

Rachid Bouchareb: Europe not doing enough to understand why teens turn to Isis

'We don't know why young people want to head off to jihad,' said the director of London River and new movie Road to Istanbul at the Berlin film festival

Henry Barnes

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Europe is ill-equipped to deal with the problem of young people travelling to Syria to join Islamic State because not enough work has been done to understand why they leave, according to director Rachid Bouchareb.

Bouchareb's new film, Road to Istanbul, which premieres at the Berlin film festival this week, focuses on a Belgian single mother who tries to track down her 18-year-old daughter after she, despite living a seemingly happy home life, decides to secretly follow a radical Islamist to Syria, via Turkey.

"Sociologists need to look at this and address what's happening, said Bouchareb at the press conference for his film. "You have to be able to understand to be able to act. That work still needs to be done. We don't understand why young people want to head off to jihad. It's enormously complex and mysterious".

In preparation for the film the French-Algerian director spoke to a number of parents whose children been recruited by Isis. He said that often, the private sector was offering parents advice that social services were failing to provide.

"There isn't really prevention nowadays in European society," he said. "We're just covering events day-to-day".

"I found it interesting what some people were doing in the private sector. Bringing together parents and trying to explain to them that these things exist. And that if they want to get children back, it was important to re-establish a link with them".

Bouchareb, whose previous film, London River, saw two parents searching for their children in the wake of the 7/7 bombings, said the two films were linked by events and that he'd seen great from parents who had tried to convince their children to turn away from terrorism.

"Some went to the Turkish-Syrian border to try to at least have a debate with them," he said. "They want an explanation for what's causing their anguish".

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Asked if, following the attacks in Paris of November last year, he felt like the atmosphere in France had become more difficult for second generation French citizens, Bouchareb said that terrorism was not an excuse for the general public to become fearful of immigration.

“You’re a child of France, you contributed to the history of this country and now you’re being asked if your faithful to France or not?” he said. “You shouldn’t be asked this question. They are France. They are the France of tomorrow. You have to take it all. You can’t go cherry-picking, saying you want immigration sometimes and not others”.

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