

Cosmopolitanism and Neocitizenship in Teju Cole's *Open City* and Zadie Smith's *NW*

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*Abstract: This paper examines the possible new dimensions of the cosmopolitan disposition and a phenomenon that can be called neocitizenship in two contemporary literary works, Teju Cole's *Open City* and Zadie Smith's *NW*. The main question the paper explores is how literary narratives portray the clash of cosmopolitan attitudes with material and economic interests in contemporary neoliberal societies. It is argued that some characters can theoretically identify with the classical, human-centric idea of cosmopolitanism based on the principle of fair treatment, but it remains an unattainable utopia because they bump into obstacles when putting principles into practice. Julius is an example of this attitude in Cole's *Open City*. Other characters, such as Natalie in *NW*, exemplify the pragmatic notion of self-entrepreneurial neocitizenship which is constrained by the inhuman practices of neoliberalism. They are flexible and opportunistic characters who work meticulously to achieve personal success and seem successful on the surface. However, it turns out that both of these characters, who believe in cosmopolitan ethics and are more down-to-earth neocitizens, only chase a mirage and eventually fail in the novels, which can be retraced to the fact that they live in denial and are unable to come to terms with past deeds.*

The concept of cosmopolitanism (i.e. world citizenship) was born in the European civilisation and it has existed primarily within the European context for more than two thousand years. Even though it reflects an approach based on Western culture, during this unthinkably long period the meaning of the word has noticeably transformed. The expression “world citizenship” evokes an urban environment and, in this respect, cosmopolitanism, cities, and citizenship can be seen as inseparable ideas, though the meanings of these terms have always been defined by a given social and political context. The ancient Greek idea of cosmopolitanism, in short, means that people deserve fair treatment, just like quasi-siblings, which should be coupled with a profoundly open-minded attitude.

Cosmopolitanism suggests that despite profound cultural and social differences, mankind constitutes one community. The first usage of the word in the fourth century BC differs from its twenty-first-century meaning and, due to never-ending social changes, the meaning of the term also keeps changing. Colonisation and its aftermath have irreversibly altered, among others, the social composition of the inhabitants in many cities of once colonising countries, and the specific social issues and typical challenges they are coping with at present, for instance, racism, prejudice, and undue police violence can be retraced to this heritage to some extent.

Like the concept of cosmopolitanism, the meaning of citizenship has also transformed in contemporary Western societies. *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines citizenship as a form of relationship between an individual and the state, the latter giving freedom and responsibility to the citizens. However, according to Eva Cherniavsky, the “old” term citizen refers to abstract equality in bourgeois civil society, and since the 1990s, heated debates have taken place about the relationship of the nation and the state under the political and economic condition of neoliberalism (23), which clearly shows that the term citizenship, not unlike cosmopolitanism, needs to be redefined. Accordingly, the meanings of cosmopolitanism and citizenship have been in the process of transformation under the economic imperative of neoliberalism, and the aim of this study is to explore how twenty-first-century literary works thematise this change. The question I am going to explore is what new dimensions of cosmopolitanism can be traced in Teju Cole’s *Open City* and in Zadie Smith’s *NW*, and how a new phenomenon, which can be called “neocitizenship,” appears and shapes the behaviour of fictitious characters. The novels are part of diasporic literature, they

COSMOPOLITANISM AND NEOCITIZENSHIP

were written by a Nigerian American and a British Jamaican author, both exploring topical issues, such as migration, prejudice, and violence, from the perspectives of contemporary diasporic fiction.

Teju Cole is a Nigerian American novelist, photographer, critic, curator, and author of several books. He was born in the United States but partly grew up in Lagos and is currently the Gore Vidal Professor of the Practice of Creative Writing at Harvard. He published *Open City* in 2011. Julius is the main character of the narrative; he was born in Nigeria, has a German mother and grandmother, and works in New York. From the beginning, he is described as someone who pays special attention to visual arts and classical music; he is a highly educated, open-minded intellectual with a multi-ethnic background, which superficially implies a cosmopolitan disposition. However, it gradually emerges that he lives with repressed memories and, although a psychiatrist by profession at an American hospital, he has fundamental problems with becoming emotionally attached to people. By the end of the novel, the readers learn that they see everything only from Julius's perspective and the character, who is successful and open-minded on the surface, hides secrets in his past that he fails to admit to, which questions the viability of cosmopolitan ideals.

Zadie Smith is a contemporary British author of novels, essays, and short stories. She published her fourth novel, *NW*, in 2012. Set in Northwest London, the narrative focuses on the friendship of Leah Hanwell and Natalie Blake who grew up together in Willesden. As young adults, they gradually drift apart since their education, social class and status, career ambitions, and family life take them in different directions; however, the novel's final scene offers hope that their friendship has deeper roots than it seems on the surface. In the novel, Leah embodies innocent goodwill, a hallmark of the cosmopolitan utopia, whereas Natalie is the model of an entrepreneurial neocitizen with a strong drive for social and economic self-realisation. The two characters provide excellent grounds to explore how cosmopolitan ideals and neocitizen reality clash in the city-dwellers' lives in modern London.

My analysis of Teju Cole's *Open City* and Zadie Smith's *NW* shows that today's cosmopolitanism sometimes suggests an escape to avoid facing personal responsibility, for example, for violent acts. It can also be a constraint in the case of an abused victim who may prefer to move far away rather than live where the violence happened. Thus, ultimately, people in both categories may leave their countries of origin for a new home where nobody knows what had happened to them. The main characters in the novels I explore in this paper carry injuries or secrets from their

pasts; they subsequently become world citizens, establish a new existence, and start to flexibly adapt to new circumstances yet cannot really overcome the previous trauma or misery.

