

Making and Unmaking ‘African Foreignness’: African Settings, African Migrants and the Migrant Detective in Contemporary South African Crime Fiction

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*This article aims to examine the portrayal of African migrants and South Africa’s relationship to the African continent in post-apartheid crime fiction. Exotic settings and the figure of the stranger have featured in the crime genre since its emergence in the 19th century. Reading Mike Nicol’s *The Ibis Tapestry* (1998), his trilogy *Payback* (2008), *Killer Country* (2010) and *Black Heart* (2011), and H.J. Golakai’s novel *The Lazarus Effect* (2011), this article suggests that the themes of migration and ‘xenophobia’ have become central to reconfigured socio-political commitment in contemporary South African crime fiction. The article argues that the re-writing of generic formulae and boundaries in *The Ibis Tapestry* and *The Lazarus Effect* becomes a powerful vehicle for an enquiry into constructions of ‘foreignness’ and a means to allot a space to African migrants in the ‘new’ South African imaginary. The simultaneous unmaking and remaking of ‘African foreignness’ that characterizes the *Revenge* trilogy draws attention to the paradoxical temporality of transitional literatures and cultural formations, in which former discourses of ‘the foreign’ remain imprinted.*

Introduction: Crime Fiction and ‘The Foreign’

Since the emergence of the detective genre in the era of British imperialism,¹ ‘foreign’ settings and characters have become central elements of crime fiction. The allure of the ‘foreign’ and the ‘exotic’, their association with mystery and the unknown, are mirrored in the quest format that structures most detective fiction and its insistence on the legibility of the world. As Gary Day notes, ‘generally speaking, the detective story promotes the idea that things can be known – a crime is committed and the detective, through deduction or action or both, finds out who is responsible’.² The most thorough survey of ‘the foreign’ in crime fiction is Jean Anderson *et al.*’s study *The Foreign in International Crime Fiction*. Tracing the use of the trope, the editors write:

From the ‘exotic’ Parisian setting of the first crime story ever written, Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Murders on the Rue Morgue* (1841), to the shadowy ‘foreign devils’ hiding in Arthur Conan Doyle’s Victorian landscape and the complicated murders carried out in Agatha Christie’s colonial Middle East, the Other and its many declinations has fascinated readers all over the world. Even today, in an increasingly globalized world, [...] a large number of crime novels and thrillers feature international and exotic elements.³

1 See C. Reitz, *Detecting the Nation: Fictions of Detection and the Imperial Venture* (Columbus, Ohio State University Press, 2004).

2 G. Day, ‘Investigating the Investigator: Hammett’s Continental Op’, in B. Docherty (ed.), *American Crime Fiction: Studies in the Genre* (London, Macmillan, 1988), p. 40.

3 J. Anderson, C. Miranda and B. Pezzotti, ‘The Foreign in International Crime Fiction: Transcultural Representations’, in J. Anderson (ed.), *The Foreign in International Crime Fiction: Transcultural Representations* (London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), p. 1.

Marina Cacioppo observes that the proliferation of 'strangers' and 'foreigners' in the crime genre generally reflects the social anxieties of its readership.⁴ Early British detective fiction included foreign criminals threatening middle-class lives, while early American detective fiction 'went even further, echoing unsympathetic and often xenophobic representations of foreigners in the popular press'.⁵ In *Detective Fiction in a Postcolonial World*, Nels Pearson and Marc Singer argue that detective fiction and the spy story were likely to 'align mystery conventions with anxieties over contamination, irrationality, and the threat posed to imperial modernity by unassimilated racial and cultural difference'.⁶ The impossible task of early detectives was thus the policing of foreign bodies and borders with the attempt to regulate and control their inherent instability.

