

BORDERS AND COSMOPOLITANISM IN THE GLOBAL CITY: LONDON RIVER

ANA VIRGINIA LÓPEZ FUENTES
Universidad de Zaragoza
analopfuentes@gmail.com

ABSTRACT. *This article explores the representation of borders and cosmopolitanism in the city of London in London River, a film about two parents looking for their children in global city after the 7th of July of 2005 terrorist attacks. As will be argued, different spaces in the city work simultaneously as dividing lines and as borderlands, emphasising the dual nature of borders theorized by border scholars such as Gloria Anzaldúa (1999), Mike Davis (2000) and Anthony Cooper and Christopher Rumford (2011). Elijah Anderson's (2011) concept of cosmopolitan canopy and Gerard Delanty's (2006) moments of openness will be used to analyse the articulation of cosmopolitanism in the different constructed spaces displayed in the film.*

Keywords: Film studies, *London River*, cosmopolitanism, borders, borderlands, global cities.

FRONTERAS Y COSMOPOLITISMO EN LA CIUDAD GLOBAL: *LONDON RIVER*

RESUMEN. *Este artículo explora la representación de las fronteras y el cosmopolitismo en la ciudad de Londres en London River, una película en la que una madre y un padre buscan a sus hijos alrededor de toda la metrópolis después de los atentados del 7 de julio de 2005. En London River, los diferentes espacios de la ciudad actúan simultáneamente como líneas divisorias, y a su vez, como borderlands, destacando la doble naturaleza de las fronteras teorizada por Gloria Anzaldúa (1999), Mike Davis (2000) y Anthony Cooper y Christopher Rumford (2011). Este trabajo utiliza el concepto de Cosmopolitan Canopy de Elijah Anderson y el de Moments of Openness de Gerard Delanty para analizar el tipo de cosmopolitismo que se articula en los diferentes espacios construidos en la película.*

Palabras clave: Estudios fílmicos, *London River*, cosmopolitismo, fronteras, borderlands, ciudades globales.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The increasing mobility of people, goods and information around the globe has resulted in an increasingly interconnected world with a high potential for cosmopolitan encounters. This is particularly true in the so-called global cities where people from all over the world meet and interact on a daily basis. No longer restricted to the geographical lines dividing two countries, borders play a key role in the contemporary scenario. Both dividing lines and borderlands, they have the potential to either curtail or promote cosmopolitan moments of self-transformation. The so-called “border films” structure their narratives around different types of borders, usually highlighting their paradoxical nature (Mendes and Sundholm 2015; Deleyto 2015, 2016)

This article looks at *London River* (Rachid Bouchareb 2009) as an example of a border film that can be inscribed within the category of “cultural exchange” narrative as theorized by Deborah Shaw (2013), Tom O’Regan (1999), and others. The film tells the story of two parents; Ousmane (Sotigui Kouyaté), a black Muslim from Mali and Elisabeth (Brenda Blethyn), a white protestant from the Channel Islands, looking for their children in the city of London after the 7th July terrorist attacks. Borders feature prominently in the film. The narrative crosses various geographical borders and was filmed in different locations: France, London, and

one of the Channel Islands (Guernsey). It was a French-British coproduction and it features a multinational cast and crew, including a French director of Algerian origin working in the city of London. This article looks at the film's representation of today's extremely complex borders, in society in general and particularly in global cities. As will be argued, the movie constructs different spaces of the city of London as both dividing lines and as borderlands, emphasising the dual nature of borders theorized by border scholars such as Gloria Anzaldúa (1999), Mike Davis (2000) and Anthony Cooper and Christopher Rumford (2011). Elijah Anderson's (2011) concept of "cosmopolitan canopy" and Gerard Delanty's (2006) "moments of openness" will be used to analyse the articulation of cosmopolitanism in the different constructed spaces displayed in the film.