Although neoliberalism is an economic term, it has an impact on many non-economic spheres of the present Western world, including the concepts of cosmopolitanism and neocitizenship. In the wake of neoliberal changes, the word “citizen” has slowly been divested of the modifier “bourgeois” and gave way to the birth of new descriptors, for instance, “entrepreneurial citizen-subjects” (Cherniavsky 2). *Open City* and *NW* are set in this Western, neoliberal world and some characters in the stories can be labelled neocitizens because they represent the gap between the ethical principles of cosmopolitanism and the inhumanity of neoliberal practices.

Cherniavsky’s recent monograph, *Neocitizenship: Political Culture after Democracy* (2017), helps understand the social background of the novels because she discusses the changing contexts and practices of citizenship in twenty-first-century neoliberal societies (5). The expression “neocitizen” needs to be introduced “as we are living in the midst of a momentous reconfiguration of political order” (11). She suggests that “neocitizens” are citizens who are not primarily characterised by an active political identity (36), but they are neoliberal subjects with fewer claims on the state; they are “citizen-subjects” who are obliged to become entrepreneurs of themselves (38). Cherniavsky assumes that in the context of neoliberal governance, the classical term citizenship (which implies abstract equality, racial nationalism, bourgeois civil society) has been transformed, eroded, and made to disappear, and instead, flexible (23), openly opportunistic (64) and entrepreneurial neocitizens live in the neoliberal states (11). Since Cole’s and Smith’s novels explore the dynamic transformation of characters with biracial or multi-ethnic backgrounds in an urban context, Cherniavsky’s observations may prove useful in highlighting the social-civic environment in which the personal stories unfold.

Correspondingly, it has become obvious by the second decade of this millennium that under the condition of neoliberalism, the expected advent of freedom and equality that cosmopolitanism fosters is lagging. Instead of working like a well-oiled machine, diverse and multicultural societies are struggling with new challenges, for instance, instead of becoming integrated, many people live in quasi-enclaves. Although the ever-expanding boundaries of a global world make London and New York more versatile, cosmopolitanism is still not a synonym for a new type of freedom. In this essay, it is argued that cosmopolitanism is acquiring new meanings

COSMOPOLITANISM AND NEOCITIZENSHIP

in neoliberal societies; it is becoming an unattainable, utopian ideal, an escape, as the two diasporic novels I discuss, Teju Cole's *Open City* and Zadie Smith's *NW*, suggest. Some characters are self-made entrepreneurs, others are cosmopolitans showcasing an approach that differs from the classical interpretation, and both categories express the disillusionment of a nominally open society that is bound together with the longstanding ties of neoliberalism in a shrinking world. The characters chase a mirage and can never reach the glowing image of equality as they fail to face personal responsibility and run up against the norms and limits of neoliberal societies.

MODERN CONCEPTIONS OF COSMOPOLITANISM

It is Immanuel Kant who defined cosmopolitan citizenship in a way that continues to have an impact on the twenty-first century. He speaks of a world in which states are obligated to recognise that every human being has the right to visit a foreign country without being treated with hostility. The ultimate goal of his theory would be to establish a community and, in his work *Perpetual Peace*, Kant envisions this ideal world, a cosmopolis, a world made up of confederated free republics (Taraborrelli xi–xii). This idea has endured throughout the twentieth century and has been the inspiration underlying global projects such as the League of Nations or the United Nations Organisation to promote international peace and defend fundamental human rights (Taraborrelli xii). In the twentieth century, the Kantian notion of cosmopolitanism became a theoretical resource to face the challenges triggered by globalisation processes (Taraborrelli xiii).

Today, in literary academic discourses, the term cosmopolitanism seems to be more heterogeneous, and sometimes contradictory; it appears as an umbrella term. Sonya O. Rose notes how debated the concept is in academic texts and elaborates on a possible definition: “an intellectual and aesthetic stance of openness towards divergent cultural experiences, a search for contrast rather than uniformity” (3). Robert Spenser also describes the term as contradictory because it may designate the Kantian ideal of hospitality, it may refer to an expanded definition of citizenship, or it can label a cultural mixing represented by literary texts (2). Both arguments include a new aspect of the contemporary academic approach, namely, cultural mixing, broadening further the earliest interpretation of cosmopolitanism and revealing the experience of the characters in Cole's novel.

In *Open City*, cosmopolitanism refers to real or imaginative mobility, and a summary of personal memories and collective historical recollections as well (Gehrmann 9). Besides mobility, in Julius's case, the word can be associated with both intellectual curiosity and a normative concept that characterises globalised societies. In a similar vein, *Open City* is customarily read as an exemplary cosmopolitan performance (Vermeulen 3) that both fosters and critiques cosmopolitanism. The accelerating progress in global economies and societies, and the escalating migration waves suggest that the number of possible interpretations of cosmopolitanism will increase in the future, and probably more neologisms will be born that follow the latest developments in multi-ethnic societies.

In *NW*, cosmopolitanism is not described as a perfect ideal, but rather as something defective. According to Kristian Shaw, cosmopolitanism is “the means by which to achieve harmony when living with difference” (21), which resembles Kwame Anthony Appiah's view on difference. Leah exemplifies the hard side of cosmopolitan reality: even though she approaches Shar with trust at the beginning of the novel, she bumps against walls. The relationship between the two of them shows the harsh reality of transnational engagement, the cultural tension, and social divides in the Northwest district of London. Although she is refused and scammed by Shar, Leah does not stop being altruistic. On the contrary, she seeks a way to help Shar, she even goes to her flat and she is not discouraged when the trust she shows is not returned. Her naïve treatment of her fellow citizens is a refreshing illustration of human generosity and coincides with the utopian cosmopolitan ideal. When she is cheated, she does not seek revenge; she can handle rejection and she can be as generous as before, which is comparable to Christian ideals of forgiveness.

