

**INTERROGATING COSMOPOLITANISM AND THE STRANGER IN TENDAI HUCHU'S *THE MAESTRO, THE MAGISTRATE & THE MATHEMATICIAN* (2015)**

**CUESTIONANDO EL COSMOPOLITISMO Y EL EXTRAÑO EN *THE MAESTRO, THE MAGISTRATE & THE MATHEMATICIAN* (2015), DE TENDAI HUCHU**

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**Abstract**

This article analyses Tendai Huchu's novel *The Maestro, The Magistrate & The Mathematician* (2015) in the light of cosmopolitan theory, drawing from Ulrich Beck's conceptualisation of the cosmopolitan society and Vince Marotta's notion of the figure of the cosmopolitan stranger. Urban space theory and Henri Lefebvre's *Rhythmanalysis* is also discussed. This work focuses on the main characters in the novel in order to question the validity of some of the characteristics attributed to the cosmopolitan stranger, principally their ability to transcend standpoint epistemologies. It addresses the characters' common struggle to re-evaluate their identity in the new neoliberal capitalist context of Edinburgh in which they find themselves, as well as their search for belonging in the new community and the creation of a new home. The article also explores the potential of walking the city as a mechanism to reconcile identity conflicts and respond to the anxiety that the city generates—connecting internal time, memories and the body with external time and space—and contrasts it with the experience of running. It is contended that the novel resists the imposition of a definite meaning, portraying the cosmopolitan strangers as nuanced individuals, while also exploring the possibility of failure of the cosmopolitan stranger.

**Keywords:** cosmopolitanism, rhythm, cosmopolitan stranger, urban space, community.

## Resumen

Este artículo se centra en la novela de Tendai Huchu *The Maestro, The Magistrate & The Mathematician* (2015), analizándola a la luz de la teoría cosmopolita, a partir de la conceptualización de la sociedad cosmopolita de Ulrich Beck, y su intersección con la figura del extranjero cosmopolita, tal como la conceptualizó Vince Marotta. También se aplica la teoría del espacio urbano, a través del *Rhythmanalysis* de Henri Lefebvre. Se centra en los personajes principales de la novela para cuestionar la validez de algunas de las características atribuidas al extraño cosmopolita, principalmente su capacidad para trascender epistemologías localizadas. También se presta atención a la lucha común de los personajes por reevaluar su identidad en el nuevo contexto capitalista neoliberal en el que se encuentran a su llegada a Edimburgo, así como a su búsqueda de pertenencia a la nueva comunidad y a la creación de un nuevo hogar. Se explora el potencial de caminar por la ciudad como mecanismo para reconciliar los conflictos de identidad y responder a la ansiedad que genera la ciudad, conectando el tiempo interior, los recuerdos y el cuerpo con el tiempo y el espacio exterior, en contraste con la experiencia de correr. Se concluye que la novela se resiste a la imposición de un significado definido, retratando a los extraños cosmopolitas como individuos matizados, al tiempo que explora la posibilidad de fracaso del extraño cosmopolita.

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**Palabras clave:** cosmopolitismo, ritmo, extraño cosmopolita, espacio urbano, comunidad.

## 1. Introduction: Situating Huchu's Cosmopolitanism

Cosmopolitanism has a long tradition in Western thought, dating back to the Cynics in the fourth century BC. Diogenes the Cynic is credited with initiating the tradition: allegedly, when asked where he came from, he answered *kosmopolitês*, meaning “a citizen of the world” (Nussbaum 2019: 1). Nussbaum explains that the tradition was then developed in the following century by the Stoics, who shared the Cynics’ belief in the equality of all individuals on account of their capacity for moral choice (2). The concept proved its resilience in modern Western thought, especially through Immanuel Kant’s writings and “vision of a cosmopolitan politics that will join all humanity under laws given not by convention and class but by free moral choice” (in Nussbaum 2019: 2). The bicentenary of Kant’s book *Perpetual Peace* (1795) —which deals with the cosmopolitan obligation— in 1995, contributed to “the revival of cosmopolitanism since this work was the defining text in modern cosmopolitan thought” (Delanty 2012: 3).

Older critiques directed at this cosmopolitan outlook questioned its apparent rootlessness and contempt for the local, considering it a privileged perspective of a highly mobile elite for whom the world was their stage. However, in recent years it has been understood as an ethical and political response to contemporary challenges and as an effective critique of globalisation. Gerard Delanty argues that, in its broadest sense, “cosmopolitanism is about the extension of the moral and political horizons of people, societies, organizations and institutions” (2012: 2), and that “openness” is a defining characteristic of the cosmopolitan attitude. While it still retains that older sense of belonging and allegiance to a wider global community, there has also been a strong emphasis on the inescapability of the local in the cosmopolitan. Ulrich Beck is among the defenders of a “rooted cosmopolitanism”, arguing that “there is no cosmopolitanism without localism” (2002: 19, 36). He equates this term to “ethical glocalism”, emphasising that cosmopolitan ways of life and identities are characterized by being ethically and culturally global and local at the same time (2002: 19-36). As a result, cosmopolitanism has been presented as a valid framework within which to understand contemporary world society. In this vein, Delanty contends that “[c]osmopolitanism is expressed in degrees as opposed to being a condition that is either present or absent, elements of cosmopolitanism can be found in all societies” (2012: 4).

