ReFocus

The Films of Rachid Bouchareb

EDITED BY MICHAEL GOTT AND LESLIE KEALHOFER-KEMP

ReFocus: The Films of Rachid Bouchareb

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Contents

Part II Case Studies

Figures

Note on Translations

Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from French to English were done by the author(s) of the individual chapters. For reasons of space, we have opted to include only the English translations. In a few instances, however, when the original French citation is not easily accessible (for example, quotes from television or radio interviews that are not available online or those from the film *Cheb*, which is not available on DVD), we have included the French in the notes.

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grateful to the College of Arts and Sciences, the Office of the Provost, the Department of Modern and Classical Languages and Literatures, and the Harrington School of Communication and Media at the University of Rhode Island for research and travel support. Last but not least, she would like to thank her family for their unwavering support and encouragement.

Introduction: Rachid Bouchareb—A Global French Filmmaker

Michael Gott and Leslie Kealhofer-Kemp

Born in Paris in 1953 to Algerian parents, Rachid Bouchareb became one of France's first directors of North African descent. With a career that now spans over forty years, he is an internationally recognized filmmaker and producer. His works are remarkably varied in their themes, formal elements, languages, budgets, production contexts, and narrative settings, ranging from Senegal, England, Vietnam, and Algeria, to France, Belgium, Turkey, and the United States. Yet they are also connected by key concerns, such as the meetings and mixings of cultures, engagement with contemporary political issues and debates, immigration, movement and mobility, borders, and identity. His life and career in the cinema and television industries have also paralleled—and been shaped by—periods of significant change in France, as well as internationally. This includes the aftermath of the French colonial empire, which ended officially in 1962 following the bloody Algerian War of Independence and led to the emigration to mainland France of over a million *pieds-noirs* (settlers of European descent); the rise of the far-right Front National political party and its anti-immigrant agenda, beginning in the early 1980s; the coming of age and increased visibility and cultural output of the children of Maghrebi migrants (sometimes referred to as "*beurs*" or "second-generation Maghrebis");[1] ongoing debates as well as new legislation in France relating to national identity, integration, and immigration; and the rise of Islamophobia and Islamic terrorist attacks, including 9/11 in the US, the 7/7 London bombings, and the 15 November 2015 attacks in Paris.

Since his feature-length debut *Bâton Rouge/Baton Rouge* (1985), Bouchareb's films have engaged with and reflected on a variety of crucial social and historical issues, from the role of colonial conscripts in the French army during the liberation of Europe in World War II, to terrorism

in contemporary Europe and the Middle East. As will be discussed further in this introduction, Bouchareb's work has drawn a cinematic map of the world that is best described as an archetype of what some scholars have now labeled as cinéma-monde, and in many ways, his profile complicates the very idea of what defines French cinema.[2] France and the French film industry are often present and perhaps even central in historical, cultural, or production senses even while the centrality of France is repeatedly questioned or the French language used only minimally. Bouchareb's cinema has examined the relationship between France and its former colonies in the Maghreb and, most recently, it has brought him back to North America (a setting of five of his eleven feature films) to make several features that have still been (co)produced and funded by France. Bouchareb's fascination for the landscapes and people of the American South and West places him in a lineage with other global filmmakers whose works have traced routes through Hollywood's terrain, including Michelangelo Antonioni, Wim Wenders, Aki Kaurismäki, Walter Salles and, most recently, Andrea Arnold. His geographically and linguistically diverse oeuvre has in particular explored a variety of locales and routes linked to the francophone world, from Vietnam to Senegal and Belgium to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, while emphasizing the cultural mixings that occur in these spaces. Throughout his career, the director has been influenced by American culture and cinema, from Spike Lee to Hollywood blockbusters, and this has impacted his cinema in key ways.

