

## London River

UK / France / Algeria  
Cert tbc 2009 90 min

### Credits

Directory	Rachid Bouchareb
Screenplay	Olivier Lorelle Rachid Bouchareb Zoé Gáleron
Cinematography	Jérôme Alméras
Editor	Yannick Kergoat
Art Director	Jean-Marc TranTan Ba
Original Music	Armand Amar

### Cast

Brenda Blethyn	Elisabeth
Sotigui Kouyaté	Ousmane
Francis Magee	inspector
Sami Bouajila	Imam
Roschdy Zem	Butcher
Marc Baylis	Edward
Bernard Blancan	forest worker
Aurélien Eltvedt	chapel guide
Olivier Rabourdin	police

### Synopsis

*Cities push strangers together, at times tragically, as in the London bombings of July 7, 2005. As hundreds went missing in the confusion of the aftermath, family and friends posted flyers all over the city with pictures of the loved ones they sought.*

*Elisabeth Sommers is a farming woman with a simple rural routine. When her regular calls to her city-dwelling daughter go unanswered, she crosses the English Channel into the throng of north London. At first, news of the terror attacks are mere background noise to her, but as she continues to search fruitlessly for her daughter, and the unfamiliarity of her daughter's predominately Muslim neighbourhood begins to unsettle her, fear sets in.*

*At the same time, Ousmane has travelled from rural France to London to search for his son, also missing since the attacks. An African farm worker, he is equally lost in the city. Ousmane and Elisabeth meet by chance, but it soon dawns on them that his son and her daughter were roommates, and maybe more.*

*Abridged from Sight & Sound, Nov 2009.*



### Review

A moving story of a Muslim father and a Christian mother searching for their children in the aftermath of London's 7 July bombings has premiered at the Berlin film festival (2009). *London River* is the latest film from Rachid Bouchareb, the quietly-spoken French-Algerian director whose last film *Days of Glory* – about four North Africans fighting for the French army during the second world war – impressed critics and was nominated for an Oscar. This film, which was met with applause after its first screening, is much smaller in scale but takes on a big topic. Brenda Blethyn plays a very English widow who travels from her lovely house on Guernsey to the rather less lovely Finsbury Park flat where her daughter Jane lives.

At the same time a Muslim man, played by the Malian actor Sotigui Kouyate, travels from France looking for his son. It turns out the children were lovers and both were learning Arabic at the local mosque. The worlds-apart strangers realise they are much closer than they thought.

Bouchareb admitted the film could have been set after a number of terrorist attacks but he chose 7 July because he wanted Blethyn involved. "I had to wait a year for her and if I'd have had to wait two years I would." Indeed it is Blethyn's performance that stands out. Her character is a woman who does not realise how prejudiced she is. "This place is absolutely crawling with Muslims," she says of north London at one stage.

Blethyn today said her character was arriving in a place that was alien to her. "She gets paranoid and suspicious and she wants to know the truth. I think the film is daring and it is good because of that. It touches on the subject of prejudice." Blethyn said the biggest challenge had been learning French for the role: "Because I learned it so quickly the tragedy is that you forget it so quickly."

*Mark Brown, The Guardian, February 2009*

### Obituary of Sotigui Kouyate who played Ousmane in *London River*

Malian screen star Sotigui Kouyate, who was named best actor at the Berlin Film Festival last year, has died in Paris at the age of 74.

A former professional footballer, the actor began his career on stage as a favour to a friend. He also had a long association with UK playwright Peter Brooke; the pair collaborated on a 1983 screen production of an Indian epic tale *The Mahabharata*.

Kouyate wrote and staged a number of plays himself, and was the founder of the Mandeko Theatre in the Malian capital Bamako. Kouyate, whose parents came from a long line of griots - or traditional storytellers - was also made an officer of arts and letters by the French government at the Cannes Film Festival in 2009

*Botswana Gazette, 21 April, 2010*