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In the specific Scottish context, since the successful referendum on Scottish national self-rule in 1997, much of post-devolution Scottish literature has been concerned with interrogating the notion of the Scottish nation and identity. In 1998, Christopher Whyte argued that, “[i]n the absence of an elected political authority, the task of representing the nation has been repeatedly devolved to its writers”, also saying that he hoped that “the setting-up of a Scottish parliament will at last allow Scottish literature to be literature first and foremost, rather than the expression of a nationalist movement” (1998: 284). In the same vein, Berthold Schoene contended that in post-devolution Scotland, the Scottish nation should cease to identify itself “in opposition to all things English”, in favour of new narratives that examine contemporary Scottish identity along the axes of “class, sexuality, gender, globalisation and the new Europe, cosmopolitanism and postcoloniality, as well as questions of ethnicity, race and postcolonial multiculturalism” (2007: 2). Indeed, Jessica Homberg-Schramm argues that following devolution in 1997, a more “self-confident Scottish identity” emerged, allowing a more “international perspective”, which recognized that “[g]lobalisation, transculturalism and cosmopolitanism have widened the frame of reference for identity constructions, and a new generation of writers now comes from a mixed-raced [sic] background, while the voices of immigrant writers enrich contemporary literature” (2018: 195). It is precisely within the framework of cosmopolitanism that I examine the migrant search for belonging in Scottish society and its relation

to the ideas of cultural negotiation, social connection and the experience and performance of urban space in Tendai Huchu's novel *The Maestro, The Magistrate & The Mathematician* (2015). This multi-layered narrative tells the stories of three Zimbabwean migrants in the capital city of Scotland: the Mathematician, a 24 year-old man from a wealthy family doing a PhD in economics at the University of Edinburgh; the Maestro, a 27 year-old working-class clerk at Tesco; and the Magistrate, a middle-aged and middle-class man who was a magistrate in Zimbabwe. I will focus mainly on these last two characters, as they tend to exemplify throughout the novel opposed positions and reactions to the issues I will analyse.

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The author of the novel under analysis, Tendai Huchu, appears to share this cosmopolitan vision. A Zimbabwean immigrant in Edinburgh himself, he was asked why he had decided to write his first novel, *The Hairdresser of Harare* (2010), once he was in the Scottish capital, because the story takes place in Zimbabwe, mostly in the capital city of Harare. To that, he answered in a very cosmopolitan way: “[m]y favorite books are often very local in their scope and concerns, yet, somehow, they manage to capture something universal about the human condition” (Jackson 2016). Raised and educated in Zimbabwe before moving to Edinburgh, Huchu also displays in his work features of the Zimbabwean literary tradition. Discussing the transnational critical reception and context in which literature from Zimbabwean writers is received, Jeanne-Marie Jackson argues that the tendency to read “for an abstract kind of literary multiplicity—the epistemological and narratological endorsement of the fluid many over the demarcated one— has in many ways come to signify the progressive cosmopolitan bona fides of literary critics” (2018: 339). In her view, this cosmopolitan disposition “has complicated the reception of even the most heralded Zimbabwean writers” (344), because important Zimbabwean novels tend to “deploy a lot of dichotomous pairs, a technique that [...] may easily be read as discontinuous or reductive” within a critical context that is wary of categories and favours plurality as a representational ideal (344). Jackson thus differs from scholars such as Ranka Primorac and Robert Muponde who value precisely the “plurivocal texts” in Zimbabwean literature (2005). Jackson suggests that a technique that relies on categories is “structurally productive” (2018: 346), arguing that “categories are essential to narrative structures of debate, above and beyond the particular categories such structures may seem to entrench” (340). He concludes that,

Departing from plurality as a post-categorical ideal, however, in favor of theorizing narrative models that rely on categories to argue, shows that dualistic structures do more than enforce social divisions. Key Zimbabwean works are agonistic in form, subjecting even plurality itself to contestation and debate. It is a tradition that privileges categorical conflict over categorical dissolution, thereby relativizing

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plurality to maintain sharper structures of disagreement. This, in turn, may offer an unlikely space for social pluralism to thrive: the agonistic novel keeps the Zimbabwean fight alive, in structural rather than obviously ideological terms. (340)

However, this approach to the formal structure of novels is not at odds with a cosmopolitan framework that takes cosmopolitanism as a project that is still being developed and that values precisely dialogue and debate. Huchu's novel is episodic in form, the views of each of the three narrators are contrasted and contested through the text, and there is a clear dichotomy between Zimbabwean traditional values and Western values, especially in the Magistrate's narrative; there is a tension that is left unresolved. Ambiguity coexists with opposition as a way of testing and bringing to the fore the problems that arise in these migrants' experience and that still need to be taken into consideration in the search for a more cosmopolitan future.

The affinities between the cosmopolitan subject, as the individual endowed with a cosmopolitan outlook or intellectual disposition, and the sociological stranger have been dissected by Vince Marotta. He further argues that a new type has emerged, the "cosmopolitan in-between stranger" (2010, 2017). The figure of the in-between stranger, as theorized by Simmel and Baumann, stands outside of both the host and their own group and this ambivalent position endows them with an epistemic distance that allows them to "adopt and therefore understand the particular view of both parties but be adequately detached from them to identify underlying common or universal interests" (Marotta 2017: Chapter 7). This epistemic distance is also characteristic of the cosmopolitan subject who, thanks to their allegiance to both global and local communities, "can adopt a universal stance while incorporating and understanding local identities", allowing them to move between particularistic and universalist perspectives without being confined to either (Chapter 7). However, Marotta questions the cosmopolitan stranger's ability to transcend standpoint epistemology because the in-between perspective itself "actually collapses into another standpoint" (2010: 118). He also stresses that cosmopolitan strangers are "not ahistorical social actors who float above those who are socially and historically located. Social actors, and their understanding of the world, are formed in the context of customs, traditions and prejudices", as well as backgrounds that would influence their interpretative processes (Marotta 2010: 118).