Although Bouchareb's films have garnered both mainstream and critical success, including three Oscar nominations and many other national and international awards, there currently exists no book-length study—in French or English—on the director's body of work. *ReFocus: The Films of Rachid Bouchareb* seeks to fill this gap, examining Bouchareb's work from an interdisciplinary perspective, exploring key influences on his output, and considering new theoretical approaches to his filmmaking. In what follows, we will provide an introduction to Rachid Bouchareb's films and career trajectory, taking as points of departure two understudied elements that serve as a useful prism through which to consider his career: his 1983 short film *Peut-être la mer/Perhaps the Sea*, and his work as a film producer. We will then theorize Bouchareb's cinema through a broader lens in relation to discursive and critical categories such as cinéma-monde, francophone cinema, French national cinema, "*beur*" and *banlieue* cinema, and transnational cinemas. Ultimately, we suggest that Bouchareb does not quite fit any of these categories, and we propose that he is best defined as a "Global French Filmmaker." Finally, we will conclude with an overview of the chapters that make up the volume, many of which situate Bouchareb and his work in relation to the aforementioned categories.

LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS: RACHID BOUCHAREB'S EARLY CAREER

After completing a two-year degree in mechanics, Bouchareb decided to embark on a different path and attend film school. From there, he worked in the French television industry from the late 1970s into the early 1980s, during which time he also began to make short films. His fourth short, *Perhaps the Sea*, was selected for competition at the 1983 Cannes Film Festival in the category "French Cinema Perspectives."[3] This was the first of what would become many festival selections and major awards and nominations for his films, both in France and abroad. These include three Oscar nominations in the category of Best Foreign Language Film (*Poussières de vie/Dust of Life*, 1995, *Indigènes/Days of Glory*, 2006, and *Hors la loi/Outside the Law*, 2010), a César award for Best Screenplay for *Days of Glory*, and films selected for competition at Cannes and the Berlin International Film Festival, among many others. He has also been nominated and awarded several prizes for his work as a producer, as will be discussed in more detail below.

The fifteen-minute-long *Perhaps the Sea* is an apt starting point to discuss Bouchareb's filmmaking because it foreshadows many of the themes and subjects that have become cornerstones of his work. This includes immigration, identity, cultural mixings, borders, and the place of Maghrebi migrants and their children in France. It also brings to the fore the social, historical, and political contexts in France that shaped the first part of Bouchareb's career (and beyond), notably the legacy of France's colonial empire and the Algerian War of Independence, and the impact of these on the lives of the descendants of Maghrebi migrants in post-colonial France. The protagonists of *Perhaps the Sea* are two boys of Algerian descent—one of whom is named Rachid—who decide to leave their working-class Parisian suburb of Bobigny (also Bouchareb's hometown) and head to Algeria. Rachid's friend persuades him to accompany him there with the promise of sunny weather and warm water for swimming at the beach. Although Rachid has never been to Algeria, or to the sea for that matter, his friend has spent time there with his family, and he is eager to go back. The first sequence of the film is set in a port authority office in Le Havre, where the two boys are held and being questioned by officers. From there, the narrative cuts back and forth between scenes in this enclosed space and others that will eventually piece together how the boys ended up in this port city in northern France. The boys scrape together meager travel funds by washing car windshields at stoplights as they talk about what they will do upon their arrival in Algeria. Although they lack the exact address of an uncle with whom they plan to stay, this does not deter them. After acquiring some supplies—namely sunglasses, towels, and T-shirts for the beach—they set off, unbeknownst to their families. Unable to afford plane tickets to Algeria

or even train tickets to Marseille, the typical point of departure for travelers taking ferries across the Mediterranean, they decide to hop on a train for Le Havre, the closest large port. They plan to stow away on a ship to Algeria and manage to gain entry to a large vessel flying under an Algerian flag. Their plans are foiled, however, when the ship enters a dry dock instead of heading out to sea. In the final sequence, the boys' optimism and excitement turns to disappointment and disbelief. After the ship stops moving, they run up on deck only to realize that it is no longer in the water and that they will therefore remain on dry land, in France.

