Introduction

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On Saturday nights, my mother loves watching the re-run of the British television series *Maigret*, aired by the Italian channel Lasette. It is a regular occurrence and, in the family, we have learned not to call or bother her on Saturday nights. If she misses one small portion of the episode, or an exchange between the characters, she cannot solve the mystery on her own or understand the chain of events in the final reconstruction. This small and private reference to the never-waning appeal of the crime stories solved by Simenon's detective, a detective that attaches whiteness, heterosexuality and masculinity to the figure of the 'man of law', allows me a point of entry into the larger topic under discussion in this issue of *Textus*.

Crime fiction is currently one of the most globalised and biggest-selling forms of popular expression and it offers a privileged perspective on problematic current issues such as migration, social conflict and identity. The great appeal of the genre, however, poses some questions. What brings together the *Maigret* episodes that my mother watches and the crime stories by Walter Mosley, in which blackness matters, or the forensic reconstruction of truth in postcolonial Sri Lanka in Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* that I read? If the genre is defined by the dialogue between a crime and its resolution and punishment, then what needs to be explored is how the definition of crime, of the criminal, and of the detective has evolved from the publication of the first crime fiction books in colonial times to the current multimediality of the genre in our postcolonial and globalised world.

Recent scholarship has studied the indissoluble link between the language of the law in colonial countries and the crime fiction set in those contexts. In *Crime and Empire* (2003), for example,

U.P. Mukherjee explores the centrality of the language of law and order, policing, crime and punishment in establishing British authority in India. And, in her book *Detecting the Nation* (2004), Caroline Reitz emphasises the bond between crime fiction and the Imperial enterprise. Stories of chaos and restored order were central in colonial literatures and in the beginnings of the genre of crime fiction: they gave voice to a culture of anxiety that found its hub in the colonial subject as the enemy and the criminal, guilty for her racial, ethnic, and cultural otherness. But what happens when the criminal is not the colonized 'Other', but the regime itself? In whose hands lies the resolution of neocolonial crimes? And how has the genre changed in order to incorporate the questioning of knowledge construction and acquisition that is the defining mark of postcolonial texts?

A new area of study on crime fiction writers as *also* postcolonial has emerged in the last decade (Gosselin 1999, Christian 2001, Reddy 2003, Fischer-Hornung and Mueller 2003, Matzke and Mühleisen 2006, Pearson and Singer 2009), and this issue of *Textus* finds its place in the middle ground between a postcolonial critical exploration of notions of justice, legality, order, and a study of the portrayals of crime and the criminal, the social and cultural 'Other' in crime fiction. On the one hand, the postcolonial turn in crime fiction has altered the identikit of the detective from Eurocentric, white, and male to sexed and non-Western, pluralising not only the vantage point through which the story is told, but also challenging the established epistemology and putting truth and justice at the very centre of the investigation.

In *Traces, Codes, and Clues: Reading Race in Crime Fiction*, Maureen Reddy writes about the hard-boiled tradition:

> The voice is everything. To change the voice, to let the Other speak, is to transform the genre by replacing the traditional central consciousness with another that does not share the ideology or the racial (or sexual) identity around which the genre formed. (2003: 9)

Considering crime fiction through other voices and, also, other languages provides the thread keeping together the diverse essays gathered in this issue, and opens the debate about crime fiction to an exploration of the ways in which contemporary writers are dealing

with one of the blind spots of the genre: its inherent racism. Race and ethnicity appear as central elements to be decoded in much contemporary crime fiction, and the simplistic reduction implicit in stereotyping and profiling is not applicable because, in many cases, the narrating voice is ethnic. Walter Mosley's popular protagonist, Easy Rawlings, is a good example of how the genre, traditionally attached to a white/male/heterosexual consciousness, has shifted to match the social and cultural changes "that made it possible for readers to inhabit a black consciousness in crime fiction" (Reddy 2003: 43).