This idea of an ambivalent position also seems to be present in Ulrich Beck's cosmopolitan sociology, in which he identifies "dialogic imagination" as a defining characteristic of a cosmopolitan perspective. This dialogic imagination, he says, "corresponds to the coexistence of rival ways of life in the individual experience, which makes it a matter of fate to compare, reflect, criticize, understand, combine contradictory certainties" (2002: 18). Moreover, it encourages a "*higher amorality*",

understood as an ethical attitude that would deny a belief in the superiority of one's own morality (2002: 36, emphasis in original). The figure of the cosmopolitan subject has been largely theorised as gender-neutral and, thus, favouring the male gender (Nava 2002; Germann Molz 2011; Vieten 2016) —a tendency also identified in the research into the “classical stranger” (Marotta 2017: Chapter 1). Although in this article I analyse the figure of the cosmopolitan male stranger, it is important to bear in mind the gender-blind approach of these accounts. Thus, the three male characters under analysis retain gender—and sexual— privilege, while the Maestro would also enjoy racial privilege, on account of being the only white character. However, as I will discuss, Huchu subverts this character's privileges by portraying him as the most alienated character in the story.

## 2. The Magistrate: Finding Roots

The tension between cultures is portrayed in the novel through the experiences and feelings of the three migrants mentioned above. Starting with the Magistrate, at the beginning of the novel he is unable to see beyond the traditional hierarchies in which he was embedded back in Zimbabwe. His arrival in Edinburgh causes a disturbance of his position and status, as well as in terms of what is expected from him, both in the public and the domestic sphere. On the one hand, he used to be the head of a traditional household in Zimbabwe, under the state-organized capitalism ideal of the family wage. However, the structure of his family changes once they settle in Edinburgh. Under “disorganized” and neoliberal capitalism, the ideal is replaced by that of the two income family and his wife works long, and often double, shifts as a nurse.<sup>1</sup> Although he tries to find himself a job in Edinburgh that is worthy of his qualifications and experience as a magistrate in Zimbabwe, his search is unsuccessful. Thus, he is forced to alternate between periods of unemployment and periods doing menial jobs. Being the one who spends more time in the house, he is in charge of the domestic duties, and this new situation leads him to compare his life now with what he had back in Zimbabwe, and he finds himself thinking that what he misses the most is their maid. He is now in a position from which he can reflect on the poor working conditions under which this woman was working and wonders “[w]hy did I never question this before — an injustice in my own house, yet there I was dispensing justice every day while I kept a virtual slave in my own house? How could this have seemed normal?” (Huchu 2015: 8). However, even though he now understands and critically interrogates his previous attitudes, he nonetheless later on in the novel talks of the maid and “how he missed her” (68). He would like to go back to the times when the man-earned family wage was enough to raise a family, “a simpler time” where

“a man’s role was clearly defined. He was the provider. Nothing else was required of him” (12). Although now he can criticize the labour conditions and gender inequality in Zimbabwean society, his perceived loss of authority and power in the family and social structure in Edinburgh makes him nevertheless long for his past life in Zimbabwe, highlighting Marotta’s idea that the cosmopolitan stranger,

may be ‘homeless’, but one is never socially or culturally homeless because your ‘home’ —in terms of your values, prejudices, ideas, traditions and customs— are always with you, even if they change. Something of the past sticks to you however hard one tries to peel it off. (2017: Conclusion)

Thus, Beck’s idea of the “dialogic imagination” could here be contested. Although in a tentative manner, aware of the morally questionable ideals, working relations and conditions, the Magistrate still looks back to his way of life in Zimbabwe as the best way of living, feeling that his life in Edinburgh leaves him without his former feelings of greater purpose and authority.

The characters in this novel come from different socio-economic backgrounds, yet they all share the common struggle of re-evaluating their identity within the new neoliberal capitalist context in which they find themselves in Edinburgh. The magistrate, for example, tries to make connections between his former hometown and the new city in an effort to see and feel comfortable with Edinburgh as his new home. As Sara Ahmed argues, migration is related to the process of “finding our way” through what she calls “homing devices” (2006: 9). Interestingly, she points out that, in a way, “we learn what home means, or how we occupy space at home and as home, when we leave home” (9). She describes the experience of migration as “a process of disorientation and reorientation: as bodies ‘move away’ as well as ‘arrive’, as they reinhabit spaces” (9). As such, the Magistrate tries to emotionally map Edinburgh, establishing both a physical connection with the city —through walking around and touching its buildings and monuments— and an emotional one through the Zimbabwean music playing on his Walkman, in an effort to orient himself in the city. Walking, in this novel, is thus considered as a way of occupying and re-inhabiting the space, of orienting oneself in a new setting. In this same vein, Rebecca Solnit, in her study of the cultural history of walking, reflected on how “[t]he rhythm of walking generates a kind of rhythm of thinking” that connects internal time, memories and the body with external time and space (2001: Chapter 1). The Magistrate at one point stresses the difference between travelling on the bus in the city and the embodied experience of walking, reflecting on how the physicality of walking and feeling the tiredness of his body stimulates his “topographical awareness of how he was oriented on a gradient, a connectedness not possible at the same level of consciousness on the bus” (Huchu 2015: 62). The physical act of touching is also a valuable mechanism for the Magistrate to,

quite literally, feel connected to the urban space he now dwells within. As Huchu states, the Magistrate,

was one of those peculiar people who felt the need to touch things, to feel them and connect with them physically. The wall felt rough against the palm of his hand. It had weathered rain, wind and snow for centuries; time had leached and calcified within. It was solid, fixed in this point of space, and the act of touching it fixed him to it too. They shared roots for a brief moment in time. (93)