Underpinning the film's light-hearted narrative is the exploration of questions of cultural mixings and complex identities with reference to children of Algerian migrants in France. This is framed by reminders of the colonial and post-colonial connections that exist between France and the Maghreb (and Algeria in particular). The film's thirty-second title sequence introduces these themes in a subtle manner. It begins with a postcard of Paris that depicts iconic images of the city: the Eiffel Tower, Notre-Dame Cathedral, Sacré-Coeur Basilica, and the Arc de Triomphe. Accompanying this visual is Arabic instrumental music, which continues to play as the frame cuts to the reverse of the postcard, where there are handwritten words. These do not form a message or recipient's address, as one might expect, but rather, they provide information relating to the film. The French production company (L'Oeil en boîte) and film title appear in the message box on the left, and on the address lines on the right are the words "A film by Rachid Bouchareb." These are surrounded by images, words, and symbols of France, resulting in a layout that underscores that both film and filmmaker are French and part of the French film industry. In the upper left corner is a small map of France; on the bottom left is the word "Paris," along with the names of the sites found on the front of the card; in the middle, running vertically, is the name and address (in Paris) of the company that made the postcard, along with the words "Made in France." Finally, in the top right corner are two French stamps depicting the image of Marianne, a symbol of the French Republic.

At the same time, the pairing of Arabic music with these quintessentially "French" markers contributes additional layers of meaning to the words and symbols relating to France and perceptions of "Frenchness" that are presented in a seemingly uncomplicated way on the postcard. This combination posits at the very beginning of the film the idea of French-Maghrebi identity, or what Bouchareb would later call a kind of double culture ("*bi-culture*"), as the child of Algerian migrants born and raised in France.[4] The idea of a double culture, as well as the connections between France and Algeria, both past and present, are evoked by the two Marianne stamps. One is green, the other is red—respectively the colors of Algerian and French passport covers—and they are connected by a postal marking that resembles a crescent moon (as the ink of

the marking did not fully transfer to the postcard to complete a full circle). The overall image is therefore reminiscent of the Algerian flag, but one in which French and Algerian national symbols intertwine to evoke the dual identity of Bouchareb (who has both French and Algerian nationality) as well as that of the protagonists of *Perhaps the Sea*. In addition, the flag of Algeria, which was also used during the struggle for independence, serves as a reminder that the end of colonial rule in Algeria—which as an overseas *département* was considered part of France until 1962—occurred just over twenty years prior to the film's release.[5]

The Arabic music continues on the soundtrack as the film cuts to the front of a second postcard, this time of Oran, Algeria. It contains four images that highlight the beauty of the city: beaches, sunset, coastline, and mountains. On the back, a handwritten text presents the names of the actors who appear in the film. The beautiful images of the postcard align with how the film's young protagonists envisage Algeria and foreshadow what will motivate their attempted voyage. This perception of Algeria is complicated, however, by the postcard images of Paris and Algeria that follow and form the rest of the title sequence. They situate the film within a larger context: the history of French expansionism and colonialism in Africa dating back to the nineteenth century. The first is an image of the Grande Poste (main post office) in Algiers, a white, neo-Moorish style building—and a striking example of Orientalism in architecture—built by the French colonial government in 1911. Following this is an image of the obelisk situated at the Place de la Concorde in Paris. Originally from the Temple of Luxor in Egypt, it arrived in 1836 (as a gift) after several years of planning, via the port of Le Havre—where the narrative of *Perhaps the Sea* begins. The historical timeframe evoked by this image also connects to the early years of French colonization of Algeria, which began in 1830. The final images of the title sequence present an exotic vision of Algeria, complete with camels, sand, and palm trees.

The subtleties and deeper meanings at work here come into clearer focus as the film progresses. *Perhaps the Sea* suggests that the questions of identity and belonging with regard to the children of Maghrebi migrants are not clear-cut. Rather, they are part of a large and complex historical framework that links colonial and post-colonial France and the Maghreb and has shaped perceptions of the Maghrebi population in France by the majority-ethnic population—as well as self-perceptions.[6] These issues are highlighted with particular clarity in the first scene of the film when the principal investigator at the port authority asks his colleague if they have any information on the two boys in custody. His colleague responds that they have nothing, other than a legal text relating to the question of nationality, which informs them (and reminds viewers) that children born in French territories after 1 January 1963 hold French nationality.[7] Yet when the investigator asks the children:

"So you are French?" Rachid answers: "No, we're Algerian!" The irony, of course, is that Rachid has never been to Algeria, has been raised in France, and speaks French with ease—unlike his father, who came to France as a migrant worker and, as Rachid explains to his friend, does not understand French well.