2. COSMOPOLITANISM AND BORDERS

Critical theorization on the border has noticed its intrinsic paradoxical nature since the line that separates two countries or territories is also what they have in common. Gloria Anzaldúa's foundational text *Borderlands/La frontera* distinguishes between border and borderlands. While the term border emphasises the division between two contiguous territories, borderlands refers to the hybridity and fruitful encounters that are also consubstantial to any border. As she puts it, the borderlands "are physically present whenever two or more cultures edge on each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy, created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary" (1999: 25). Borders can be seen as both sites of separation and exclusion and of confluence and openness to the Other. They can act as sites of oppression and violence but also as "connective tissue" (Rumford 2008); they can be both enriching and destructive. Anthony Cooper and Chris Rumford argue that "the border is a prime site for connecting individuals to the world, bringing them into contact with Others and causing them to reassess their relations with the multiple communities to which they may or may not belong" (2011: 262). In this sense, borders are one of the privileged sites where cosmopolitan encounters take place (Rumford 2008).

Cosmopolitan theorists have developed a growing interest in borders over the last two decades. Cosmopolitanism is based, on the one hand, on the notion that all human beings are equally valuable, positing borders as a site of connection between individuals (Beck 2002a; Skrbis, Kendall and Woodward 2004; Rumford 2008). However, when diverse cultures get together, differences may be exacerbated and reinforced. The contact with the Other can result in an open disposition and a fruitful interaction, a type of self-transformation that Delanty

refers to as “the cosmopolitan moment.” (2006: 29). However, this encounter may also trigger an anti-cosmopolitan reaction of rejection and fear. Cosmopolitanism is a contested term that also includes several critiques from different scholars, such as Craig Calhoun (2003, 2008), David Miller (2002, 2007) and Eddy Kent and Terri Tomsy (2017). For instance, David Miller (2002) considers cosmopolitanism as an imperialist project in which existing cultural differences those are nullified or privatized. For his part, Calhoun talks about this project as unrealistic and utopian, and he claims that real people are necessarily situated in particular webs of belonging, with access to particular others but not to humanity in general (2003: 6). Celestino Deleyto argues that contemporary movies attempt to make sense of the world in a context of globalisation and its economic, social and cultural consequences, and as such they can be interpreted under a “cosmopolitan lens”(2016: 2). Borders are an intrinsic element of cosmopolitanism and, therefore, need to be looked at in order to analyse films from a cosmopolitan point of view.

Global cities have become one of the recurrent sites to explore cosmopolitan and border dynamics. As a consequence of the increasing flow of border-crossers towards them, global cities are traversed by borders. According to Saskia Sassen, global cities like London, are a consequence of the weakening of concept of the nation as a spatial unit due to the privatization and deregulation of territories as well as the strengthening of globalisation (2005: 27). Global cities emerged as a strategic site for the transnationalization of labour and the formation of translocal communities and identities (38). In the field of cinema, Mendes and Sundholm mention how transnational films embody “dimensions of border crossing, including its locales, its constraints and its affective aspects” (2015: 120), for his part, Celestino Deleyto imagines London as a border city, “a city crossed by borders and constantly reshaped by borderwork” (2015: 6). Borderwork is the process whereby borders are constantly transformed by the daily activity of ordinary people (Cooper and Rumford, 2011: 262-264). Charlotte Brunsdon (2007) argues that the city of London has suffered a transformation from imperial capital to global city and this is portrayed in the 21st century films. Global cities become not only microcosms of a global world, but actual borderlands, constantly crossed by fluctuating borders, exclusions and exchanges.

London can be considered one such borderland, one which includes the city's cultural diversity while at the same time witnessing the proliferation of various types of borders between its citizens, among them economic barriers. Doreen Massey, in her book *World City* (2007), explores these two parameters of the city of London. Massey describes the term global city as a place that is part of a larger system, with advanced producer services in a context which involves banking, accountancy, law and advertising (2007: 33-35). London is undoubtedly a