Through touching, a sense of his having roots in this new place arises, even if at this stage of the novel it is only for a fleeting moment. During his walks, the Magistrate plays Zimbabwean music on his Walkman, which also helps him develop an emotional connection to the city. As a meaningful cultural marker from the culture to which he feels closest,

[t]he music on his Walkman provided his soundtrack to the city. The right song at the right moment would fix an image, an emotion, a memory in his mind for the rest of his days. He felt a flutter in his heart, a familiar feeling from long ago. He was falling in love again, falling in love with the city. (91)

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Music also shields him from the noisy outside world, enabling him to focus solely on the city and its architecture. In this way, music permits a reflexive intentionality in his interaction with the urban space around him, and one that cultivates a more meaningful connection. The landmarks fixed in his memory work as cardinal points that help him orientate himself in the city, at the same time as anchoring himself to and within it. It is this dialectic between his physical body, Zimbabwean music and the urban space of Edinburgh that allows him to synthesize his own personal cartography of the city, claiming his presence in the space without leaving his past behind. Instead, his present and his past are gradually reconciled, opening up the possibility of a future for him in this new city:

He found he could clear his mind when walking. It was as though the act of perambulation was complemented by mental wandering, so he could be in two, or more, places at the same time. His physical being tied to geography and the rules of physics, his mental side free to wander far and wide, to traverse through the past, present and future, free from limits, except the scope of his own imagination. (14)

This process could also be interpreted through the logic of the dialogic imagination that Beck outlines as it presupposes the “imagined presence of geographically distant others and worlds” (2002: 31). Significantly, Beck also identifies the actions of migrants and minorities in their struggle to belong as “major examples of dialogic imaginative ways of life and everyday cosmopolitanism” (2002: 30). Huchu shows how this character is embedded in that negotiation, resorting to meaningful signifiers of his “home” culture to provide meaning and make sense of



the otherness of this new context in which he now finds himself, trying to create an embodied connection that will make his experience in Edinburgh liveable.

However, the neoliberal culture of effort and the imperative to work to the point of exhaustion often disturbs the Magistrate's psychogeographic process. When he gets his first job, taking care of the elderly at a care home, he is often too exhausted to walk home, which forces him to take the bus. This makes him feel more alienated from the city, a feeling that is heightened by the numb state to which he succumbs in his "free" time, where he finds that instead of enjoying his time off, it has simply become a time to recharge his batteries in preparation for going to work again. In a sense, this disconnection between time and space, the emptiness that he feels and which makes him too tired to think and carry out his cartographic project, or simply to keep living under these conditions, could be seen as one of the dangers that is always threatening the individual in the work-oriented society of the west. His wife, who has been working longer than him under these conditions, does not have any time at all to walk around the city. When the Magistrate finally convinces her to go with him for a walk, she summarizes this situation saying "[t]his is the first time I've walked down here", [...] 'It's easy to get lost in work and forget you're entitled to a life in this country'" (Huchu 2015: 195). The novel underlines this tension between trying to live a life and meeting the demanding commitments of everyday work, and links it with the associated struggles that migrants endure in their struggle to belong in a new place.

Although the Magistrate finds it difficult at the beginning, by the end of the novel he has achieved a sense of belonging in the community. Early in the novel, when he is still outside of any community in Edinburgh, he finds out that his teenage daughter Chenai is pregnant. His initial reaction is blaming himself, thinking that that would not have happened back in Zimbabwe, that Zimbabwe would have been a better place to raise his daughter, that the problem is teenage boys in Western society. However, when he finally comes to terms with the idea, out of love for Chenai he tries to get to know her boyfriend and his white middle-class family. At one point, the Magistrate, his wife and Chenai go to their house to have Christmas dinner and, although previous encounters between the two families had been problematic, mainly due to cultural differences and their different approaches to their new situation and status as a soon-to-be family, by the end of the soiree the Magistrate starts to think that it feels as though "they had known each other for an eternity and this is how they'd always spent Christmas. Because that was the essence of a holiday, a familiarity rooted in old tradition" (Huchu 2015: 276). Through this old tradition, stripped of its religious meaning but retaining its social function as an event that invites communion and sharing, they connect and feel themselves at home. Time and space also feel heavy with the idea of duration and

permanence, through the imagining of the dinner as something they have been doing annually in the past, opening up the possibility that it will actually be repeated in the future. This brings to mind Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis. When he discusses the necessity of repetition for the production of rhythm, he stresses the relation between repetition and difference, recognising that repetition itself does not exclude difference but in fact creates it (2013: 16-17). As such, in this part of the story the reader feels they are witnessing the wonderful birth of a new rhythm for these two families.