With the benefit of hindsight, we can identify several aspects of *Perhaps the Sea* that would become recurrent through Bouchareb's film corpus (to varying degrees) and are touched upon throughout this volume. In addition to the themes of immigration, identity, and cultural mixings, there is the interest in contemporary issues, debates, or events that underpin his work and are often political in nature. This includes unemployment in France in the early 1980s (*Baton Rouge*), the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Algeria (*Cheb*, 1991) and in Europe (*La Route d'Istanbul/Road to Istanbul*, 2016), terrorism (*London River*, 2009), and the international drug trade (*Le Flic de Belleville/Belleville Cop*, 2018). Other films have adopted an approach that connects contemporary concerns (sometimes indirectly) to a larger framework of past injustices and/or human rights abuses. This includes slavery (*Little Senegal*, 2001), re-education camps in the aftermath of the Vietnam War (*Dust of Life*), the forgotten role of colonial troops in World War II, discrimination in the ranks, unequal pensions (*Days of Glory* and the short film *L'Ami y'a bon/The Colonial Friend*, 2004), and colonialism and the Algerian War of Independence (*Outside the Law*). We can also note Bouchareb's interest in telling stories from the perspective of children or youth (*Baton Rouge*, *Cheb*, *Dust of Life*, *L'Honneur de ma famille/My Family's Honor*, 1998), especially during the first half of his career. Protagonists who are in movement, on a voyage, and/or crossing or seeking to cross various kinds of borders have also formed a key current throughout his filmography, connecting *Baton Rouge*, *Cheb*, *Little Senegal*, *Days of Glory*, *London River*, *Just Like a Woman* (2012), and *Belleville Cop*. Finally, *Perhaps the Sea* even provides a nod to Bouchareb's longstanding interest in the United States, American culture, and Hollywood cinema. It comes in the form of an R2D2 toy from the Star Wars franchise that the two boys have brought with them for their trip. It provides a moment of comic relief when the customs officer confiscates the toy and then sets off the sounds as he plays with it in his office.

Perhaps the Sea is also a useful point of departure to consider how Bouchareb's filmmaking has diverged, evolved, and gone in new directions since the start of his career. The director's corpus now includes small- and big-budget films, made-for-television films, and most recently, a commercially oriented film, *Belleville Cop*. In addition, the meetings and mixings of cultures evoked in *Perhaps the Sea* have extended well beyond the France/Maghreb dynamic. As Alec Hargreaves has observed:

> Far from being preoccupied with the fates of narrowly defined Maghrebi-French characters or situations, Bouchareb's vision is much more global in scope, blending the specificities of a wide range of social and ethnic milieus with an underlying concern for universal principles of individual freedom and equality.[8]

Writing about Bouchareb's 2010 film *Outside the Law*, Will Higbee notes how far the director—and the French film industry itself—have come since the beginning of his career:

> Made for a budget of €20m, released on more than 400 prints and starring Jamel Debbouze—a French-born actor of Moroccan immigrant parents and one of French cinema's biggest stars—*Hors-la-loi* enjoyed the kind of distribution and marketing conditions reserved for only the most high-profile French mainstream productions.[9]

As Hargreaves convincingly argues, the existence of established and bankable Maghrebi-French stars, including Debbouze, had also been crucial to the creation, financing, and success of Bouchareb's blockbuster *Days of Glory* and was not something that existed in the early 1980s.[10]

Indeed, the French film industry was a decidedly different place at the start of Bouchareb's career. There were few filmmakers of North African origin in France, and the French cinematic landscape provided very limited opportunities for minority-ethnic directors and actors. According to Higbee, in the 1970s there were "a handful of militant, low-budget films by immigrant directors located on the margins of the French film industry," and in the 1980s he cites "the small but influential number of films made by French directors of North African immigrant origin," including Bouchareb.[11] In a 1991 televised interview, the director reflected on some of the specific challenges that he faced during the first part of his career in the French film industry, in particular obtaining financial backing for the kinds of films that he wanted to make. He explained that he wanted to tell stories relating to his own experiences and cultural make-up ("*coloration culturelle*"), immigration, and his parents' experiences in particular, yet he encountered roadblocks. In his words:

> In the economic landscape of French cinema, it isn't easy—or at least back then it wasn't, even if things have evolved a little—to make films whose main characters are named Ali or Mohamed. While it's true that it's changing, it's been difficult. It's changing because there are more and more of us making films. There are more and more. There are more of us in music, painting, and fashion now. So for the past few years, that has been taken into account somewhat, but around 1977, when I started

> making my short films, there was no openness at all. So I did these films myself because I wanted to do them. From an economic standpoint, it was difficult.[12]

Bouchareb was able to secure financial support for his first feature film, *Baton Rouge*, a collaboration between French producers Lyric International and TF1 Films Production. Funding came notably in the form of an *avance sur recettes* (an advance against earnings designed to support first films) from the National Cinema Center (Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée or CNC).[13] In order to receive funding from this source, "a proposal must either show evidence of 'quality' (a sound script, a star cast) or potential as a self-expressive *auteur* film."[14] Although *Baton Rouge* received some media attention and was reviewed in major French print media outlets upon its release (*Le Monde*, *Libération*, *L'Express*, *Le Point*, and *L'Humanité*, among others, as well as the industry publication *Cahiers du Cinéma*), the film was not successful at the box office, selling only 72,222 tickets.[15] Thus in order to make his second feature film, *Cheb* (1991), Bouchareb decided that it was necessary to create a production company. He founded 3B Productions, with Jean Bréhat—with whom he continues to collaborate—and Jean Bigot, his coscreenwriter for *Perhaps the Sea*. According to Bouchareb:

> After my first film I realized pretty rapidly that it was going to be difficult to get my projects off the ground through more traditional routes and that it was also unlikely that I, a young second generation North African, was going to get a directing gig at one of the French broadcasters any time soon. It seemed to make the most sense to go into production. It was almost an obligation.[16]

Bréhat summed up their decision to go into production in the following terms: "You have to give yourself the means to do what you want."[17] They began working out of the studio apartment of Bouchareb's sister due to limited financial means, and 3B Productions produced their first film, *Cheb*, in partnership with Algeria's state-funded National Audiovisual Production Company.[18] Since then, Bouchareb and Bréhat have (co)produced all of Bouchareb's films—and numerous others—either via 3B or the second company that they founded, Tessalit Productions.[19]

Although Bouchareb's career as a producer stemmed from necessity and a desire for artistic liberty, it has by no means been limited to producing his own films. In total, 3B or Tessalit Productions have (co)produced over fifty films. A particularly noteworthy part of Bouchareb's efforts has been to support the work of other Maghrebi-French filmmakers. These films also feature Maghrebi-French actors in the lead roles and focus on the lives of Maghrebi

and Maghrebi-French protagonists, thus contributing to increasing the representation of people of North African origin in France on the big screen. Films in this category include Bourlem Guerdjou's *Vivre au paradis/Living in Paradise* (1998), starring Roschdy Zem (who has also acted in six of Bouchareb's feature films, dating back to *My Family's Honor* in 1998); Zem's *Omar m'a tuer/Omar Killed Me* (2011), starring Sami Bouajila, another frequent collaborator of Bouchareb; and Karim Dridi's *Chouf* (2016).

It is also worth citing Bouchareb's collaborations with historian Pascal Blanchard, which have resulted in two series of short films made for broadcast on French television (produced and directed by Bouchareb): *Frères d'armes/Brothers in Arms* (fifty 2-minute films, broadcast in 2014–15) and *Champions de France/France's Champions* (forty-five 2-minute films, broadcast in 2015–16). These projects aim to make known and celebrate the contributions of people of diverse backgrounds and origins to France and French history, in both colonial and post-colonial contexts. As such, they clearly connect to Bouchareb's *Days of Glory*, as the tag lines for each project underscore: "They have fought for France for over a century" and "They have won for France for more than a century." The short films also serve to remind viewers of the diversity of contemporary France and of the French population. Each forgotten hero or sporting champion featured in a short is presented by a well-known artist or public figure of a diverse background. These include Roschdy Zem, actor and comedian Jamel Debbouze, actress Rachida Brakni, journalist Audrey Pulvard, and author Dany Laferrière, among many others. Writing about this choice with regard to *Brothers in Arms*, Bouchareb and Blanchard stated:

> Short films are the best medium by which to reach a large public and raise awareness about veterans who came from around the world to defend the values of the Republic and the ideals of Liberty. Calling upon today's well-known public figures to talk about yesterday's heroes creates a strong sense of citizenship. It serves to make them into great French heroes and to make the history of France.[20]

The timeframe within which each series was broadcast on French television was also strategic, serving to connect past and present: *Brothers in Arms* was broadcast during centennial commemorations of World War I and the seventieth anniversary of the liberation of France during World War II. *France's Champions* was broadcast in the months leading up to two major sporting events held in the summer of 2016: the men's European football championship, hosted by France, and the Olympics in Rio de Janeiro.

