



# THE LAST SHORE

A FILM BY **JEAN-FRANÇOIS RAVAGNAN**

| PRESS KIT |



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2025 - 71' - Belgium | France | Qatar - Color - DCP 2K - 1:85 | Dolby 5.1 - Fula - VOST EN

Stills and press kit available on <https://www.derives.be/films/la-derniere-rive>

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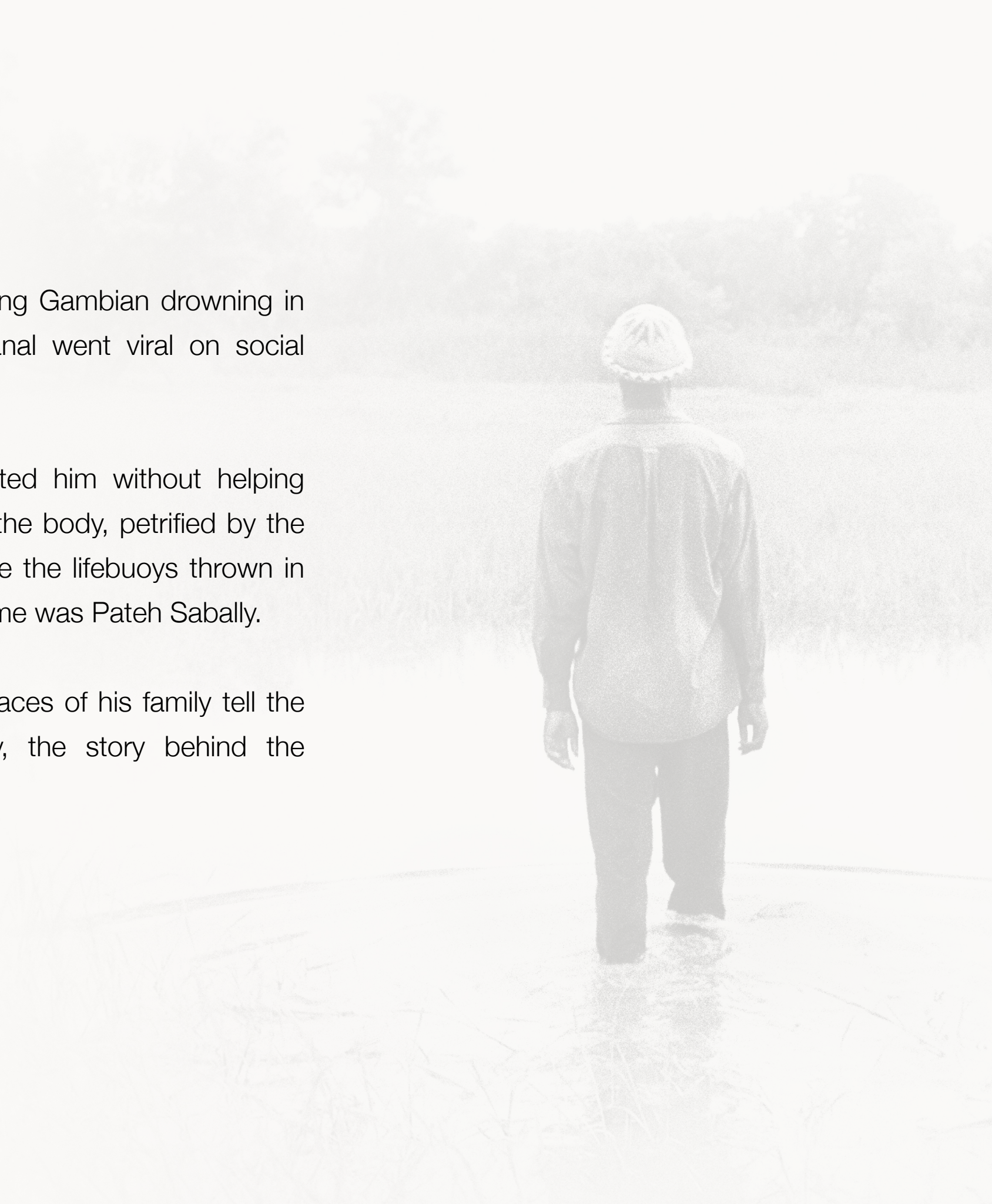


## SYNOPSIS

In January 2017, a video of a young Gambian drowning in the waters of Venice's Grand Canal went viral on social networks.

From the shore, passers-by insulted him without helping him. Filmed with a mobile phone, the body, petrified by the cold, appears to be sinking despite the lifebuoys thrown in its direction. He was 22 and his name was Pateh Sabally.

2500 miles away, the voices and faces of his family tell the story that preceded this tragedy, the story behind the images...









## INTERVIEW WITH

### JEAN-FRANÇOIS RAVAGNAN

**When you first hear about the subject of the film – the drowning of a young man in the Grand Canal in Venice, to the jeers of witnesses and filmed by multiple people – you might get the feeling that this is going to be a militant film. Yet in fact you take us somewhere else, to a very personal form, to a poetic film, almost sweet even (with the exception of the opening video). How did you make that choice? Was it always going to be that way?**

**Jean-François Ravagnan :** In making this film I thought a lot about the Italian writer Erri de Luca, who says that the drowned people of the Mediterranean have become mass phenomena and, as such, become anonymous. In contrast, the act of this young man, whose name is Pateh Sabally, was personal, but immediately oversaturated. It's not known whether there was a political message behind what he did.