With the emergence of revisionist approaches to crime fiction, beginning with feminist, African American, gay and lesbian rewritings of the genre, and proceeding to include postmodern and postcolonial perspectives, crime fiction writers have increasingly challenged and redefined traditional genre conventions and exotic stereotypes. Most importantly, the appearance of postcolonial detectives, 'themselves sites of hybridity',⁷ as Ed Christian posits, has transformed the genre's approach to otherness and the process of detection itself.⁸

Since 'an integral function of crime fiction is the negotiation of social anxiety',⁹ crime writers all over the world have in recent years explored increasing levels of cross-border migration caused by economic deprivation or political instability.¹⁰ Crime writers from Mediterranean countries, in particular, have addressed the plight of thousands of individuals trying to cross the sea in makeshift boats. While migration to the west has garnered the most media attention, non-western countries remain the main receivers of migrants and refugees. Post-apartheid South Africa, for instance, has become an alternative destination for many Africans from other parts of the continent and migrants from the global south,¹¹ and many crime writers have equally begun to engage with these realities in their works.

4 M. Cacioppo, 'Insider Knowledge Versus Outsider Perspective in Early Italian American and African American Detective Stories', in D. Fischer-Hornung and M. Mueller (eds), *Sleuthing Ethnicity: The Detective in Multiethnic Crime Fiction* (Madison, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003), p. 23.

5 *Ibid.*

6 N. Pearson and M. Singer, 'Open Cases: Detection, (Post)Modernity, and the State', in M. Singer and N. Pearson (eds), *Detective Fiction in a Postcolonial and Transnational World* (Burlington, Ashgate, 2009), p. 4.

7 E. Christian, 'Ethnic Postcolonial Crime and Detection (Anglophone)', in C.J. Rzepka and L. Horsley (eds), *A Companion to Crime Fiction* (Oxford, Blackwell, 2010), p. 285. See also E. Christian, *The Post-Colonial Detective* (New York, Palgrave, 2000); J.H. Kim, *Race and Religion in the Postcolonial British Detective Story: Ten Essays* (Jefferson, McFarland, 2005).

8 These revisions of the genre do not mean that contemporary crime fiction avoids stereotypical portrayals of minority groups. In fact, crime fiction set in non-western countries has, over the past decades, grown in popularity in Europe precisely because of its 'exotic' appeal, 'co-opt[ing] and commodif[y]ing foreignness' – R. Saunders, 'Uncanny Presence: The Foreigner at the Gate of Globalization', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 21, 1–2 (2001), p. 89.

9 C. Warnes, 'Writing Crime in the New South Africa: Negotiating Threat in the Novels of Deon Meyer and Margie Orford', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 38, 4 (2012), p. 984.

10 Henning Mankell's novels, for instance, 'contain a strong focus on the uncertainties caused by increased immigration and globalization' – K. Bergman, 'The Well-Adjusted Cops of the New Millennium: Neo-Romantic Tendencies in the Swedish Police Procedural', in P. Arvas and A. Nestingen (eds), *Scandinavian Crime Fiction* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2011), p. 44. Italian crime fiction, such as Andrea Camilleri's novels, addresses the plight of North African migrants in Italian refugee camps – B. Pezzotti, *Politics and Society in Italian Crime Fiction: An Historical Overview* (Jefferson, McFarland, 2014), p. 149. For a discussion of the Spanish context, see S. Lino, 'Metaphysical Detection in Marta Sanz's *Black, Black, Black*', in D. Faszler-McMahon and V.L. Ketz (eds), *African Immigrants in Contemporary Spanish Texts: Crossing the Strait* (Surrey, Ashgate, 2015), p. 37.

11 These countries include Pakistan, Bangladesh and China – A. Segatti, 'Migration to South Africa: Regional Challenges versus National Instruments and Interests', in A. Segatti and L.B. Landau (eds), *Contemporary Migration to South Africa: A Regional Development Issue* (Washington, World Bank, 2011), p. 9.