Bouchareb has also made his mark in the realm of production in other ways. 3B and Tessalit have gained national and international notoriety thanks to the nomination of their films at prestigious festivals in France and abroad. In a

2006 interview, Jean Bréhat cited festival recognition as having been crucial to 3B's ability to make films outside of mainstream commercial channels.[21] The year 2006 was particularly significant for Bréhat and Bouchareb in terms of their production careers: both 3B and Tessalit had films nominated for the Palme d'Or at Cannes—and thus they were in the rare position of having films competing against each other. The films were Bruno Dumont's *Flandres/Flanders* and Bouchareb's big-budget war film *Days of Glory*. 3B or Tessalit have produced all of Dumont's films, and the director has had considerable success at Cannes: *La Vie de Jésus/The Life of Jesus* won the Caméra d'Or in 1996, *L'Humanité/Humanity* and *Flanders* each won the Grand Prix (in 1999 and 2006, respectively), and *Jeanne/Joan of Arc* earned the Jury's Special Mention in the category "Un Certain Regard" in 2019. Dumont's other films selected for competition at Cannes include *Ma Loute/Slack Bay* (2016) and *Hors Satan/Outside Satan* (2011). Bouchareb and Bréhat have also produced films by Lebanese director Ziad Doueiri, including *L'Insulte/The Insult*, which earned a 2018 Oscar nomination for Best Foreign Language Film.

An interview in which Bouchareb discusses the production side of filmmaking vis-à-vis his film *Dust of Life* underscores the transnational connections that epitomize nearly all of the films that he has directed, and many of those that he has had a hand in producing. In many ways, this sums up the crossings and mixings that have shaped his career, not to mention his persistence. In the words of the director:

> Convincing Chinese and Algerians, along with Europeans, to produce a film shot in Malaysia about Amerasians born out of the Vietnam War was not exactly a walk in the park. The undertaking was more than a little risky (faraway countries, shooting in the jungle, climate) but we had a good story and experience in this kind of film shoot; these two arguments, among others, convinced the investors.[22]

Although Bouchareb's filmmaking has evolved considerably since *Dust of Life*, he has retained an approach that involves the constant mixing of cultures and languages within the narratives and in the production. His most recent feature, *Belleville Cop*, is set in a transcultural milieu in Paris and in Miami and stars Omar Sy alongside Hollywood actor Luis Guzmán (whom Bouchareb had cast in his 2014 film *La Voie de l'ennemi/Two Men in Town*). The narrative features significant amounts of dialogue in French, English, Spanish, and Mandarin.[23] According to Sy, the set was equally polyglot. As he describes it: "It felt like we were in the Tower of Babel: on the set, we were speaking English, French, Spanish, Chinese . . ."[24]

Another notable—and equally polyglot—aspect of Bouchareb's filmmaking process is his casting. Several actors have collaborated with Bouchareb on

multiple films. In addition to Luis Guzmán, mentioned above, Roschdy Zem, Sami Bouajila, Chafia Boudraa, Brenda Blethyn, and Sotigui Kouyaté have all acted in more than one project (and sometimes several, as in the case of Zem) helmed by Bouchareb. Their appearances represent a wide variety of roles, contexts, and geographical settings. One potential point of comparison to this practice is the work of Robert Guédiguian, another French director known for working with the same actors repeatedly. Guédiguian leans on the same circles of actors (Gérard Meylan, Arianne Ascaride, and Jean-Pierre Daroussin, now frequently joined by Anaïs Demoustier, Robinson Stévenin, and Grégoire Leprince-Ringuet) to forge a sense of tightly knit solidarity and friendship based on proximity and community links.[25] The associative networks that keen viewers of Bouchareb's films might perceive through the director's repeated casting choices are more wide-ranging. To take perhaps the best example, Roschdy Zem (a French actor and director of Moroccan descent) is sometimes cast as Algerian (*Days of Glory*, *Outside the Law*) or Maghrebi-French (*My Family's Honor*), plays an immigrant in the US with unspecified Arab/Muslim origins in *Little Senegal* and *Just Like a Woman*, respectively, and in *London River*, he is part of a network of French-speaking characters that connects to the mosque (Bouajila's character is the French- and Arabic-speaking imam of unspecified national origins). Meanwhile, Bouajila, a French actor of Tunisian descent, plays the Algerian brother in arms of Zem's character in *Days of Glory* and his actual brother in *Outside the Law*, in addition to the role in *London River.*