significant centre of coordination of the global economy, trade and financial flows, based on its neoliberal economy. Historically, the city reinvented itself as a world financial centre after a mid-twentieth century decline (32). First industrialization and then financial power meant an increase in the possibilities of work. Therefore, its resurgence is a product of deregulation and privatization/commercialization, along with internationalization. This has attracted migrants from all over the world, particularly but not only the old colonies of the British Empire, which in turn has produced a cultural diversity that contemporary discourses on the city exploit to provide a positive spin on its ruthless deregulatory financial activity (Massey 2007: 44). British governments implemented restrictive immigration policies throughout the 1970s and 1980s, so in the 1990s employers began to call for easing of restrictions on the use of foreign labour to meet Labour demand (Flynn, 2005 in Mcilwaine, 2008: 8). At the same time, migration increased partly as a result of the expansion of the EU but also because of the growth in refugees and asylum seekers (Rees and Boden, 2006 in Mcilwaine). Thus, the proportion of foreign-born residents in London rose dramatically during the 1990s, to account for approximately 29% of the city's total population by 2001 (Spence, 2005: 35 in Mcilwaine).

In the city of London more than 270 nationalities coexist and over 250 languages are spoken. The interface between the Anglo majority and other ethnicities in London is regulated by what Davis has called the "Third border" (2000: 59). The third border is the invisible line that deprived foreigners come across every day in their intercourse with other communities, a reminder that their lives are under constant scrutiny (71). This third border restricts the use of public space by poorer citizens, building boundaries inside the inner city between neighbourhoods with a different economic development and based on racial segregation. Simultaneously, the process of gentrification has built an exclusionary wall around the entire city of London. Neil Smith describes gentrification as a "global urban strategy" socially organised in the twenty first century, which portends a displacement of the working-class residents from urban centres (2002: 440). It is a practice through which whole urban neighbourhoods are appropriated by real estate and business concerns, property values skyrocket and, as a consequence, the low-income families that lived in those neighbourhoods are displaced.

London was at the height of its self-refashioning as a global city when the 7th July 2005 bombings took place. Global terrorism is one of the three axes of conflict that, for Ulrich Bech, are central to the "world risk society", a term he uses to describe a contemporary social order affect by manufactured and unexpected risks that are global in nature (2002: 41). The risk society, Beck argues, creates a generalized feeling of threat and, in the case of global terrorism, of fear of the

Other. The perception of terrorist threats replaces active trust with active mistrust, which undermines the trust in fellow citizens, foreigners and governments all over the world (Beck 2002b: 44). Consequently, racial issues and cultural disagreement between the different cultures are increased.

However, the perceived risk of global terrorism has also had the opposite effect, Beck claims, since it has marked the beginning of a new phase of globalisation, the globalisation of politics, the moulding of states into transnational cooperative networks (2002b: 46). Even in the state of mistrust produced by terrorist attacks, terrorism can be considered a form of cosmopolitanism because it not only separates societies: it also reunites them. “What can unite the world?” asks Beck. The answer suggests that unity to confront the threat is possible between different social groups: “alliances are forged across the opposing camps, regional conflicts are checked and so the cards of world politics are reshuffled” (2001: 1). Although, it is necessary to distinguish between the risks and the opportunities presented by these dangers, alliances between different cultures have been created to combat the threat and differences have been laid aside, at least in some respects.

A film like *London River* portrays London as both a city crossed by internal borders and, at the same time, a fruitful borderland where cosmopolitan encounters take place. It shows how the global terrorism and the fear of the Other can both separate and unite people. *London River* is not the only contemporary film to deal with these issues. Recent border films such *Amreeka* (Cherien Dabis 2009), *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (Mira Nair 2012), *Crossing Over* (Wayne Kramer 2009) and *Ae Fond Kiss...* (Ken Loach 2004) present multiple social borders inside different global cities, like culture, religion and race. Most of these borders are based on prejudices towards the Other, on account of, again, borders permit a new human sensibility, but at the same time they restrict certain forms of expression. Movies set in the British capital *Breaking and Entering* (Anthony Minghella 2006), *It's a Free World...* (Ken Loach 2007) and *Eastern Promises* (David Cronenberg 2007), portray a city of London characterized by extreme wealth, unrestrained capitalist practices, and borderwork. Although away from geopolitical borders, this is, in Gloria Anzaldúa's terms, a borderland where people of different ethnic origins come together, interconnectedness being balanced by violence and intolerance (1999: 25). As a whole, these films contradict the view of the city as a harmonious multicultural place where various cultures coexist without any problem. They offer a sense of the global city as a borderland of encounters and exclusions, spaces of globalisation and mobile borders, where cosmopolitanism exhibits its complexity and contradictions. It is within this context of contemporary cinematic representations of the British capital as a bordering and cosmopolitan place that I would like to place my study of *London River*.