Nevertheless, it is surprising that there is not a single viable example of cosmopolitanism in *NW*, despite the fact that London is the capital of multi-ethnic Britain, and theoretically could be an example of happy coexistence in the novel. Although the history of colonisation and the Commonwealth after decolonisation are not dealt with in the novel, the long history of multi-ethnic London would have undoubtedly created some positive and happy experiences at the same time. With this lack, the novel suggests that due to the social changes in twenty-first-century London, the utopian ideal of cosmopolitanism fails inevitably.

The two novels explore the experiences of diasporic characters in American and British societies in the twenty-first century in which new layers of the word cosmopolitanism are also in the process of taking shape. One such new expression

COSMOPOLITANISM AND NEOCITIZENSHIP

is vernacular cosmopolitanism, which has been coined by Homi K. Bhabha. Bhabha found Naipaul's central character in *The Mimic Men* enthralling because he worked through his despair, anxieties, and alienation and lived a sort of incomplete but intricately communitarian and busy life (11). Bhabha calls this type of character vernacular cosmopolitan, meaning that such characters can move between cultural traditions, and live hybrid forms of life. His term also refers to refugees, who are on the periphery of Western societies and belong to more than one language or culture (13). According to Bhabha, vernacular cosmopolitans are free but have the right to difference in equality (16). In other words, vernacular cosmopolitanism describes the universality of non-Western citizens with local bonding, who can be called "local-universal citizens" since they are willing to broaden their cultural horizons. These citizens, nevertheless, do not consider equality as a "neutralisation of differences in the name of the 'universality'" (Bhabha 17). However, it must be noted that the context Bhabha deals with is mainly the post-colonial habitat of better-educated members of the former British Empire; undoubtedly, he describes an intellectual battlefield.

Open City and *NW* are also examples of urban fiction where the city and the setting of the stories play a central role. The metropolises, New York in the *Open City* and London in *NW* are not randomly chosen environments. Both novels deal with characters who have multi-ethnic backgrounds, family ties, and social relationships and they live in a city, a perfect hiding place to run away from past mistakes. In the case of Cole's novel, the main character lives and travels through three continents, yet he always chooses a global city. On the other hand, *NW* exposes disharmony, a morose, bitter atmosphere of a district in London where characters struggle in a life fraught with many complications and they are on the verge of losing the game. They are not excluded from the ideal world of freedom and equality; they just do not pursue dreams out of reach because it is beyond dispute that the utopian community of a harmonious cosmopolitan society does not exist in the world of this novel. This claim is supported by a sentence on the very first page of *NW*: "Here's what Michel likes to say: not everyone can be invited to the party" (Smith 3), revealing that equality is only a mirage.

There is one more significant difference between the two novels: the question of mobility. Julius is a continuously moving, walking, travelling, and working person, he is described as somebody who is constantly leaving a location or heading to a new place; he is a highly mobile person, which is a profoundly cosmopolitan

trait and does not necessarily characterise neocitizens. The characters in *NW*, however, are mostly immobile. Leah, for example, has never had any experience outside the NW neighbourhood in the novel as Molly Slavin states (8). Leah's hammock scenes frame the novel; the narrative begins and closes with an image in which Leah is lying in her hammock, her immobile resting place. Another difference is that Leah and Natalie's world could be "nowhere," as Slavin puts it (7), whereas Julius's world could be called "everywhere," which poses further questions about locality.

UNIVERSAL VS. LOCAL VALUES

As a friendly gesture, Julius sends a copy of *Cosmopolitanism* by Kwame Anthony Appiah to Farouq, a young Moroccan man who runs a phone shop in Brussels (Cole 124). Although no concrete part of the book is referred to or analysed in detail during their discussions, the modern conception of cosmopolitanism offered by the book must have made a deep impact on Julius. When Appiah discusses the question of whether it is worth speaking about universal values and universal morality or not, he undoubtedly communicates his commitment to objective values, which he defines as universal and local values (Appiah 20). He is thinking about a universal morality that rests on both being part of the place where one lives and a part of a broader human community (Appiah 17). In other words, certain values are universal just as certain values are local: this argument adds new features to the classical interpretation of cosmopolitanism; however, as my analysis will showcase, the reconciliation of the two types of values remains unsuccessful in both novels. For instance, an ironic remark in *NW* reveals that Smith's novel regards universal ethical principles utopistic, which are challenged by local practices: "She and Michel are invited [to the dinner at Natalie's house] to provide something like local colour" (Smith 87); referring to the fact that Leah and Michel are an interracial couple, Leah is white and Michel is black.

In *Open City*, Julius meets Dr Maillotte, a retired surgeon, on the flight to Brussels, whose approach to maintaining or losing personal ties to a country can be read as a model for advancing from a national to a global direction. They have a long discussion on the plane and later meet for lunch (Cole 88). Dr Maillotte shows that it is possible "to work through the national towards the global" because she, by nature, never has to choose between the local and the global but her inborn cosmopolitanism helps reconcile local attachments with global allegiances (Spenser 38). Local

COSMOPOLITANISM AND NEOCITIZENSHIP

attachment can mean, for instance, personal relationships in New York or Nigeria for Julius, or the fact that Dr Maillotte travels to Belgium every now and then because her friends there keep her coming back. On the other hand, she thinks that her husband slowly loses his connection to Brussels (Cole 142), and it can be one reason why she mainly comes to Europe without him. When she asks Julius about his travels to Nigeria he says that he rarely visits the country of his birthplace because he is rather busy, and that he too is losing some of his connections.