A corpus of texts is establishing itself in crime fiction, a corpus that has interiorised the inner mobility and the dark underbelly of society represented in hard-boiled fiction, and is declining the central identity of the genre as, respectively, immigrant, postcolonial, multilingual, African American, Asian, Chicano, ethnic minority. The visibility of this tradition is hindered by the lack of a unified centre of identity, but it is all the same important to note that on this new transnational scene authors as diverse as Walter Mosley, Mike Phillips, Barbara Neele, Marcos M. Villatoro, and Michael Ondaatje, Amitav Gosh, Vikram Chandra have reached a huge readership that postcolonial literature alone has not yet had outside of academia.

Crime stories start in chaos and expect order to be restored. The visions offered by several of the texts discussed in this issue paint the image of a world of chaos rather than a world of law and order. This is the realm of experience in which postcolonial nations – nations that have been made out of successive moments of violence and chaos – are particularly well versed. It is no surprise, then, that an increasing number of (literary) postcolonial writers use or adapt crime and detective fiction conventions to tell their stories of postcolonial violence and the often impossible justice of a postcolonial society. A generalised sense of violence, individual and collective, is often found in postcolonial literary texts that tackle with the complexities of the political situations or of the civil wars that have ravaged many postcolonial nations in recent years. When this happens in novels that make use of crime fiction formulae, it complicates, not only the reading practice, but also the solution of the mystery. How do you assess criminal guilt in situations of ethnic divisions, or when the regime is not representative of the ethnic multiplicity of the nation?

Ondaatjie's literary career is a good example to have a sense of the fascination of postcolonial authors with the liminal figure of the outlaw and with unsolvable crimes. Starting with one of his earliest works, *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (1970), dedicated to the quasi mythical hero of the outlaw cowboy and his on-going struggle with Sheriff Pat Garrett, and continuing with the mysterious European spy in northern Africa during the Second World War in *The English Patient* (1992), a nationless spy whose identity remains undisclosed until the end, to, finally, *Anil's Ghost* as the novel most explicitly in line with the crime fiction formulae, as the Sri-Lankan-American, UN protected, protagonist engages in the forensic search for the true identity of a corpse in her home Sri Lanka, ravaged by civil war and ethnic divisions, we see the author exploring the meanings of truth, justice and the law. As the trajectory of Ondaatje's career outlines, the potential that crime fiction has to offer to postcolonial authors is remarkable, especially for depicting worlds caught in what with Soyinka we may call "seasons of anomie" (Soyinka 1972). The questioning of society, its rules and conventions that we find in crime fiction becomes crucial when we add 'global' or 'postcolonial' to the term, and one of the central areas to be probed is, inevitably, that of the state and its institutions.

The nation-state, as a colonial legacy, provides the all but perfect framework in which the stories are set, the corruption of its officers is often denounced, the collective agency of its population severely limited either by the laws themselves or by the disinterest of the ruling classes towards the wellbeing of the many. As a consequence, in postcolonial and global crime fiction, we read of the specific problems of national belonging for immigrant subjects, of the social 'problem' posed by conflicting ethnic identities in postcolonial nations, and the categories of justice and criminality appear in all their limits and, at times, in their inadequacy to provide a solution to urgent social needs. The detective in these stories knows the hardships of a postcolonial and transnational subject from within: Sam Dean, the protagonist of UK-based Mike Phillips's novels, for example, is an immigrant from Guyana who lives in England. He has a son, Roy, with a white English woman. Roy is divided by his double affiliation within the family and by the different loyalties – English and black – that each parent is trying to force on him. At the same time, it is not that Roy can choose what to be or what to

become in the world, as he is seen as unmistakably black by the surrounding white English society.

Roy Dean's biracialism is one of the many unsolvable mysteries brought to the surface by contemporary postcolonial and global crime fiction. And it is easy to see how the genre is being manipulated to give its readers an image of the world in all its complexity, not a believable "pattern of fantasy" (Cawelti 1976: 34), as Cawelti argued, rather as a "chaos-world," as Glissant put it. The chaos-world that Glissant refers to is not so much "an apocalyptic world, but rather a world that one can no longer predict or plan in advance" (Glissant interviewed by Chanda 2000). This inability to predict or read the way the world goes captures well, I believe, the sense of impotence or lack of foreseeability that we feel *vis à vis* so many of the current events happening in the world. A crime fiction geared towards coming to terms with and, possibly, making sense of all this is not only welcome, but necessary, as the articles in this issue of *Textus*, taken as a whole, contend.