3. COSMOPOLITAN AND BORDER MOMENTS THROUGH URBAN CONSTRUCTED SPACES

In *London River*, the city is presented as a border place where the action happens in several important spaces. It is a geography of power that produces an unequal geographic democracy (Massey 2007: 119). This geography of inequality is produced by the gentrification of the city in different neighbourhoods that are classified by the nationalities and cultural origins of the citizens. In the movie, most spaces depict Muslim communities, separated by the existence of the third border. In this part of the analysis, the essay explores the main multicultural urban spaces of London used in the movie in which the encounters and disagreements of different cultures occur. It is necessary to remark how the *mise-en-scène* helps to display the global city of London as a place characterized by inner borders between different groups of society, but also by blossoming encounters. Besides, it articulates complex cross-border interactions, reflecting the evolution of the characters whereby they become more cosmopolitan and open-minded due to coexistence of different cultures and participation in moments of openness.

The movie conveys a realistic effect with the use of real London locations, such as Blackstock Road. This space is introduced with a handheld camera and a bumpy frame movement from inside the car in which Elisabeth is travelling from the ferry port to Jane's house. The shot offers a glimpse of the film's documentary style that will be sustained during the whole narrative. Once the taxi stops at Jane's address, we see a P.O.V shot of the neighbourhood from Elisabeth's eyes that suggests her disapproval of her new environment. Then the camera follows the direction of her eyes and shows the sign of the Halal shop, *Butcher El Baraka*, above which Jane's apartment is supposed to be. Elisabeth observes this with scepticism. At this point, the window of the Halal shop functions as a border. Elisabeth looks through the shop window and metaphorically a border is established, in Elisabeth's eyes, between the Anglo and the Islamic world. The framing makes her look weak, submissive and frightened. Then, the camera follows Elisabeth with a close-up, detailing her alienated state. This first representation of the street offers the viewer a clue about the possible position of Elisabeth, namely, her rejection of her foreign surroundings.

In a later scene, Blackstock Road is presented very differently. When the protagonists come out of the travel agency, thinking that their children are safe on a trip to France, the street is particularly highlighted, with natural light illuminating the road, which is further enhanced by the characters that are glowing with happiness. They sit on a doorstep, sharing an apple that Ousmane slices with his penknife. She cleans the first piece that Ousmane shares with her, but not the second one. It is the first moment in the film in which there is no physical border

between the characters. It is also the first time in which they do not need to hold onto their belongings that define who they are: a briefcase and a walking stick in the case of Ousmane, and a handbag in the case of Elisabeth. The apparently good news have made them feel liberated and safe in each other's presence; they have learnt to coexist with the culture and customs of the other. In this climax, Elisabeth even ventures to introduce some comments about Ousmane's appearance, specifically his long hair. The street becomes a space with the potential for multicultural encounters like this one.

A thorough analysis of the street enables us to see more examples of extensive intercultural exchange. For example, the representation of women from different cultures in a city like London is remarkable. In the following scene, Elisabeth observes the street at length, and she sees a group of women with different origins. The film gives an image of a relatively privileged position of women mostly in world cities like London. One of them, for example, is using technology, her mobile phone, while wearing a *burka*, which, to some, may represent something repressive and traditional. In contrast with this positive view of a multicultural space, the third border is again presented in this neighbourhood as a weapon to control the mobility of foreigners. In this image with multiple women from different origins, the film captures not just the diversity of the area but also the reality of this borderland led by a discriminatory border system that has the aim of maintaining and reinforcing the status quo of certain empowered citizens and the patriarchal system. The border is established here, the foreign population is predominant over the white British population.