Farouq, on the other hand, thinks about global and local values from a different angle as he would like to be the next Edward Said (Cole 128). He makes reference to Said, who published *Orientalism* in 1978, in which he criticised the stereotypical Western vision of otherness: “European culture was able to manage—and even to produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period” (Said 3). Farouq is disappointed because marked difference is never accepted and never seen as containing its own value in Europe. Farouq describes “Belgium as a difficult place for an Arab” to live in because there is a specific trouble about being here and maintaining uniqueness and difference (Cole 142–143). Nevertheless, Farouq represents a self-contradictory point when he says, “in [his] opinion, the Palestinian question is the central question of our time” (Cole 121), suggesting that he believes this question to be more important than others, including the question of the value of difference.

Professor Saito, who used to give lectures at Maxwell College before he retired, can be seen as another character who embodies universal values. Appiah argues that cosmopolitanism is based on two ideas: first, it is an obligation that exists toward others and that stretches beyond personal interest, and second, human lives are taken seriously since practices and beliefs are treated as significant (Appiah 14). In this vein, we can observe in the novel that the professor enjoys the debates with Julius, shares his opinion with him, and warns him that he “must be careful about closing too many doors” (Cole 172), which can be a relevant piece of advice to help him maintain the cosmopolitan open mindset. Julius in turn visits him in New York, sometimes due to respectful obligation. One day Julius meets Mary, who used to work as a nurse for Professor Saito, and she lets him know how much the professor enjoyed his visits (Cole 234), meaning that not only did Julius highly appreciate the professor but that Saito also equally valued his company. They have a master–disciple relationship, and when Julius eventually learns that the professor is gay (Cole 172), he only says that “[they] had had conversations for three years without

any idea about this vital part of his life” (Cole 172), coming to the conclusion that there is no reason to bring it up now.

According to Appiah, a further tool the cosmopolitan disposition relies on in case of discord is conversation; it is a universal value, and it can be the first step when the voices of dissent are heard. Appiah acknowledges that a “conversation doesn’t have to lead to consensus about anything, especially not values; it’s enough that it helps people get used to one another” (Appiah 87). Julius applies this method when he talks to Farouq and Khalil; he listens to them and transmits their one-sided opinion to the reader. He does not refuse or quarrel, but he also shares his final thoughts on Farouq’s position: “there was something powerful about him, a seething intelligence, something that wanted to believe itself indomitable. But he was one of the thwarted ones” (Cole 129). It may sound disappointing because the men’s different points of view do not come closer in the end; nevertheless, reaching an agreement on such complex questions is anything but utopian, rather, it would require a down-to-earth approach.

The analysis of the local versus global aspects of cosmopolitanism, then, suggests that representing both dimensions generates tensions that remain unsolved throughout the novel. The difference is regarded as an enriching component in an ideal case, and multi-ethnicity or same-sex relationships may add diverse values to the composition of society. The role of conversation is also mentioned as a crucial element in the understanding of other points of view and Farouq’s narratives supply many examples for this. Farouq’s opinion is revealed on many topics, and Julius transmits them in an impartial style, he positions himself as neither superior nor inferior to Farouq. It is left to the reader to agree or disagree with Farouq; nevertheless, the inherent tension due to irreconcilable opinions never disappears, and the unrealistically utopistic character of cosmopolitanism is strengthened even further.

NEOCITIZENSHIP IN THE NEOLIBERAL FRAME

Whereas the ideal of cosmopolitanism appears as an unattainable mirage throughout the novels, another accessible form of conduct is slowly taking shape on the horizon: neocitizenship. Characters manage their lives in the freedom offered by a neoliberal environment which ensures the conditions for opportunistic self-realisation. Michel in *NW* can be an example of this attitude when he says, “[he] know[s] this country has opportunities if you want to grab them, you can do it”

(Smith 29). In addition, the ideology of neoliberalism is inseparable from market capitalism, the prime mover of neoliberal societies. However, this perceived freedom is often very deceptive: migrants who are less skilled than Julius can easily find themselves on the periphery of the neoliberal city. In *Open City*, for instance, Julius speculates about a black woman who is cleaning a church in Brussels, he tries to find out about her story while he is walking up toward the altar in the silent hum of the vacuum cleaner and the organ music (Cole 138). Interestingly, this immigrant woman never says a word, she remains a marginal character on the periphery; it is only Julius who speculates about her story. The woman is working in silence while the well-educated, elite Julius remains the single narrator, and the less privileged woman's story in the background is conveyed exclusively through his perspective. *NW*, on the other hand, provides a less stereotypical example of how labour force moves when the story of a Brazilian girl, Maria, is related, who, after arriving in London, "discovered her employer to be several shades darker than she was herself" (Smith 299). The two examples show that being a mobile world citizen itself does not guarantee equality; people can be equal cosmopolitan human beings only in theory as the labour market prices them very clearly in neoliberal societies.

Sheri-Marie Harrison claims that in immigrant novels, such as *Open City*, the movement of migrants follows the model of capital flow: "they formally position migrant subjects as analogues of capital" (203). Nations remain important, though not as fixed goals but as a means to forward the flow of capital or labour force, and in this respect, "an immigrant novel mirrors neoliberal capital's paradoxical reliance on the nation as an economic mechanism that can facilitate competitive conditions for the free flow of capital" (203). Unlike the cleaning woman who may be perceived as cheap labour force, Julius is an elite diasporic intellectual; he is from Nigeria, but he lives in America as a respected psychiatrist, not as a refugee. His patients are proud of him, one of his elderly patients, for instance, notes with emotion in his voice how important it is for him to see a black man in a white coat: "Doctor, I just want to tell you how proud I am to come here and see a young black man like yourself in that white coat, because things haven't ever been easy for us, and no one has ever given us nothing without a struggle" (Cole 210). This episode shows that neoliberal societies welcome those who can adopt the attitude needed to become successful, but the underprivileged layer is ignored and neglected, for instance, the reader knows nothing about this patient except that he is black.