Bouchareb's desire to work with specific actors or actresses has also shaped his film projects. For example, when asked why he chose to set the narrative of *London River* in London as opposed to Madrid or Bali (both of which had also been affected by terrorist attacks), Bouchareb said: "It was purely because of Brenda [Blethyn]. For years, I wanted to do a film with Brenda but I didn't have the framework for it. I also wanted to make a film again with Sotigui Kouyaté" (who had the lead role in the 2001 film *Little Senegal*).[26] Bouchareb told Blethyn that he wanted to work with her again after *London River* and envisaged a very different role for her. According to the director:

> At the end of shooting *London River*, I told Brenda that we'd make another film together, and I imagined her wearing a gun on her belt. She was very surprised! When she read the script of *Two Men in Town*, she wasn't sure if she would be able to play this probation officer. But look at the result on screen! She's perfect.[27]

The fact that Blethyn did not speak French before she was cast in *London River* (where her character communicates in French) did not deter Bouchareb from giving her the role. Similarly, Samy Naceri, who plays a Moroccan colonial soldier serving under the French flag in *Days of Glory*, did not speak Arabic

but learned some in order to play the role. Bouchareb's films can also incorporate the native and/or second languages of the various actors (sometimes with variations in accents). To cite a few examples: Blethyn speaks English with a British accent in *London River* and an American accent in *Two Men in Town*; Guzmán, born in Puerto Rico, speaks both English and Spanish in *Belleville Cop* and *Two Men in Town*; Forest Whitaker uses English, Spanish, and Arabic in *Two Men in Town* (and he studied Arabic extensively for this role, as Valérie Orlando discusses in Chapter 12); Bouajila, Zem, and Debbouze communicate in French and Arabic in their various roles; and Omar Sy uses French, English, and (more rudimentary) Mandarin, as well as a little Spanish, for his role in *Belleville Cop*.

A GLOBAL FRENCH FILMMAKER

Bouchareb's filmmaking practice and films are always on a border: between national and transnational, between languages, between geographic contexts. It is therefore difficult to settle on one label or theoretical framework to apply universally to his work. Nonetheless, some terms and concepts provide useful—and often overlapping—lenses through which we can consider his diverse oeuvre and the multitude of links among the films, their themes, their sociopolitical contexts, and the production processes behind them.

To begin, Bouchareb should be identified as a French filmmaker. This appellation, however, does not sufficiently describe his work, which includes a number of films which, as Valérie Orlando puts it in Chapter 12, have credits rolling in French but dialogue in English or a mix of languages. Bouchareb's unusual relationship to French national cinema is one of the more interesting elements of his career. This dates back to *Baton Rouge*, his unconventional take on what would later be called the *banlieue* film category, which was the point of entry for many Maghrebi-French or "*beur*" directors in the 1980s and 1990s.[28] His work is not delimited by France or directly French concerns yet cannot be disassociated from the French industry. Bouchareb's trajectory provides a fascinating case study on the evolution of French cinema as a national category: first increasingly diverse (with *Perhaps the Sea* and *Baton Rouge* associated with the emergence of "*beur*" cinema and cultural consciousness), then connected with the post-colonial world of French influence and interest, and finally more geographically and linguistically disparate. All of his features, although often international coproductions, have been at least funded in part by France. Bouchareb's status as a French director therefore requires some qualification. In Chapter 7, Mireille Rosello proposes that Bouchareb's work is best understood as "rearranged