In the opening essay, Caroline Reitz reads the recent production of global feminist crime fiction against the grain of the development of the genre within the Anglo-American tradition, a tradition that is characterised by an association between white heterosexual masculinity and detective work. Exploding the Anglo-American horizon in which to consider the work of feminist crime fiction writers, Reitz also explodes the disciplinary field(s) in which detective fiction is generally studied by using as a cardinal framework in her reading the notion of an "ethics of care" developed by global feminisms. With an insightful reading of the way in which the American tradition of hard-boiled fiction came into being, and the social purpose as a form of caring it aimed to serve, Reitz shows the shared ground between detectives as diverse as Raymond Chandler's ultra-popular Philip Marlowe, and the more recent and globally popular Mma Ramotswe of the "No. 1 Ladies' Detective" series by Alexander McCall Smith, and Lisbeth Salander, the girl with the dragon tattoo of the Millennium trilogy by Stieg Larsson.

Now that crime fiction is raising in important and unavoidable ways the questions of social solidarity, justice, and human rights for 'global' (immigrant, refugee, diasporic) subjects, the ethical import of the genre needs to be discussed. Caroline Reitz argues

that "care ethics help recover an idea of justice that incorporates an understanding of difference (gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion) rather than ignores it", since "[l]ooking at all sides of a situation is consistent with the feminist care ethic and with detective work" (Reitz in this issue). In the stories about women detectives that Reitz analyses, it is their global perspectives that require that a feminist commitment to justice "creates the conditions for a broader pursuit of social justice, or at least an understanding of the individual self as inextricably linked to a social self" (Reitz in this issue).

A more specifically postcolonial approach to the representation of the "Other" in contemporary crime fiction and a study of the ways in which a postcolonial revision of the genre may be altering its original formulae is found in the next three essays, respectively by Federica Zullo, Roberta Cimarosti and Ellen Carter. The starting point of this postcolonial revision is India, the "jewel in the crown" during the Golden Age of British Imperialism, as well as the exotic setting of some famous stories with Miss Marple, as in *Murder in Mesopotamia* or *Death on the Nile*.

Federica Zullo's essay is dedicated to the figure of the "thug" between colonial India and postcolonial England. Focusing her reading on Tabish Khair's novel *The Thing about Thugs* (2010), set between London and the Indian region of Bihar, and Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868), Zullo traces the complex intertextual web of representations of the colonial as a criminal and the fear of invasion from the "Oriental Other" that pervaded Victorian literature.

Intertextuality is an important and common operation in postcolonial literatures. Following the model established by Pablo Mukerjee in *Crime and Empire* (2003), Zullo's essay offers a historically detailed analysis of the development in the figure of the "thug" in Victorian literature. Reading the fear of the Indian (or generically colonial) invader against the background of the Indian Mutiny of 1857 and of the Jamaican Revolts of the 1860s that we find in the "revenge narratives" (after the Mutiny), where all criminals in England are descendants of Thugs, and in the "literature of invasion" developed after the 1870s, we can also read the inconsistency of the process of colonial knowledge, its blind spots, and the colonizer's will to conform the Other to his/her own needs.

The other obvious place to explore the colonial legacy of crime fiction is in the Antipodes as the area in which the British

established their penal colonies. The two essays dedicated to the South Pacific region are also, literally, at the antipodes in terms of scholarly approach to the genre: Roberta Cimarosti contends that Les Murray's five-book novel in verse *Fredy Neptune* may be considered a masterpiece of crime fiction for undermining the norms that traditionally codify that genre, while Ellen Carter explodes the Anglophone framework which dominates this issue and explores through the lens of French-language crime fiction set in the South Pacific issues of postcolonialism and otherness.

Les Murray's verse novel *Fredy Neptune* is the object of Roberta Cimarosti's article. As a literary work, it defines itself in opposition to the cultural and aesthetic assumptions in which crime fiction developed. In this sense, it is an antipodean appropriation of the genre. As Cimarosti explains, "[t]he story's content as well as the circumstances in which it was written qualify *Fredy Neptune* as anti-crime fiction for three main reasons: *first*, it originates in introspection and it is a poetic account of the way Murray's came to terms with his chronic depression; *second*, it is the story of a body rather than of a mastermind; *third*, it is set in a worldwide scenario where the legal states of police are the principle murderer" (Cimarosti in this issue).