I wanted to go beyond this oversaturation to reflect a more complex reality. I had two specific goals: first, to give an identity back to a person dehumanised by a racist word, and secondly to take the time to tell a story that can be viewed from a number of perspectives.

The film has a strong poetic dimension because, to our Western ears, Pateh's father, in particular, expresses himself in a very poetic manner. I believe that this poetry can provide another perspective on migratory journeys. If you take the time to listen to Pateh's nearest and dearest, you get to understand that they're not speaking from a place of rage or demanding things.

The film does not provide definitive answers, but it tries to ask new questions. Of course, it was born of and continues to be fed by a sense of revolt, by that initial shock of the video that opens the film. But very quickly that ceased to be enough to sustain it. There was a need to go further, to come face to face with and listen to other viewpoints.

**Was it a difficult choice to open the film with the video of the drowning?**

**JFR :** All the way through making the film I was asking myself if it was relevant to include the video. I kept thinking I didn't need it, but the whole project starts from the video, which I watched over and over again and which became an obsession for me. I wanted to see behind the images, behind this clash of two worlds, behind the insults, the panic and the abdication of responsibility...

So whether or not to show these images was a real ethical issue, as well as a narrative one. I tried putting the video in a number of other places, but it only worked at the beginning.

So I conceived *The Last Shore* as a reverse shot of the video, in terms of both form and content, in order to re-humanise what had been de-humanised, to take the time, to get away from the social media images, to tell the story of the family, the journey, exile...







### **How did you find the family?**

**JFR :** It was a long journey that took over two years. I couldn't find any information in the embassies or even in the press. There wasn't much filtering through because an investigation by the Italian justice system was under way.

Eventually I met an Italian lawyer who had helped repatriate the body to The Gambia who put me on the trail of the family.

I went to meet them in their village, on the border with Senegal. As I began my interviews, a brother of Pateh's who was in Spain at the time asked the family to stop talking to me. He wanted to see me and sound out my intentions before giving his approval to the project. Until I went to see him, the family wouldn't confide in me. I realised that these were not the words of individuals, but the words of an entire community.

When I went to see him, I didn't even know myself if this project could result in a film, and I made no secret of that fact. We talked for an hour, and as we parted he told me that it had done him a lot of good to talk about Pateh, and that I could go back and see his family.

The whole process took quite some time – it wasn't until a year later that I went back to see the family. Looking back, I think that was time I needed. It allowed me to approach these individuals step by step, by degrees.

### **Where did you get the idea of disconnecting speech, storytelling and images?**

**JFR :** When I was out there on location, I very quickly realised that the classic interview process wouldn't work. The day after my first attempts, I only took a sound recorder with me, convinced that it was going to be a voiceover story, a spoken word film, not knowing if I could put pictures to it later on. I discovered Pateh's story as I collected these spoken words.

When I got back to Belgium, I had twelve hours of untranslated audio rushes in the Fulani language. I started with an accurate translation, then I composed a sound montage to see if it would already work as a VoiceOver.

That's how I built things up, with interacting speech recordings, all talking about Pateh, but with different perspectives, experiences and vocabulary. Hearing people who don't speak on camera also allows for a different kind of identification.

The only bit of the film with synchronous sound is the end – the prayer – the moment when Pateh becomes human again for his brother, a missing person who can be called upon.

### **How did the imagery come to be backed by this montage of sound?**

**JFR :** I wanted the imagery to help us find the places that Pateh had passed through, so that you almost got the feeling that the camera was looking through his eyes. While he was in Europe, he didn't give his family any updates. I had to imagine what space he'd occupied, what places he'd been through.



Then, through editing, I tried to create a balance between the film you hear and the film you watch. The images must not diminish the words, and vice versa.

Time also created a gap between the spoken words and the images, as three years passed between when I recorded the voices and when I filmed people. So the images were recorded five years after Pateh's death. It's one of the reasons why the pain of the speech recordings is not reflected in the images. In three years, the mother's voice had changed, and the brother's too, as had their emotions.

In addition, I wanted something calm to back up, even reinforce the spoken recordings, gentle images that act as a counterweight to the violence and abruptness of the video at the beginning of the film, images that help to dress the wounds caused by the violence of the first minute.

### **Does each image bring something symbolic with it?**

**JFR :** The editor and I treated the images like rhymes, and their symbolic aspects then revealed themselves. Each frame of the film was printed and put up on a wall in the editing room. We then realised that the visual, graphic poetry corresponded to that of the spoken words.

The characters also brought out recurring motifs: for example, they went to the river every day, taking the same routes through the same landscapes. The symbolism of the water and horizons was already there during filming.

We also shouldn't forget the role played by the soundtrack, which recreates atmospheres and gives rhythm to the film with motifs such as the wind, the rain and insects.