There is another relevant scene where the Magistrate describes the snow outside as follows: "[l]ight snowflakes fell from the sky. They flitted round, tumbling to the earth. And when they got there, they became part of the indistinguishable white blanket, mere threads in a tapestry. If each flake was unique, that uniqueness only served to form something larger, something common" (Huchu 2015: 276). This evokes Gilroy's idea that in our cosmopolitan societies "diversity within sameness" should be acknowledged (2004: 75), and the need to adopt a vision, in the words of Ash Amin, of the "diverse and open society as a community of equals, expressing difference with a common cause" (2012: 3). In the case of the Magistrate and his expanding family —on a very small scale— people are working towards a common goal, the well-being of the new baby and the creation of a new family, even though they come from very different backgrounds and epistemological frameworks. Significantly, at the beginning of the novel the Magistrate talks about the importance of kinship terminology in Shona culture, i.e. the names express the relationship between family members and the community, and constantly adapt themselves to the changes of these organic entities. In this way, the Magistrate explains he always "stayed abreast of births and deaths in the family, each one representing a slight shifting of his position within it" (Huchu 2015: 6). In contrast, "[t]his western business of calling people by their names riled him" (10), because the Shona culture reflected the idea that "[t]he individual was the product of a community and had to be placed in relation to the next man. It was the glue that held them together, giving each value" (11). At this point in the novel, the Magistrate feels his family and community to be located "back home" in Zimbabwe. When Chenai finally gives birth to her daughter Ruvarashe, the Magistrate thinks about how, now, the name of the members of this newly-created family should change and how, symbolically, they should bury their baby's umbilical cord in the garden "binding Ruvarashe and, by extension, themselves to this place" (293). He is not forgetting about his roots but rather putting down new roots in Edinburgh. By the end of the novel, the Magistrate has adapted himself to his new life in Edinburgh, and is even able to create memories without the constant active help of Zimbabwean music,

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[t]hey took the [number] 30 [bus], got off on the South bridge and backtracked to Chambers. The Magistrate was impressed by the solid, grey architecture of the buildings on the row. But the old masonry held no memories for him and, in his despair, he failed to see that, even without music, he could and was in fact creating new ones one brick at a time. (250)

It is interesting that the Magistrate is unable to perceive this new ability that he has developed. Throughout the story, the character develops new bonds both to the city and to the people, and thus becomes part of the community. However, he is still unable to feel his roots growing: “[i]f I die here, make sure my body goes back home. You young ones can be transplanted but my roots are very deep. It’s too late for us oldies” (304). This affirmation seems ironic because in fact, in this novel, the one that is unable to adapt himself to the new context, and physically dies, is not the Magistrate, but the Maestro.

It is this failure of the cosmopolitan stranger to adapt himself to the new context which the Magistrate wants to avoid for his fellow expatriates in Edinburgh by means of his leadership; a leadership which, in turn, fills him with purpose. He is persuaded to attend a meeting of the MDC—the “Movement for Democratic Change”—Edinburgh branch, created in support of the main MDC, Zimbabwe’s principal opposition party. At the meeting, there are numerous displays of nationalist fervour that are parodied in the novel. For instance, they play the Zimbabwean national anthem, but they stop it at the second stanza because everyone seemed to sing different words such that “[t]he effect was mildly patriotic but mainly comical” (Huchu 2015: 129). Then, the Chairman Dzivarasekwa starts to deliver an inarticulate rambling speech about the political situation back in Zimbabwe, full of weak and incomplete arguments, with the general idea being that the only problem that Zimbabwe has is President Mugabe, and once he was gone, everything would be fine. Thus, rather than explaining the party’s branch philosophy and aims, it becomes an impassioned patriotic speech, embellished with declarations such as “I am prepared to die, right here, right now, for the freedom of Zimbabwe” (130). The Magistrate gets involved in the party and later ends up being elected as the new Chairman. Significantly, Dzivarasekwa—who had started calling himself life-chairman—, after being defeated by the Magistrate, abandons the party and announces that he is going to form a splinter faction called “The Real MDC in Edinburgh”. The Magistrate points out the underlying irony of this event as being that “[t]his meant the party lost a member as soon as democracy prevailed” (271), the same democracy the party was calling for in Zimbabwe. Although he was not involved in politics in his home country due to his job as a magistrate, he finds that now being the Chairman in Edinburgh restores him to his former prominent status: “[t]he Magistrate, finding himself at the

centre of things once more, became energized” (271). Recovering his former authority in Edinburgh boosts his self-confidence.

The turnout at the meetings of the MDC is for him “a reflection of how many people were interested in politics back home, as opposed to the day-to-day business of survival” (Huchu 2015: 271). This statement, together with the policies that the Magistrate wants to implement as the new Chairman of the party, can be interpreted in the light of Beck’s rooted cosmopolitanism. It shows that the cosmopolitan stranger does not reject their local roots in the encounter with the culture of the Other. As part of the Magistrate’s proposal to improve the structure of the MDC in Edinburgh he, for instance, contacts a law student at the University of Edinburgh to provide the community with a network specialized in immigration matters. He also wants to set up a free childcare group which would also teach Shona—the language of the majority in Zimbabwe—and Ndebele—the language of Zimbabwe’s largest minority. By the end of the novel, he is promoted from local Chairman to international development co-ordinator to “liaise with all our branches in the diaspora” not just in the UK, but around the world (Huchu 2015: 323). He wants to help Zimbabwean migrants, on account of their shared roots and heritage, through actions directed to orienting individuals in their new setting, thereby fostering the advancement of the Zimbabwean community in the diaspora, in an attempt to make “the party socially relevant” (322). Thus, in contrast to the previous (dis)organisation of the party and its nationalist zeal, he steers it towards a more ethical and social engagement in its present context.