Fredy's original crime in fact is his witnessing of the burning of a group of Armenian women in Turkey in 1915. This is the event that pushes him overboard psychologically, begins his expiation journey across countries and that, ultimately, gives structure to the entire work as a memoir. *Fredy Neptune* is written in the confessional mode, it is a memoir gathering Fredy's progressive retellings and attempts at expiation across the years and the continents. With a complex web of intertextual references, ranging from Shakespeare to Coleridge's *Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner* to Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* and Rainer Maria Rilke's poetry, Les Murray realises a combination of mass-culture and modernist forms to create his own version of crime fiction as a tool to tell of a collective and shared crime.

Another outsider's look at crime fiction in the Antipodes is the one offered by Ellen Carter's essay focusing on the Francophone tradition of the South Pacific area. In exploring how crime fiction's geo-political context addresses the social critique traditionally attached to the genre, Carter's essay offers an important case study

to open up to comparison the intellectual tradition, exclusively Anglophone, through which crime fiction is explored in this issue.

Ellen Carter bases her study on Daniel Margueron's overview of French crime and spy novels set in French Polynesia (1998) and extends it across the South Pacific. In her own analysis, Carter reveals a significant gap between South Pacific cultural and geopolitical reality and its imagined crime fictional depictions by South Pacific crime fiction authors, contending that 'local' places and cultures are manipulated to reveal more about metropolitan French preoccupations rather than South Pacific geo-political realities. What differentiates what Carter calls "SPFCF's reality gap" (Carter in this issue) is that it seems to involve the novels' setting and characterisation more than their plot. Early social critique in SPFCF is a unidirectional denunciation by metropolitan French outsiders of the Pacific way of life. While some recent South Pacific insider voices have reversed this to denounce the Western lifestyle being imposed on them, this switch is by no means complete, perhaps, Carter suggests, because much of the region remains colonized to this day.

A special space in this issue has been devoted to essays examining the racial anxieties surrounding the Far East and its perceived absolute otherness. From the imperial representations of the Indian or Oriental 'thugs' to the Yellow Peril stories of the American hard-boiled tradition, Chinese and, more generally, Asian characters or settings have been used all but neutrally, either to convey anxieties of racial miscegenation, or to express the fear, as Maureen Reddy claims, "that especially Asians, constitute not only a frightening horde ready to take over the entire country, given the opportunity to do so, but a group whose intelligence is greater than that of whites" (Reddy 2003: 23). This is perhaps the most fertile, yet incomplete, area of scholarship for a full exploration of the question of the representation of the Other in crime fiction in the Western and Anglophone tradition. The three essays in this section, while focusing, respectively, on a novel, a film and two television series of the new millennium, all go back and revisit the imperial colonial tradition in the representation of the Asian Other as inscrutable, unreliable, and ultimately threatening.

Alessia Ursella investigates the literary genealogy of Christopher Banks, the detective protagonist of Kazuo Ishiguro's successful

novel *When We Were Orphans* (2000). The Asian setting of part of the novel, in the International Settlement in Shanghai, brings the ethnicity of the detective in full light: Christopher Banks is an ethnic other, has been raised and trained as an Englishman, but in the end he has to go back to Shanghai, where he was born, to solve the mystery surrounding the disappearance of his father. Christopher Banks does not find his father, discovers a harsh truth about his parents, and, most importantly, discovers that his detective skills are of no use in Shanghai. Alessia Ursella concludes that it is the setting of the story in Shanghai that makes *When We Were Orphans* a novel which turns the classical conventions of the genre upside-down.