Julius demonstrates what Spencer has called cosmopolitan disposition, though he only looks free and altruistic on the surface. He never really intends to put his ideals into practice, instead, turns out to be a self-entrepreneurial neocitizen. Spencer states that cosmopolitanism is, first of all, a disposition characterised by self-awareness, a sensitivity to the world beyond one's immediate milieu (Spencer 4), and this is true for Julius on the surface. This disposition characterises his life; at first glance, he appears to be sensitive to the suffering of others. The young Julius wants to protect a girl in his class because she has polio which has withered her left foot into a twisted stump that she drags behind her when she walks, and Julius is afraid that the boys in the class would mock her (Cole 61). His first instinct is a gallant, protective one, though he has nothing to do with that girl. This is a generous, altruistic step toward a stranger, but it is odd at the same time that he shows empathy only to people who are emotionally removed from him in the novel.

Until the end of the narrative, Julius creates the impression of an objective observer, a person who is highly sensitive and responsive to others' suffering, but it is rather telling that this is true exclusively in the case of strangers. For instance, as part of his professional duties, he wants to buy a book written by his patient just to understand her mindset; though he knows he would not have time to read all of it, he wants to think more about what his patient has written, and he also hopes that the book might help him gain further insight into her psychological state (Cole 27). However, looking at the deeper level of the story, Julius's response is different to people he has intimate connections with. He is, for instance, incomprehensively ignorant of the tragedy that his rape of Moji could have caused in the girl's life. He is insensitive to the devastation that he had caused and he is also blind to acknowledge that it is impossible to turn his back on his past deeds and run away without restoring his relationship with Moji.

Finally, the treatment of the rape that Julius may have committed highlights a typical feature of the neoliberal world, namely, accountability. Accountability matters even though it is not foregrounded in the novels, it remains hidden behind veils but it subconsciously controls the behaviour of neocitizens who work conscientiously to achieve personal success. In the environment of the neoliberal business practice, which seeks protection from local regulation, profit-oriented companies often try to avoid high national taxes by resorting to offshore banks (Harrison 208). Similarly, Julius exemplifies a new neoliberal model of migration: his figure is modelled on the capital committed to endless movement across borders and he strives

COSMOPOLITANISM AND NEOCITIZENSHIP

to shake off accountability (207). Harrison also states that “[h]is rape accusation is also about transparency and about being accountable” (212). Natalie in *NW* can be mentioned as another example of a character struggling with accountability since she also leads a double life and she is described as someone who exhibits voyeuristic tendencies: “Natalie Blake had a strong desire to slip into the lives of other people” (Smith 283). Her deeds committed in secret are eventually revealed to her husband and it slowly becomes obvious that the entrepreneurial self-actualisation of neocitizenship has an unexpected price.

Characters manage their lives in the freedom provided by neoliberal societies and they flexibly adapt to the circumstances. Their country of origin does not determine their options, as it does not delimit their cultural practices: they are self-entrepreneurs who take advantage of the free mobility offered by neoliberal societies, yet their choices are constrained by the market economy. Interestingly, the novels under scrutiny in this study approach the same subject from different angles.

NEOCITIZENSHIP IN *NW*

Zadie Smith’s novel is a social drama of steely grey lives and endless struggles for a little human warmth, and the narrative that distances the characters from the reader portrays the coldness in human relationships. James Wood states that the narrative technique that overwhelms the reader with information beyond control can be viewed as filling a void (Hedin 18), and it creates a bridgeless chasm between the characters and the reader. Bruce Robbins shares this view: he argues that the narrative technique used by Zadie Smith is characterised by “too much information” to spare the readers’ feelings (4). He mentions the example of a death scene: Felix’s death is communicated in a cold, distanced manner as the narrative offers too much information instead of creating an affective link, inhibiting the reader from connecting to the character emotionally. Furthermore, there are no admirable characters, successful and desired careers, reassuring foreseeable solutions on the horizon, or happy endings in any of the storylines. Instead, examples of abusive personal relationships, substance abuse, stabbing, social strife, desperate struggles on a personal level, and fear of aging dominate the narrative.

Shaw states that the realistic urban environment is an ideal setting to address cosmopolitan issues at the most micro-level of society (6). The London of *NW* is depicted as a microcosm for the transnationalism of the twenty-first century, exposing

the difficulties of practising the world citizen ideals of empathy, tolerance, and belonging (7). The setting of the story is London, a megacity, which is a perfect setting to demonstrate how cosmopolitan ideals come up against neoliberal reality. For instance, Leah's immediate friendly reaction to help Shar is an illustration of the cosmopolitan attitude but later, when the fraud is revealed, she is shattered. This episode shows her as a naïve, altruistic cosmopolitan who is willing to help on the grounds that everybody deserves fair treatment. This way, *NW* displays sunless shades of a metropolis: characters are world citizens but their downfall is inevitable. The characters also exemplify an earlier observation that there is a significant difference between human-centric cosmopolitanism and profit-centric neoliberalism. Leah, for instance, comments on Michel's opinion this way: "you want to be rich like them, but you can't be bothered with their morals, whereas I am more interested in their morals than their money" (Smith 82).