This third-border, exclusionary and racist attitude is gradually counterpoised with the presence of instances of what Elijah Anderson has described as "cosmopolitan canopies", urban sites that offer a special environment conducive to interethnic dialogue and communication (xiv). An example of cosmopolitan canopy is seen in the movie when the two protagonists are sitting on a bench in "Finsbury Park" (one of the most important settings of the film, a public park located in Haringey), sharing the same space and thereby deemphasising the border that has separated them from the beginning of the movie. The narrative conscientiously tries to create this type of space, not only as environments where people from different cultures meet, but also as spaces where the protagonists search for each other's presence. In the film director's words "in France, Finsbury Park in North London is well-known as a place where a lot of Muslims live, and a lot of people from Algeria and Morocco, too" (Bouchareb in Gritten 2010). Finsbury Park has, therefore, the right connotations to be chosen for this setting. The scene begins with a close-up of Elisabeth's face used to emphasise a moment of tension that develops into a moment of freedom in this gratifying space. Then, a long shot frames the characters

sitting on a bench in the park (Figure 1). This technique is used to emphasise the arduous situation that the characters are living in the aftermath of the London outrage, both of whom are navigating the city without any clue of where their children could be. Then, close-ups of both of the characters emphasise the fruitful moment they manage to create and the “cosmopolitan canopy” into which the scene turns. It is a natural space where they feel comfortable as it is more similar to their usual environments. The movie constructs this park as a “heterotopic place” (Foucault 1971), considered as a space for otherness that only lasts a few moments, in which the protagonists open up to each other, share their concerns about their children, and start to know each other deeply. In this moment, they realise that they are not very different from one another, and despite their obvious differences, their ways of life share numerous similarities.



Figure 1. Finsbury Park and the cosmopolitan canopy.

If we turn our attention once again to the first time that Elisabeth arrives at Blackstock Road, there is another important space involved, which is conceptually and geographically counterpointed with urban and domestic spaces: the entrance to the flat and the gate. The entrance functions as a cosmopolitan space where sexual and ethnical differences are challenged at some point. In the first scene, Elisabeth is framed standing in the entrance; it is as if she were trapped or entering a cage. The fences on the right and at the back of the frame, together with the high walls, form an oppressive framing. It portrays her feelings of panic and unease. Suddenly, she moves backwards as the Muslim shopkeeper approaches her, until

she is unable to move any further because of the wall—she is totally trapped. Then, the owner says that he is the landlord of Jane’s house, and, with amiability, offers to give Elizabeth a key to the flat. At this point, Elisabeth becomes more comfortable with his presence, yet, she is wracked by doubt.

Later, the same setting seems to be transformed, transmitting very different feelings —security, freedom and borderlessness. The final scene of Ousmane and Elisabeth together aims at moving the audience. The figure of Ousmane hugging Elisabeth, protecting her and consoling her, helps us to see how devastated both of them are, but also how they have finally transgressed the borders between each other. Importantly, at this point, no fences are shown in the frame, just the two protagonists. In this shot, it is possible to appreciate how Ousmane is enveloping Elisabeth, meaning that he has already transmitted his sense of otherness to her. Ousmane’s height exceeds the level of the walls that previously separated them and made Elisabeth feel trapped. His otherness and tolerance has been transmitted to Elisabeth through a feeling of protection and respect.

Central to the transnational sensibility of the movie, there are other locations which foreground the presence of Muslims, for instance, the mosques. Mosques in real life are often identified from a Christian perspective as places of inscrutable “otherness”. Nowadays, there is a well-known conflict over the Islamisation of the public space in Britain, which often reveals the major fears about the erosion of the “British way of life” in an age of global migration and ethnic pluralism (McLoughlin 2005: 1046). There is certain rejection from the part of the western world towards Muslim religious symbols and places of gathering. They represent one of the main borders in today’s society between different cultures. *London River*, however, portrays mosques as places where fruitful encounters and flourishing cosmopolitanism take place. There are two mosques shown in the movie: the Central Mosque of London, and Finsbury Park Mosque, where Jane and Ali take Arabic classes. The first place where Ousmane receives help is the London Central Mosque, at the hands of the Imam (Sami Bouajila). Later, he receives help from the teacher of the Arabic class in the Finsbury Park mosque and also meets with Elisabeth there. Furthermore, it is here that the Imam tries to bring the two parents together, explaining to Elisabeth that their children know each other, and making gestures to encourage her to reconsider her position towards Ousmane. Barta and Powrie comment on how Ousmane finds a “network of solidarity” (2015) in this space. To this, I would add the idea of a network of cultural and religious solidarity, where despite not knowing each other, the Muslim community tries to help their brother Ousmane.