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### **3. The Maestro: The Failed Quest for Eurhythmia**

The Maestro, another character that has been living under this neoliberal system for a long time, feels completely alienated from the city. A quixotic character, unable to orient himself in the city, he secludes himself in his apartment trying to find refuge within books without any success. His feelings of alienation from the present and the urban space are embodied in his way of experiencing the city: in contrast to the Magistrate’s reflective walks, he runs through the city looking for self-obliteration. There is one particular passage in the novel that lacks full stops and is written as a succession of repetitive structures, the narrative mirroring the Maestro’s agitation. As Fatima Fiona Moolla contends, by linking this white Zimbabwean to Africa in this passage through the symbol of the drum—which is considered the most powerful symbol of “traditional black Africa”—and the shackles—a symbol of trans-Atlantic slavery—, Huchu plays with the motif of routes and roots that appears in much of African diasporic literature, making the

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Maestro the recipient of the ancestral call of the African motherland unlike any of the black Zimbabweans in the novel (2018: 14):

He carried on, one foot after the other, just running, leaving everything behind, edging closer to the zone, his eyes no longer making out distinct shapes or objects, light scattering on his retina, the green of the plants, the black of the track, the brown canal, the blue sky, no objects but colours running in parallel lanes as the world was pushed back behind him to the past, as he was running west, away from the sunrise, fleeing the new day, outside of himself, reaching a state of grace where the only thing that mattered was movement, pushing his body to its physiological limits, and then a thud, and another, and another, the beating of an ancient drum going faster and faster, a loud percussion that pierced through the whooshing and the swirling of the atmosphere, louder and louder, this primitive drum that never broke rhythm only getting louder and stronger, hypnotic in its intonation of sounds from the savannah, the song of the hunter and the hunted, the powerful melody of life and death that plays on and on until he was no longer there, broken free from the shackles of reality into a running induced nirvana, becoming not himself but pure movement. (Huchu 2015: 139-140)

In contrast to the reflexive or even meditative state that the Magistrate reaches during his walks, here the Maestro has “the mind on autopilot” (Huchu 2015: 140), and his rapid ceaseless pace does not foster self-reflection. Running does not allow him to pause, preventing him from physically feeling himself as a part of the city: he cannot touch and symbolically establish that close connection that the Magistrate develops in his walks. He is even unable to see, to notice the shapes of the buildings; everything around him loses its singularity and the urban space takes on an indeterminate form. In the novel, Edinburgh, like any other city, is subjected to the interaction of several rhythms, and it is from this that the particular polyrhythm of the city arises. In Lefebvre’s study of rhythms, he starts with the basic premise that “[e]verywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm” (2013: 25), and posits repetition as a necessary condition for rhythm, stating that there is “[n]o rhythm without repetition in time and space, without *reprises*, without returns, in short without measure” (16, emphasis in original). He points to the relation between cyclical repetition and linear repetition that constantly interfere with each other in reality. Cyclical repetition originates in the cosmic, in nature, whereas the linear is found in social practice (18). As Lefebvre contends, the cyclical and the linear “exert a reciprocal action: they measure themselves against one another; each one makes itself and is made a measuring measure” (18). The body is placed at the centre; it is where social rhythms come into contact with bodily rhythms. In fact, it is from their own body that an individual learns rhythm “in order consequently to appreciate external rhythms”, their body acting as a “metronome” (29). Unlike the Magistrate, who strives towards eurhythmia, a harmonious connection on his

walks between his bodily rhythms and the social rhythms of the city, the Maestro is unable to achieve an embodied experience of the rhythms of the city. He finds his job at Tesco draining and alienating: he describes the mechanical rhythm of his work, where time and space are devoid of meaning and sense of duration, and everything is ready to be consumed: “[t]ime was warped in this place, bent, buckled, packaged into little packets called clocking in and clocking out. Everything had a price tag, a value assigned to it by some unseen authority” (Huchu 2015: 46). The building looks like a spaceship: “[e]verything about it felt as though it could just take off at any moment, nothing was permanent, nothing was fixed, it was just a space, a form that could be taken apart and reassembled anywhere else—transient, with no pretence of an eye on eternity” (47).

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The linear mechanical rhythm that predominates in the Maestro’s workplace ends up imposing itself on and engulfing his life. In fact, Lefebvre does not consider mechanical rhythm to be a rhythm, but just movement. As he argues, “[w]e easily confuse rhythm with movement” (2013: 15). Rhythm presupposes repetition but, as he points out, a repetition that introduces difference, a “qualified duration” (86). Thus, “only a non-mechanical movement can have rhythm” (87). Mechanical movements, with their mere monotonous repetition and accumulation of the same, he confines to the “domain of the quantitative, abstractly detached from quality” (87). The movement, devoid of rhythm, that the Maestro experiences at work intrudes and in fact imposes itself on his body, preventing him from tuning himself to the social rhythm of the city and inducing in him a state of arrhythmia. Untethered from the city, he becomes “pure movement” (Huchu 2015: 140). It should also be noted that the ways each character has of experiencing the city are also related to their socioeconomic position. The Maestro lives in one of the three identical twelve-storey blocks in a low-rent area in Edinburgh, the Calders. This stands in stark contrast to where the Magistrate lives, in Craigmillar Castle Road, close to Craigmillar Castle and Holyrood Park, and closer too to the city centre than the Calders. Thus, whereas on his walks the Magistrate encounters historical buildings, which give him a sense of permanence and duration, the Maestro encounters, once again, in the space around him that sense of repetition, of the same, of futility. However, with his low wage he cannot afford to move, and Huchu tells the reader that “[t]hrough the Maestro was grateful for the comforts and protection of the city, he wasn’t ready to give in to its seduction and charms, and to love it” (2015: 136).