There's something bordering on fiction about this recomposition of the soundscape. This is my first documentary and I found that it allowed me greater freedom than fiction, which sometimes requires you to tread conventional paths, particularly with its narrative conventions. This village, this experience, was a second film school for me.

We tried a lot of things, juxtapositions of images, sounds, specific structures, but sometimes it didn't work, we'd get the impression we were heading in the wrong direction. And we'd undo it and do it again. In actual fact, at every stage, I had the feeling that it was the film that was dictating to me what I had to do – to record, film or edit – as if the material was revealing itself to me.

### **Why didn't you film anything in Venice, when that's where Pateh's death occurred?**

**JFR :** I did try to film Venice, but I couldn't get it to work. We've all seen Venice so much that the images inevitably end up like postcards. Put simply, it just didn't work.

So I chose to show the point of view of the family, who have never seen Venice, who aren't familiar with that reality. That's why the few images of Venice I left in are blurry. In contrast, the soundtrack is more tangible and brings back the clarity that the images have taken away from us.

From the moment the family talk of trust and grant it to me, the images become clear again.







**Where did the choice come from to only have the family speak?**

**JFR:** I wanted to position the film in the complexity of the journey into exile and avoid the Eurocentric perspective so often employed in relation to African migration issues. Having only the “African” voices – with the exception of the Italian in the initial video – was vital, as was the fact that those voices were going to tell Pateh’s story from that point of view.

**Giving them the only voice also means talking about mental illness differently.**

**JFR :** Yes, there are different beliefs when it comes to mental illness. We tend to think that it’s due to his exile, to what happened in Malta when Pateh fell ill, but the family aren’t necessarily going to see it that way.

When Pateh’s brother says that it’s an illness that can’t be treated in hospital, he’s posing us the question of treatment for people on the road to exile, which doesn’t necessarily have to be ethnocentric medicine, with our ways of thinking.

There are still numerous grey areas in relation to Pateh’s journey, there are no ready-made answers for his actions. The Italian investigation, which I had access to, does not provide ready-made, clear-cut explanations, only hypotheses. We only know that he jumped into the water voluntarily. Viewers don’t have any ready-made answers either. They form their own ideas of what happened to Pateh based on their experience, their rationality or their spirituality.

**How did you find your place in this story, and the right distance from which to tell it?**

**JFR :** While making this film I often questioned my legitimacy to film, who I was to talk to about this. So finding my place was fundamental – the very existence of the film depended on it. The film-maker exists, you can’t ignore that fact.

At first, I considered a first person voiceover, and we made several attempts at it, but it didn’t work: my words carried no weight juxtaposed with those of the family.

To find the right distance, I then went back to what they told me. The father, the mother, the brother and the friend all “address” me.

It was through their words that they invited me to travel to the other side of the “Venetian troubles”, of this haunting image of drowning, to come to their home. And this “you” addressed to me, the film-maker, can also be a “you” addressed to the audience.

They are the ones who set the tempo of the film, even if we were living in different temporalities. They were no longer in the same state of mind as when I met them, while I was still “carrying” the film, and with it the mourning for Pateh.

You could say there was a kind of transfer: his brother said to me one day ‘You’re the custodian of our brother’s story, our words belong to you. Now it’s up to you to do something with them.’ They are the ones who gave me a place in the telling of their story.

**Interview by Catherine Lemaire**







JEAN-FRANÇOIS RAVAGNAN

## FILMOGRAPHY

**RENAÎTRE | RISE** 2015 - fiction - short

23' - Belgium | Tunisia - French | Arabic

Pardi di Domani - Locarno Film Festival

Grand prix - Zinebi Bilbao

Prix Federation Wallonie-Bruxelles - Brussels Short Film Festival

**LA DERNIÈRE RIVE | THE LAST SHORE** 2025 - documentary - feature

71' - Belgium | France | Qatar - Fula

Official selection - Vision du Réel

Official selection - DOK.fest München



# TECHNICAL SHEET

2025 - 71' - Belgium | France | Qatar - Color - DCP 2K - 1:85 | Dolby 5.1 - Fula - VOST EN

N° ISAN 0000-0005-FC00-0000-S-0000-0000-R

With **Jabu Kandeh Sabally** | **Pateh Alhaji Sabally** | **Yerro Sabally** | **Ibrahima Diallo**

Director **Jean-François Ravagnan** Photography **Thomas Schira** Sound **Edith Herregods** | **Jean-François Ravagnan**  
Sound editing **Arnaud Soulier** Mixing **Rémi Gérard** Editing **Marc Recchia**  
Color grading **Paul Millot** Music **Jean Kapsa**

Production **Julie Freres** | **Dérives** Co-production with **Michigan Films** | **Wallonie Image Production** | **Sténopé**  
**Les Films D'Ici** | **Shelter Prod** With the help of **Centre du Cinéma et de l'Audiovisuel de la Fédération**  
**Wallonie-Bruxelles** With the support of **CNC - Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée**  
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**Coopération Belge au Développement** | **Wallonie**

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