The last remarkable space that reappears several times throughout the narrative and is consciously constructed as a border place is the bridge that crosses Haringey train station. This railway station is located off Wightman Road

in the borough of Haringey, in North London. It is presented as one of the most important physical borders during the entire film. The train station separates both protagonists according to the part of the city that they are initially associated with: where Ousmane is staying (Shelton Hotel) and where Elisabeth is staying in her daughter's flat. The bridge is a figurative border with a double functionality; it is the means whereby Ousmane and Elisabeth are reunited and separated depending on the moment that they cross it.

In the opening scenes, the bridge is presented as a threatening place, starting with a long shot and ending with a close-up of Elisabeth. In this frame her tension is exacerbated when she sees the photocopied "missing" signs attached to the walls of the bridge. The thunderous sound of the railway makes it a conscientiously terrifying moment. In this moment she realises the magnitude of the terrorist attack, and also how common it is for someone to go missing in this global city. The presence of people of all sexes, colours and origins suggests that the bridge is a sort of no-man's land and that all people, regardless of their social status, are equal in a situation of terror. It is a space in between two different worlds, which are, in this case, the world of Ousmane and her world. After moments of openness like the ones we have previously analysed, this border is forgotten as an exclusionary weapon and is transformed into a space of unity. The initial separation of spaces reinforces their differences. Once the two parents realise that they are not so different, they are reunited through the bridge. The borders that separate them are transcended when they start living together, just as their children did. After deciding to live together



Figure 2. Ousmane crossing the bridge to live with Elisabeth in Jane's flat.

we see Ousmane crossing the bridge. The demographical border between them disappears, showing the character of Ousmane walking over the bridge with his suitcase in his hand, past the xeroxed missing posters (Figure 2). This important framing highlights Ousmane's figure as he crosses the bridge, and portrays the disappearance of his and Elisabeth's differences.

4. DOMESTIC SPACES AS A MICROCOSM OF THE GLOBAL CITY

After analysing the different urban spaces discovered in London by the protagonists, this section explores domestic spaces, namely, the flat where Jane and Ali live together. The flat, the setting for numerous scenes in *London River*, is a representation of the concept of "borderlands", in which one can observe the cooperation, collaboration and adaptation between two different cultures. The different cultures are represented by the white British Protestant, Elisabeth, and the Black African Muslim, Ousmane, and before them, their children who coexisted in this same space. The presence of this cinematic space leads us to realise that Ousmane and Elisabeth are a reflection of a multitude of global forces of which they are unaware. Their situation reflects the current state of the world. At first, Elisabeth rejects Ousmane. She often manifests racist attitudes. However, this situation progressively changes. The film demonstrates that globalisation is far from resolving the differences between cultures. In fact, it suggests that cultural borders can be transgressed easily although the *mise-en-scene* shows contradictions. The closing minutes of the movie try to highlight the fact that we have already achieved a situation of worldwide equality, with the blossoming moments that Elisabeth and Ousmane live together. The truth is that real citizens, including the protagonists, are not even close. Consequently, *London River* uses the flat to express an opinion: this is a state in which inequality persists and is even reinforced by white majority countries towards other races, despite the discourses of multiculturalism accredited to London.

The flat acts as a place of gathering between different religions and cultures and as a microcosm of the global world, in this case, Islam and Christianity. The physical changes in it provide an accurate view of the evolution of the characters in the movie. Lighting is used in *London River* to shape the way in which Jane's flat changes its appearance reflecting the moods of the protagonists. At first Jane's absence makes Elisabeth feel anxious and she is also disturbed by her daughter's Muslim neighbours. The initial shadows signal all the things that Jane is hiding from her mum, such as her relationship with a Muslim man. Elisabeth realises that she no longer knows her daughter. At first, blue and purple colours are highlighted. In the final moment in this flat, there are lighter colours combined with intensified lighting, showing that both characters are in a cosmopolitan space

where they have learnt to coexist. Elisabeth has been transformed by the moments of openness, in many cases produced by the bombing.