Although neocitizenship is used in a political context in Cherniavsky's book, it is a central concept in this study because political and economic changes always give way to social changes, often reflected in literature. *NW* is a novel that portrays characters who must attain their personal objectives in a rather challenging environment. I call these characters, such as Natalie and Felix, "neocitizens" since their present achievement and private attitude matter in the first place. Cherniavsky refers to this personal feature when she describes "citizen-subjects" and expresses the need for a new alternative descriptor attached to citizens, such as "flexible or entrepreneurial" (23). This is in contrast with the "old," "bourgeois" citizenship, which is based on the idea that people are engaged with issues of equality, civil society (Cherniavsky 23), civic virtue, and the common good. However, the characters in *NW* are seldom depicted as beings preoccupied with such virtues, and even if they are, as Leah for instance, their altruism seems to be unable to survive in the neoliberal environment. Neocitizens are not characterised by their political engagement or relation to the institutions of neoliberal governance (Cherniavsky 23), the focus is achievement based on their own efforts, irrespective of ancestry or physical heritage. In Smith's novel, Natalie, whose real name is Keisha, represents this attitude the most obviously, which is why she can model an entrepreneurial neocitizen.

Neocitizens in *NW* are born in London or soon after their arrival they live as if they had been born there, and they keep or take up the pace of the city. They are not examples of exotic otherness, oppressors and victims, immigrants, or native inhabitants. For instance, Natalie, a black woman and a busy barrister who studied

at a posh university, is trying to maintain the illusion of an enviable, privileged life. At first sight, Natalie is an ideal model of personal and social advancement; she has always been a hard-working girl and she thinks “three years ahead about the important things in life” (Smith 184). She can “sit in one place longer than other children,” and “be bored for hours without complaint” (Smith 180), she is determined about her career and even changes her name from Keisha to Natalie (Smith 206). Natalie is “studying for the bar”; she is going to be a barrister (Smith 217) and she hates “holidays preferring to work” (Smith 258), just like Julius in *Open City*. However, in a couple of years, her mindset changes: she earns so much that she has “completely forgotten what it is like to be poor” (Smith 280), and she neither speaks nor understands the language of the lower class anymore. Even though she has reached desirable economic goals and she belongs to the lucky upper-middle class, she is not happy and finds comfort in secret sexual affairs, and finally, she is teetering on the verge of committing suicide.

Leah can be an important counterpoint to Natalie, and she can serve as a positive model of the cosmopolitan disposition despite her unhappiness. The first chapter of the novel focuses on Leah’s story, revealing that she was born and raised in a warm family. She has Irish ancestors and a loving and ambitious husband: “Her husband was kinder than any man Leah Hanwell had ever known, aside from her father” (Smith 23). Michel, her francophone husband, and her Irish ancestors are her closest family members and these facts strengthen her self-image as a person who feels at home in a multi-ethnic environment, which is an important feature of cosmopolitanism. She is also a socially conscious person: her job is to distribute funds and this position fits her perfectly. Her hospitality and empathy towards Shar show that she is not just open on the surface, she does not merely pretend to care but it is her natural, innate quality. All these features introduce a person who is open, sensitive and sociable; she could be a happy world citizen, but, unfortunately, Leah is unhappy. Through Leah’s character, Smith supplies a perfectly realistic image of contemporary London in *NW*: “The narrative reflects a rational, melancholic and pragmatic glocal environment built on the conflict, diversity, and discord of a future *imperfect*” (Shaw 20).

Both female characters have identity crises, but the crises have nothing to do with abstract ideals. They have identity crises because they have reached a milestone in their lives where they must take account of and evaluate all they have, and eventually rely on something firm so that they can go on. Even though they live in socially

acceptable families with understanding husbands, they are unable to communicate with their spouses to share the unbearable burden they carry. Leah shares with Shar that she is pregnant as it seems to be easier for her to talk to a total stranger than to her husband, and Natalie talks to Nathan after running away from home. Finally, Leah gradually drifts toward a nervous breakdown and Natalie is on the verge of suicide.

It must also be noted that both women have secrets that force them to lead a double life, which culminates in a tension that permanently grinds them until they become a bundle of nerves. Leah has an abortion and uses contraception, despite their agreement to try to have a baby, but she wants to avoid the confrontation with Michel and attempts to maintain the life that she has been content with so far. It is more difficult to find the reason for Natalie's secret life. She has always been a hardworking and ambitious girl, her career is more than successful, she is a perfect neocitizen who has enviably achieved her goals in the unfriendly, cold, neoliberal, result-oriented business life of London. It seems to be incomprehensible why she needs to peep into the lives of strangers and have sexual affairs with people who are outside her class. As can be seen, Zadie Smith focuses on the portrayal of two female characters with different family backgrounds, ethnic origins, professional successes, marital relationships, social standing, and intellectual temper, but both of whom are equally on the verge of collapse. The novel suggests, then, that despite the differences, these women who live seemingly desirable lives in contemporary London tend to hide frustration and unhappiness.

The character of Felix could have been another positive model if his story had not culminated in him being murdered. He can be seen as lucky until "he got deep in the drug" (Smith 128) and lost his family, but after a troublesome couple of years, he has the mental strength to "pick himself up off the floor" (Smith 128). Felix believes that only he has the power to stand up (Smith 133) and that is how he works at a garage now: he has turned his back on drugs, became an apprentice, and he is rebuilding his life from scratch. He meets Grace and feels that his "happiness has finally arrived" (Smith 118) because she proves to be a lifesaver (133). Unfortunately, his dreams fail because he happens to come across two men who end up stabbing him after a feud (Smith 304); thus, much as he is on the threshold of a brand new and free life, his promising future shatters in a moment.