His detachment from the city mirrors his inability to establish any meaningful social connections, his failure to belong to or in any community. As Gerard Delanty asserts, the idea of rooted cosmopolitanism also implies that there is not “a rejection of real communities” (2012: 2). Although the age we presently live in

and its developments—globalisation, migration, cosmopolitanism, postmodernism, the Internet— seem to have brought about the demise of the idea of community, Delanty argues that, conversely, “community has a contemporary resonance in the current social and political situation, which appears to have produced a worldwide search for roots, identity and aspirations for belonging” (2010: x). Thus, he finds that “the idea of community is related to the search for belonging in the insecure conditions of modern society” (2010: x). Along these same lines, Scott Lyall finds that community “might be more a metaphysics of striving for home, rather than the actuality, or even the possibility, of arrival” (2016: vii). As such, the search for a community is a universal human aspiration that is heightened in our present context, although it entails a particular set of difficulties in the case of migrants who are also so culturally distant from the new community to which they aspire to belong. The Maestro finds himself unable to connect with people, even in fleeting social exchanges. At work, he finds people “zombified” by the consumerist culture. Although he would like to interact with people during his daily commute, he finds that they resemble islands that he is unable to reach, and his use of very physical metaphors highlights what seems to him an impassable social distance:

[a]lmost everyone else on board was reading the Metro or had created a wall of sound around themselves with headphones. That was the pretence of the Edinburgh bus, that everyone was an island unto themselves and the enforced proximity was a minor inconvenience to be tactfully ignored by way of averted eyes and silence, except for the odd, Excuse me, I need to get off. (Huchu 2015: 205)

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This alienation from the rest of the people and the consequent inability to find a sense of community in Edinburgh causes him to experience a profound loneliness. He only has one friend, Tatyana—herself an immigrant from Poland—and she is the only person that speaks to the Maestro. As I have already mentioned, he is determined to find a solution to his lack of bonds with others in Edinburgh by immersing himself in books, thinking that “[i]f he devoted himself wholeheartedly to literature and gave up his soul to it, then he hoped that at the end of his inquiry he would have glimpsed the secret to life itself” (162). His choice of words, that he should “give up” his soul, points to the disembodied and socially alienating process that he is about to embark on, which stands in stark contrast to the embodied and social quest that the Magistrate has begun.

In the last section narrated by the Maestro, he talks about his final quest. As he explains it, “I went on a journey of discovery, trying to find the meaning of life” (Huchu 2015: 268). This journey takes him out of his apartment and to the city, where he starts to wander around, although “it was not so much walking as staggering, dragging himself step by step” (256). This is not a restorative kind of walk, it does not allow him to heal and reconcile himself with the city. It does not even look like the

movement of a living creature, but of a dying one. In fact, he devotes most of his time to visiting cemeteries, sleeping rough in parks around the city. Although now he moves around the city centre, as the Magistrate does on his walks, the Maestro's depiction of the city remains very different. As a profoundly disembodied individual, he does not feel himself embedded in the social rhythms of the city and thus the "buildings became ethereal shadows. They could have been from the past or the future, for time itself blurred in the thickness of the fog. The reality around him seemed fragile" (261). Just like his life, his narrative ends in an abrupt manner. The reader actually learns of his death from the rest of the characters in the novel. They do not know him; they have indeed never met. But being from Zimbabwe too, they take up the task of trying to find his family back "home". Their search, however, is not successful, they cannot locate any of his relatives. Thus, they decide to collect money among from the Zimbabwean community in Edinburgh in order to pay for his funeral, and they also appeal to the community to attend the rite. His death also reveals that the Maestro is, in fact, white, breaking with the over-representation and identification of racialized bodies as sociological strangers. The novel seems to suggest that the Maestro's strangeness comes from his cultural difference, while also pointing to the alienating conditions of contemporary society that posit the Maestro's struggle as a shared and universal human experience. Moreover, being white is not a privilege for the Maestro, as it contributes to his feelings of alienation. The Magistrate finds security in his attachment to the Zimbabwean culture and nation and, indeed, he uses aspects of his culture to try and connect with the new national setting; and, as I will discuss, the Mathematician feels comfortable in Edinburgh as a member of the Afropolitan elite. However, the Maestro does not feel that he belongs to either the Scottish/British community from which he feels culturally distant or to the predominantly black Zimbabwean community.<sup>2</sup>

#### **4. The Mathematician: A Neoliberal Cosmopolitan**

We are introduced to the Mathematician through the description of his room, where a poster of Adam Smith hangs on the wall. This reference is of crucial importance if we consider Nussbaum's analysis of Smith's writings, which helps illustrate some of this character's most defining personality traits. Nussbaum traces the influence of the Cynic and Stoic cosmopolitan tradition in the ideas of Adam Smith and argues that he continues to adopt a "subtle Stoic machismo, the machismo of self-command and the contempt of adversity" (2019: 197). From the beginning, we see the Mathematician's attempts to discipline his body. For instance, he does not use an alarm clock as he has trained his body to know when to rise. He also forces himself to eat at particular times, his mind and bodily



functions and rhythms being subject to the imperative of the clock, “[h]is stomach grumbles, he won’t eat till midday though. He wants to have full mastery of his body, of every thought and emotion that comes from it” (Huchu 2015: 23). His detachment from his natural rhythms and submission to social rhythms (Lefebvre 2013) is also reflected in his experience of the city. Contrary to the Maestro, who struggles against the imposition of social rhythms on his bodily rhythms, the Mathematician surrenders to them completely due to his absolute commitment to succeed in this neoliberal society. He also always drives in the city—an individualistic activity that separates him from the rest of society, protected in the private space of his car—, moving between his workplace, Edinburgh University, his flat and different cafés and pubs; his leisure time is strongly linked to consumer activities. Inside his flat, the Mathematician spends his time playing a video game called *Pro Evo*. Immersed in that disembodied virtual reality, he concludes that “[t]here’s no need to play real football, the experience is packaged for him in the comfort of his living room. He doesn’t even need to break a sweat for it” (Huchu 2015: 77). He presents himself as a profoundly detached individual that scolds his mates for their idealisation and nostalgia of the past but cannot see his own idealisation of the present. He conceives the present as a time of opportunities for everyone who, like him, works hard enough, believing in the fallacy of neoliberal meritocracy. He regards the present reality as severed from the past, oblivious to the inherited structural and economic inequalities upon which our societies are constructed, failing to consider that coming from a wealthy and educated family has granted him the opportunities he enjoys. In his research, the Mathematician can only see numbers and decontextualized facts, to the point that he even calls himself a “human calculator” unable to see patterns and connections beyond the data he studies (81). His inability to link facts and give them a narrative is also reflected in his contempt for literature, which is in stark contrast to the Maestro’s view: while the latter seeks an absolute truth in books, the Mathematician thinks that novels are “a waste of time” and, interestingly, in what is an intratextual reference to the Maestro, he mentions that the last one he tried was *Don Quixote*, “which was forced on me in my lit class in high school. I didn’t even bother; I just bought the video and even that was boring. [...] Give me numbers, \$, £, symbols” (32).