Crime fiction in South Africa has witnessed an ‘explosion’¹² since the end of apartheid, and has established itself as an increasingly diversified genre with multiple sub-genres.¹³ While the critical engagement with post-apartheid crime fiction was initiated largely through discussion forums online, literary criticism of crime writing in South Africa has grown too, with the publication of, for instance, special issues of the journals *Current Writing* in 2013 and *Scrutiny2* in 2014. Here, recent crime novels are often read through the lens of new critical vocabularies, such as ‘entanglement’¹⁴ or ‘complicity’ – a whole array of terms signalling the implosion of binaries to characterise the post-apartheid or post-transitional literary present.¹⁵ Contrary to the common association of crime fiction with narrative closure and resolution, these accounts argue that South African authors have re-imagined the genre to explore the crossing of boundaries and identities framed in terms of difference.¹⁶ Linking these approaches to the idea of the ‘foreign’ and ‘foreigner’ in crime fiction, it seems that recent crime novels in South Africa are engaged in dismantling the opposition between a black majority population, constructed as foreigners in their own land during apartheid, and those formerly considered the only ‘rightful citizens’.¹⁷ It would appear, then, that these readings actively foreground the constructedness of the ‘foreign’, the very porosity of which both triggers and defies policing.

Most critics now agree with Leon de Kock’s controversial argument that ‘crime thrillers may have come to stand in for what used to [be] seen as “political” or engaged fiction’.¹⁸ Socio-politically relevant issues addressed in the works, according to Samantha Naidu and Elizabeth Le Roux, include ‘reconciliation and the apartheid past, gender violence, political corruption and climate change’.¹⁹ Amid and de Kock further extend this list, maintaining that “[c]rime” has also become a way to talk about race and class, xenophobia, and otherness, poverty, even service delivery, in a time when the instruments of modernity have failed the masses’.²⁰ Identifying ‘xenophobia’ as a new theme in recent crime fiction, the authors imply that the engagement with definitions of ‘foreignness’ now also goes beyond the country’s national borders.

Besides the many social and political anxieties that South African crime writers explore in their writing, migration from other parts of the continent has, therefore, emerged as a key concern, since African migrants, immigrants and refugees are frequently perceived as threats

12 Warnes, ‘Writing Crime’, p. 981.

13 See *Ibid.*, p. 982.

14 S. Nuttall, *Entanglement: Literary and Cultural Reflections on Post-Apartheid* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 2009).

15 See, for instance, de Kock’s notion of the ‘seam’, which signifies ‘the site of both convergence and difference’ – L. de Kock, ‘Judging New “South African” Fiction in the Transnational Moment’, *Current Writing*, 21, 1–2 (2009), p. 12. Other terms are ‘complicities’ – see M. Sanders, *Complicities: The Intellectual and Apartheid* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2002), and Clingman’s notion of the ‘boundary’ as ‘the place of contiguity and crossing’ in S. Clingman, ‘Writing Spaces: Fiction and Non-Fiction in South Africa’, *Safundi*, 13, 1–2 (2012), p. 52.

16 See S. Binder, ‘Disentangling the Detective in Andrew Brown’s *Coldsleep Lullaby*’, *Current Writing*, 25, 2 (2013), p. 184; C. Guldemann, ‘The Protean New South Africa in Deon Meyer’s *Heart of the Hunter*’, *Scrutiny2*, 19, 1 (2014), p. 80; R. Primorac, ‘Dialogues across Boundaries in Two Southern African Thrillers’, *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 46, 157 (2011), p. 168; M.J. Christensen, ‘Managed Risk and the Lure of Transparency in Anglophone African Detective Noir’, *Textual Practice*, 29, 2 (2015), p. 330.

17 See M. Neocosmos, *From ‘Foreign Natives’ to ‘Native Foreigners’: Explaining Xenophobia in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Citizenship and Nationalism, Identity and Politics* (Dakar, Codesria, 2010). Rebecca Saunders calls South African apartheid ‘modernity’s most drastic efforts at producing foreignness’ – see R. Saunders, ‘The Agony and the Allegory: The Concept of the Foreign, the Language of Apartheid, and the Fiction of J.M. Coetzee’, *Cultural Critique*, 47, 1 (2001), p. 217. She further notes that ‘apartheid renders the native foreign to her own land and incarnates the foreigner’s lack of identity by expurgating black history and culture from official memory’ (p. 237).