Props situate the protagonists within their new environment and introduce the unseen characters, Ali and Jane. An African musical instrument that Elisabeth finds inside the flat will become a remarkable element of union between the four. In the opening minutes Elisabeth holds the instrument in her hands with a surprised expression on her face. When the police come to the flat, Ousmane comments on the fact that the instrument used to belong to him, and later he says it was a present for Ali. This musical instrument is called a *Kora*, and it is a traditional West African stringed instrument. It is played in Mali, where Ousmane was born. The *Kora* is an important prop because it is a very specific item from Ousmane and Ali's culture. It makes the parents realise that their children are living together. A copy of a book in Arabic additionally denotes Jane's interest in and openness towards African and Arabic culture.

Other important objects are found inside the flat as well as photographs of the young couple in the city, more specifically, in a bar, sitting on the grass, and walking along a street. These images provide a way for their parents to start to know their unknown children. The pictures denote their children's appreciable adaptation to the metropolis. The flat seems to be their own cosmopolitan space, where they interact and coexist in a seemingly egalitarian manner. When Elisabeth enters the bathroom, she sees men's bathroom accessories. The framing displays Elisabeth's discomfort. She is not likely to see the truth: her daughter has had a relationship with a man and is living in a multicultural neighbourhood with him, without giving her any information. Elisabeth's face can only be seen reflected in the mirror. The curtain obstructs our view of her face. Functioning as a border and suggesting her mistrust of her daughter.

The film builds a representation of the global world around this space. It projects its ideology onto a small location where both cultures coexist, with the hope of a happy ending. Thus the flat works as a powerful visual and spatial metaphor of today's extremely complex borders. It is the place where obstacles of religion, race, living conditions and family borders between the protagonists are finally dissolved. The limitations encountered at the beginning are blurred and the protagonists manage to adapt to each other. To contradict this view, it is possible to observe exclusionary borders inside the same living space. The main borders are seen when Ousmane and Elisabeth are together in the flat and they are related to their different cultural backgrounds, which will be explained in the following paragraphs through the analysis of different scenes. The flat is a *borderscape*, a concept which Deleyto characterizes as "social space defined by its borderliness and by a border ideology" (2016: 10).

A noteworthy scene inside this space is when the police arrive to take DNA samples (Figure 3). They illuminate the truth, namely, that it is definitely possible that their children were living together in the flat and were in a relationship. Ousmane and Elisabeth open their eyes. The police give light to the flat, in a metaphorical and literal way. As we can observe in the framing, the intensified lighting contrasts with the dark presentation of the space offered previously. The wooden table separates both protagonists, and the wardrobe divides the framing in two parts, with the Muslim inspector on the side of Ousmane, and the English on the side of Elisabeth. This framing divides both groups of society into two clearly differentiated groups by culture, race and possibly, religion. This is a moment of tension reinforced by the African items found by the police inside the flat. The African instrument described above turns out to be a present from Ousmane to his son, and, importantly, is the proof that Elisabeth needed. There is also the book written in Arabic which Elisabeth discovers at that same moment. The Union Jack beside the world map also offers a vision of openness through the character of Jane. However, in this case, instead, it is representative of what the world is like for Elisabeth, comparing the large size of the flag with that of the world map. At this point in time, the police are used to open her mind and make her comprehend that the global city of London is a place of interaction between cultures, but also through the *mise-en-scène*, the film portrays how borders have been established towards the Muslim community, thereby segregating them.



Figure 3. The flat as a “borderscape” when the police arrive to take DNA samples.