The Mathematician endorses that neoliberal cosmopolitanism of mobile elites or elite Afropolitanism which in the novel also stands as an unliveable ideal.<sup>3</sup> He ends up being murdered by Alfonso, his former security guard back in Zimbabwe, who was also living in Edinburgh while secretly working for the Mugabe regime. By chance, Alfonso discovers that the Mathematician was using for his thesis on “The Economic Incentives for Sustaining Temporary Hyperinflationary Environments” the unpublished research of a little-known Angolan economist, Chilala dos Santos Lima Climente, murdered in 1999. Climente was interested in corruption “because

he saw it not as the cause of Africa's problems, but merely the symptom of a more fundamental illness" (Huchu 2015: 179), and wrote about the winners of Angola's hyperinflationary period, how investing in hyperinflationary economics, though risky, can be a "highly rewarding investment strategy for people in positions of power, thereby creating a positive feedback loop rewarding negative governance, prolonging crisis" (86). Fearing that the Mathematician would use Climente's findings to investigate and analyse the situation in Zimbabwe, Alfonso murders him and steals his unfinished thesis and Climente's papers. In an ironic twist, he is symbolically murdered by the past he despises as useless and invaluable and because of the connections that he could make between pure facts and actual reality. His last feelings and thoughts are crowded with images of the Pac-Man ghost—a game he used to love in his teenage years—which are inserted in the narrative.

## 5. Conclusion

Following Beck's argument for the anti-essentialist stand of cosmopolitanism (2002: 37), it has been demonstrated that the characters in this novel appear as complex human beings, full of ambivalence and apparently competing internal forces. Yet they do not reach an in-between epistemology, as the Magistrate's constant re-negotiation and re-evaluation of meaning from an ambivalent position illustrates. The Mathematician, who seems to have surrendered himself to the rhythms and imperatives of neoliberal principles, also fails to live by these principles. This character also shows how some cosmopolitan strangers embody their contradictions, not always taking an ethical or moral course of action, but rather the most convenient one. Following Delanty's and Lyall's ideas, I have argued that the characters in *The Maestro*, *The Magistrate* & *The Mathematician* are embedded in an active open-ended process of searching and striving for home in the host society of Edinburgh. These characters attempt and often fail to inscribe themselves in the spatial and social weave of the community. The Maestro foregrounds the possibility of the failure of this cosmopolitan ideal. His experiences are also representative of a wider experience in Western societies: the sense of dislocation, the struggle to belong, and being burnt out by demanding and discriminatory work conditions. Coming from a different social environment, cultural differences can significantly hinder these three characters' process of cementing strong ties in a host community. The lines from the poem "Scotland" by the Scottish poet Hugh MacDiarmid that Tendai Huchu chooses as the opening epigraph to his novel capture the essence of the text: exploring the particular experiences of migrants in Scotland, while inscribing them into the wider history of the nation, considering their particular search for belonging as part of a universal quest characteristic of our contemporary globalized world.

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## Notes

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1. I am applying here Nancy Fraser's analysis. She explains this shift from state-organized capitalism and the disorganized ideals of neoliberal capitalism in her chapter "Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History". She argues that the ideal of the family wage included "a masculinist romance of the free, unencumbered, self-fashioning individual" (2013: 220). The shift to the ideal of the two-earner family produced "a new romance of female advancement and gender justice" (220). However, she contends that the reality that underlies it "is depressed wage levels, decreased job security, declining living standards, a steep rise in the number of hours worked for wages per household, exacerbation of the double shift — now often a triple or quadruple shift — and a rise in female-headed households" (220).

2. This is hinted in the novel in the initial reactions to his death: the Magistrate, after learning that the Maestro is white, asks again if he is really Zimbabwean. Alfonso believes "it's a trap": "[o]ne day

you're minding your own business, paying your taxes, and the next thing you know, they've thrown a dead white guy on your doorstep" (Huchu 2015: 297), and the Mathematician's Zimbabwean friend calls him "a random white guy" (301).

3. The term Afropolitanism was popularized by Taiye Selasi in her 2005 essay "Bye-Bye Babar" — where the Afropolitan is defined as an identity category of the "Africans of the world" —, opening an ongoing debate in which the term has been equally celebrated and contested. As Durán-Almarza, Kabid and Rodríguez González argue, over the past few years the term "has become inevitably linked to discussions about what it means to be young, mobile and African in the contemporary world" (2019: 2). Most of the arguments put forward by its detractors are related precisely to "the commodification to which the term has recently been subjected, its association with the West, or the exclusion of ordinary African people and realities it seems to imply" (Bastida-Rodríguez 2019: 24).

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