Similarly, Michel is seen as a good man who is full of hope and who wants to move forward, and outwardly, he is on track to reach his goals: his credo is "you

COSMOPOLITANISM AND NEOCITIZENSHIP

are what you do” (Smith 29). For him, from the very first day he arrived in the UK, it has been very clear that he was going up and climbing the ladder. In France, his social mobility was more limited, but in England, he can move up. He appreciates his opportunity and grabs it without hesitation: “In France, you’re African, you’re Algerian. There’s no opportunity, you can’t move! Here, you can move” (Smith 29). Michel believes that the advancement in this country has less to do with skin colour and he says “[he] can trade like anyone” and “it’s pure market on there, nothing about skin” (Smith 29). Unfortunately, Leah does not want to have a child and by means of dramatic irony, the narrator informs the reader about her disposition whereas Michel does not know that his plans of having a family are soon going to collapse. In addition, Michel and Leah exemplify another disappointing feature of the cosmopolitan utopia when it turns out that their success also means an alienation from their old neighbourhood which is now seen as dangerous: “It could be said that one of Michel’s dreams has come true: they have gone up one rung, at least in the quality and elaboration of their fear” (Smith 92).

The personal failures, the unhappy stories and the ending without reassuring or hopeful future possibilities in *NW* compel the reader to face the unpleasant side of contemporary urban reality. The naked truth shown without hypocrisy to the reader destroys the idyllic image of cosmopolitanism; the characters in the novel do not embody the sunny side of the life of cosmopolitan citizens and even if they have altruistic ideals about hospitality and equality, these fail in the novel. In a conversation, Frank, Leah’s father, calls some men they know “Eurotrash brothers” (Smith 226) and in return, Leah calls Frank “Eurotrash” (Smith 226). This passionate outcry reflects a harsh neoliberal perspective that implies a critique of the basic tenets of cosmopolitanism, which are based on the belief that despite profound cultural and social differences, mankind constitutes one community. The reader is forced to be a voyeur as the most intimate, private secrets are disclosed and there is nowhere to run away from them. The characters are frustrated, their dreams fail, and none of them exemplifies an attractive model, thus *NW* can be seen as the critique of cosmopolitan utopia, which, as we will see, is somewhat in contrast to *Open City*.

JULIUS, A COSMOPOLITAN OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

In Teju Cole’s novel, Julius is able to establish a new life on a different continent in New York and to become a successful city dweller, a self-entrepreneurial citizen

with a cosmopolitan mindset who decides freely about his affiliations and solidarity. We might claim that Julius's mind is the open city. The title of this novel can be interpreted in three ways; first, it refers to Brussels during the Second World War when it was declared an open city and thereby exempt from bombardment to avoid its destruction (Cole 97). Second, New York can be called an open city as well because the influx into and the outflow from the city never stop; it is an ever-growing and always-changing dwelling place. Lastly, Julius's life is like an open city because he lives in an open world without borders, as if he were a city with open gates allowing entrance and exit. Correspondingly, Spenser asks what cosmopolitanism is and in his interpretation, Julius is the answer since his sensitive character and open disposition make him a conscious world citizen (4). He has buried his secret imperceptibly, and on the perceptible surface, the doors are open, anybody can walk in and walk out of his world. The novel depicts the steps Julius takes on the way to his self-actualisation: "You have to set yourself a challenge, and you must find a way to meet it exactly, whether it is a parachute or a dive from a cliff, or sitting perfectly still for an hour, and you must accomplish it in a beautiful way, of course" (Cole 197). He never complains but flexibly accommodates himself to his environment which helps him survive both in the Nigerian military school and in New York when he loses his girlfriend or friends.

Julius is a world citizen, and his personal relationships span over races, ages, and continents, and he interprets the terms "we" and "them" in a more conscious and less intuitive way. His free choice about solidarity and affiliation is another interesting issue. Julius's decisions seem to be more influenced by his personal interests and passions than his roots. He listens to European classical music and European radio channels, and he reads famous works of classical English, Greek, and European literature besides "a novel by a Moroccan writer, Tahar Ben Jelloun" (Cole 102). Once as he is watching a film at the cinema, he realises that almost the entire audience consists of "white-haired white people" (Cole 29) and he sits, in a sense, alone.

Moreover, black citizens often expect him to show solidarity on an ethnic basis, but Julius appears less enthusiastic about this point and his manner differs from the classic interpretation of cosmopolitanism in two ways. First, the other characters with African roots are not "quasi-siblings" from a privileged, elite and intellectual world; black characters other than Julius do not fight for the desired equality, and unlike Julius, they are satisfied with their positions. A black cab driver feels honestly hurt because Julius does not express his solidarity toward him (Cole 40). Julius,

on the other hand, is angry and not in the mood for people who try to lay claims on him; he pays the fare and walks home. During a walk in New York, he enters a restaurant, sits at the bar and orders a drink from a waitress. A man sits next to him and initiates a conversation because he saw Julius in a museum a week ago. He tries to be friendly but he starts to wear on Julius and Julius wishes he would go away. He compares this Caribbean man to the cab driver who was making a similar claim: “hey, I’m African just like you” (Cole 53). In other words, blackness is not enough to arouse his solidarity. In the post office, he meets an office clerk who calls him “brother Julius” (Cole 187), and he appears too friendly for Julius’s taste. He invites Julius to listen to some poetry together but Julius finds him intrusive and when he leaves the building, he makes “a mental note to avoid that particular post office in the future” (Cole 188). Thus, neither being a poetry lover nor being a black migrant in America awaken his sense of camaraderie.

The second way his case is different from classic cosmopolitanism is that the classical Greek and Roman interpretation of cosmopolitanism advocates for a brotherly disposition. However, three black “brothers,” younger than fifteen, rob him and Julius does not try to fight back. Even though the law guarantees the right of citizens to safety, in the crucial moment, surprisingly, Julius withdraws in defeat. The young black men in their teens pass him in daylight and, suddenly, Julius feels heavy “blows on his shoulders” and back and he “falls to the ground” (Cole 212). He shouts but soon loses the will to speak and accepts the blows in silence; his blood is not boiled. Their common African ancestry proves insufficient to prevent an attack as the values of the thugs and Julius’s behavioural norms are at an unbridgeable distance. This episode can be read as an instance where cosmopolitanism fails in the novel: Julius, a black man is attacked, robbed, and injured by other black men and he opts not to exercise his civil rights, which would be going to the police. Instead, he remains silent.