A crucial moment in the flat, which contrasts with the scene with the police, occurs when the protagonists come to live together and have dinner in the apartment. Elisabeth, apparently free of her prejudices, opens up to Ousmane and explains her anguish about how her husband died in the war and how she has brought up Jane by herself. Her fear about her daughter's disappearance can be seen in her face. The movie gives the impression that the borders between the characters have now disappeared. Their relationship is presented as a fruitful encounter. The *mise-en-scène* presents a good example of this on the right-hand-side wall, which shows the world map without any British flag. This portrays their intention to become citizens of the world beyond narrow nationalisms. The wooden table once positioned the protagonists opposite each other. Now they sit at the table side by side during dinner. The parents simulate their children's way of life. This is the turning point: from this moment onwards, the two remain together until they eventually receive the fatal news. On the other hand, after eating, Elisabeth lights a cigarette and again a physical border is placed between them, the hob. Once again, borders are being reinforced by their cultural differences. A woman smoking in front of a man is an uncommon sight for Ousmane. These apparently unimportant differences will continue to divide them until the end of the movie; it is hard for them to understand each other. Cosmopolitanism also transmits this view and includes borders in its discourse—borders that are impossible to eradicate. Persons cannot be equal in all aspects of our lives because every human being is different and unique. Not all individuals think in the same way or have the same qualities. There will always be components of a culture that the other one will not understand.

London River produces meaning through this differentiation of people through specific moments inside Jane's flat. Elisabeth is described by Barta and Powrie as an active representative of the "host society" (2015). Elisabeth is the one who seems to be the owner of the flat, and charity may be seen as the reason why she accepts Ousmane as a guest, because he cannot afford to stay at the hotel Shelton. Their shared occupancy signals an advance in Elisabeth prejudices after the cosmopolitan moment in Finsbury Park where she opens her mind to the other. She is likely to tolerate the presence of Ousmane, but at night, he sleeps in a separate bed and space, in the living room on the sofa. Elisabeth sleeps in the bed. Again the *mise-en-scène* separates the two protagonists. Only through this element can we see that the position of Elisabeth is privileged with respect to Ousmane's position. Besides, Ousmane's affirmation that he will take Ali back to Africa as soon as he finds him, makes Elisabeth smile. Both parents, in spite of trying to plan what might be seen as a life together, continue trying to keep their children apart. They cannot come to terms with their transnational relationship.

The final moments of the film seem to eradicate any chance for future coexistence between the two protagonists. The link between them is broken along with the knowledge of the deaths of their children. Ultimately, although it seems that their lives have undergone a real change, they still return to their separate homes. These scenes contrast with the final scene of the pair inside the flat, when a farewell song is sung in Malian by Ousmane. It creates an emotional moment that seems to bring a close to their relationship with their feelings of devastation. However, their relationship is also offered an opportunity with the meaning of the song that points out the uncertainty of the future: “Will I die in a city or a forest?” The truth about the protagonists is known: they have many similarities, but they are also truly different. It is a moment of entire openness in which they feel the same desperation and uncertainty about what will happen to them in the future.

5. CONCLUSION

New Borders have been constructed through transnational encounters between the local and the global today in certain spaces, “borderlands”. These new borders are often related to race, religion and language. These characteristics of a culture are the ones that mark the difference between what a group of human beings consider “Us” and what they consider the “Other” or “Them”. The drama of difference is challenged in *London River* with the portrayal of two very different characters learning to coexist in the same spaces and enjoy each other’s presence. The devastating attacks have been the link between them, but also their means of separation due to their children’s deaths.

Muslim communities are enduring all over the world the devastating consequences of terrorism as well as racist attitudes in cities like London and others. Borders are established with the Other, which in this case is identified with the Muslim culture and the character of Ousmane. These borders are present in global cities throughout the “third border” and “gentrification”, excluding foreigners from certain areas. This is shown in the movie in the use of spaces with a Muslim majority, like Blackstock Road, Haringey borough and Finsbury Park. Framing indoors and outdoors work together with lighting and props to underline barriers and designate borders.

The complexity of the borders portrayed in the movie is also a problem seen in today’s society. *London River* is an accurate representation of the complex social networks occurring in large cities all over the world. In the movie, this is especially reflected in the most intricately developed space, which is Jane and Ali’s flat, where the fruitful and, in some cases, fraught relationship between their parents

is played out. Multiple processes of globalisation are presented inside the flat, the crossing of cultures and moments of openness. Ultimately, this is the essence of global human interaction, sets of complex relationships separated and reunited by different situations and conditions.

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