In the second essay in this group, Anna Pasolini explores David Cronenberg's 2007 film *Eastern Promises* through a reading that puts the female body at the centre of the attention. Set in the late 2000s in London, the film presents the shady dealings of a Russian criminal gang, and displays the ways in which the organisation penetrates into and spreads through the city while being in turn infiltrated by Scotland Yard. Issues of ethnic rivalries and fears of miscegenation with other ethnic groups are central in the story as we follow an English midwife's attempt to find the father of a little girl she helped a Russian prostitute deliver right before dying. The mystery around the identity of the baby's natural father leads Anna, the midwife, who is translating the baby's dead mother's diary from Russian into English, to solve the mystery around the dead Russian woman.

Anna Pasolini argues that the body occupies a privileged position within the film. It is a requirement of the film *noir* genre, in which we are used to seeing the victims' bodies bleeding, torn apart, exposed. Yet, it is also an intentionally individualised and sexed body, whose surface is marked in order to be identified and identifiable, a body, in the end, that has a story to tell. Pasolini scrutinises a specific function of the female body in *Eastern Promises*: the body of the mother in its conflation with the body of the nation. She claims that the film establishes explicit parallels between maternity and nationality through their physical as well as symbolical disruption. More specifically, Pasolini explores the representation of the – public – invasion of the British nation by the extraneous and proliferating body of a Russian criminal organisation by means of – private – stories of traumatic and disrupted maternal experiences.

This section on the Asian presence in contemporary global crime fiction could not but end with a piece dedicated to the Victorian detective *par excellence*, Sherlock Holmes. In her essay, Britney Broyles focuses on two different adaptations of the notorious detective on television, the PBS and BBC joint venture – *Sherlock* (2010-2014) — and CBS's *Elementary* (2012-2014). While there have been extensive explorations of the ways in which class and race hierarchy are naturalised in Arthur Conan Doyle's stories, as well as detailed studies of the interactions between Britain and India in what Broyles calls "the Sherlock Holmes's canon", not much has been written on the way in which the Chinese are referenced in Doyle's works. As Broyles points out, the recent adaptations which are airing on television today, however, are particularly keen on engaging with Chinese representations and, in the light of the current global economic circumstances, deserve to be analysed critically.

Through a reconstruction of the historical context of the Opium Wars to reveal both the hypocrisy in the British Empire's civilising mission as well as how the stereotype of the Chinese came to be linked with criminality through their association with opium dens and the rise of Chinatowns, Broyles offers an examination of the functioning of racial and ethnic stereotyping in these texts. Through her analysis, Britney Broyles claims that *Sherlock* maintains and reiterates imperialistic propensities that were present in Doyle's original text through its reliance on racial essentialism. In contrast, *Elementary*'s representations of Chinese characters, by showing several positionalities arranged along a spectrum in relationship to their Chinese inheritance, represents a break from this chain of signification. In large part this operation is successful thanks to the recasting of Watson, as Sherlock's other, as a Chinese woman staged by Chinese-American actress Lucy Liu.

A comprehensive view on the main topics covered in the entire issue is offered by Nicoletta Vallorani in the concluding piece. Vallorani reflects on the challenges of a critical approach – the one we have tried to showcase in this issue – that has to make room for notions of difference, otherness and interstitial spaces to interpret a genre that is still expected to follow established formulae. As one of Italy's main scholars, as well as writers, of crime fiction, Nicoletta Vallorani is ideally positioned to give a European-based assessment on the recent trends in the genre.

Vallorani detects an important tension between global and local prerogatives in contemporary crime fiction more than in other popular genres, and investigates how the borders of this 'new' crime fiction should be traced. Looking at what happens, especially in Europe, when crime fiction and postcolonial narratives combine, Vallorani ties her analysis to the broader relevance that national security issues have been acquiring within the European Union in the last twenty years. The fact that the European borders have been made more "permeable" has not produced any practical development of a shared European identity. Instead the strong drive towards the elimination of national borders has determined a reaction of fear and the impression that many of the traditional paradigms according to which our personal and collective identities have been built is put at risk. This potent anxiety, coupled with the overwhelming impression of being invaded by waves of foreigners from the South and the East of the world, has originated an intense drive towards narratives celebrating a proud, often nostalgic, localism that has found its place in a number of crime series that are intentionally, and politically, "local".

Acknowledgments

The editors would like to thank Anna Pasolini for her precious help in the final stages of work for this issue.

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