Significantly, Julius is a psychiatrist and he is “at the beginning of the final year of [his] psychiatry fellowship” (Cole 3), which becomes significant at the end of the story. The narrative reveals Moji’s account who accuses him of having raped her in Nigeria when they were teenagers. It is astonishing that he intentionally chooses this occupation and studies for several years in America for his degree with such a burden in his past. His story is reminiscent of Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita* in which Humbert Humbert recalls his memory in the prison and says that “[a]t first, I planned to take a degree in psychiatry; but ... I switched to English

literature” (Nabokov 17). Moji claims that “in late 1989 when she was fifteen” and Julius was “a year younger, at a party her brother had hosted” (Cole 244), Julius “forced himself on her” and later Julius “acted like he knew nothing about it, and even forgotten” (Cole 244). Moji’s story exemplifies that the victim remembers and the perpetrator forgets. Although he was only fourteen, drunk, and had an immature psyche, it is astounding that he builds a career in his new home that is in connection with mental health: he is trying to help other people, but he is unable to face his own past deeds.

Julius lives on an abstract level of cosmopolitanism, and the unprocessed repression of his violence against Moji in Nigeria remains an irremovable obstacle in the novel that prevents him from putting principles into practice. This drives him to endless wanderings, which is the reason why Vermeulen calls Julius a *fugueur*, a mad traveller who “emerged in urban areas in France at the end of the nineteenth century” (3). They “unaccountably walked away from their lives and, when found, were unable to remember what had happened on these trips” (Vermeulen 3). Dóra Mózes also argues for the indispensable need to address the logical connection between the rape and his impaired ability to connect emotionally to the people who are the closest to him. She suggests that Julius uses a “blind spot” to cover his sin which is why he cannot remember the act of rape (Mózes 17). “Blind spot” is an ophthalmic expression in connection with the function of the eyes, and this can be responsible for when “the vision goes dead” (Cole 239).

The analysis of *Open City* shows a successful cosmopolitan image of Julius on the surface, he is a highly mobile, well-educated, and elite member of American society with an open mindset without prejudice. He performs productive self-realisation, and he can flexibly adapt to new environments because this type of flexibility, which characterises neocitizenship, is rather superficial and does not require deep changes. However, he fails to feel brotherly solidarity with fellow black citizens on the grounds of shared ethnicity, the same way he cannot connect to other migrant characters, such as the cleaning lady in Brussels. He lives alone, unable to connect emotionally in the long run, presumably because he lives in denial. Julius is accused of committing a sexual crime and he chooses an occupation that may help cure and reconstruct his shattered soul. He embodies cosmopolitan virtues, such as freedom in mobility, place of living, profession and making friends, but he is never able to face his past mistake that has left a shameful mark on his life. In the end, Moji says that she does not think Julius has changed at all and warns him that “[t]hings

COSMOPOLITANISM AND NEOCITIZENSHIP

don't go just because [he] chooses to forget them (Cole 245). She then asks: "But will you say something now?" (Cole 245). Instead of trying to restore his relationship with Moji, Julius immediately jumps to the abstract level, which Vermeulen calls a startlingly inadequate response to Moji's trauma (53): "Camus tells a double story concerning Nietzsche and Gaius Mucius Cordus Scaevola, a Roman hero from the sixth century BCE" (Cole 246). This is the same leap from reality to theory that we could see in the church in Brussels when he aestheticises the cleaning lady as a Vermeerean figure instead of speaking to her. Therefore, there remains a discrepancy between his abstract cosmopolitan ideals and everyday practices.

CONCLUSION

Cosmopolitanism needs to be redefined in the twenty-first century for a number of reasons. Firstly, the high mobility of people fostered by neoliberalism invalidate accountability. Second, while the classical definition of cosmopolitanism posits that all human beings deserve fair treatment just like quasi-siblings, recently, the meaning has broadened with an obligation to respect universal and local values. A few characters such as Farouq and Khalil in *Open City* and Felix's father and Michel in *NW* can be called vernacular cosmopolitans in the Bhabhaian sense since they intend to be equal without denying their ethnicities. The reference to Edward Said in *Open City* draws attention to the fact that a one-sided vision may lead to distorted conclusions.

Furthermore, cosmopolitanism appears as an idealistic disposition that advocates humanism whereas neoliberalism supports a profit-oriented approach. The difference between practices and principles can be seen in Julius's life who fails to live up to cosmopolitan ideals because he is in permanent denial and represses his sense of responsibility. His cosmopolitanism is manifested in an open mindset towards strangers, emotional coldness in close relationships, and an escape from the past into elitism and aestheticisation. Leah's shattered humanist ideal, and Frank's angry exclamation of "Eurotrash" also exemplify the unattainable ideals of the cosmopolitan utopia. Simultaneously, neocitizenship appears as a flexible self-actualisation exemplified by Natalie's life who is just as successful on the surface as Julius. Under the surface, however, she hides frustration which makes her seek compensation, showing that it is inevitable to face responsibility in order to live a mentally and emotionally healthy life. Both characters who believe in cosmopolitan ethics

and are more down-to-earth neocitizens chase a mirage and may seem successful on the surface, but they have yet to take responsibility and face their past to be truly successful on a deeper level.

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COSMOPOLITANISM AND NEOCITIZENSHIP

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