18 De Kock, ‘Cultural Difference’, p. 28. See also S. Naidu and E. le Roux, ‘South African Crime Fiction: Sleuthing the State post-1994’, *African Identities*, 12, 3–4 (2014), p. 292.

19 Naidu and le Roux, ‘South African Crime Fiction’, p. 286.

20 J. Amid and L. de Kock, ‘The Crime Novel in Post-Apartheid South Africa: A Preliminary Investigation’, *Scrutiny2*, 19, 1 (2014), p. 60.

to local livelihoods and are increasingly subjected to violent pogroms, or even murdered.²¹ The label ‘xenophobia’ (‘fear of strangers’),²² as used by de Kock, however, is not without its problematic dimension, as ‘xenophobic violence’ in post-apartheid South Africa is generally not directed at other nationalities *per se*, but predominantly at African migrants. The context dependency and relationality – that is, the ‘conceptual instability’²³ inherent in the notion of ‘the foreign’,²⁴ as Saunders aptly notes – seems to become ‘effectively obviated’²⁵ by national borders and passports, naturalising the distinction between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’, citizens and ‘foreigners’. In the post-apartheid context, yet another process of naturalisation has taken place, in which political and public discourse has constructed African migrants²⁶ as *the* foreigner, as the embodiment of absolute foreignness.²⁷ As Cuthbeth Tagwirei posits,

[t]he lesson that can be drawn from periodic violence against African migrants in South Africa since the 1990s is that ‘foreigner’ denotes an anonymous race. Although its current use in South Africa denotes ‘black’ migrants, ‘foreigners’ are not the right ‘black’: theirs is an impassable black, unlike that of the native, although the resemblances have previously proven too fatal, as the deaths of 21 South Africans during the May 2008 violence have shown.²⁸

In the light of crime fiction’s central preoccupation with anxieties about foreignness, the examination of these issues in South African crime fiction thus promises crucial insights into the complication of post-apartheid identities triggered by migration from other African countries. As Anderson *et al.* maintain, ‘foreign victims, foreign sleuths, foreign settings or foreign criminals can provide a fertile ground for tackling issues of belonging, difference and national and regional identities’.²⁹

Against this background, I suggest that the crossing of identities and boundaries that critics have observed in recent crime fiction also extends to national borders and identities and, particularly, to other parts of the African continent. The themes of South Africa’s relation with other parts of Africa, xenophobia and migration have become central to crime fiction’s engagement with post-apartheid social and political ills. Reading the post-apartheid proliferation of crime thrillers in this light, I explore how these texts, with their set of conventions – and the

21 During the attacks of May and June 2008, more than 62 people lost their lives and thousands were displaced. See S. Hassim, T. Kupe and E. Worby, ‘Introduction: Facing the Other at the Gates of Democracy’, in S. Hassim, T. Kupe and E. Worby (eds), *Go Home or Die Here: Violence, Xenophobia and the Reinvention of Difference in South Africa* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 2008), p. 25; L.B. Landau, ‘Introducing the Demons’, in L.B. Landau (ed.), *Exorcising the Demons Within: Xenophobia, Violence and Statecraft in Contemporary South Africa* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 2011), pp. 1–25; D. M. Matsinhe, *Apartheid Vertigo: The Rise in Discrimination against Africans in South Africa* (Farnham, Ashgate, 2011).

22 D.M. Mohr, ‘Embracing the Other: An Introduction’, in D.M. Mohr (ed.), *Embracing the Other: Addressing Xenophobia in the New Literatures in English* (Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2008), p. x.

23 Saunders, ‘The Agony’, p. 220.

24 Saunders notes that ‘[d]erived from the Latin term *foras* (outside), the word foreign designates a quality or an entity conceived relatively: the foreign is always relative to the inside, the domestic, the familiar, a boundary. A container without contents, it can only be defined negatively: to be foreign is *not* belonging to a group, *not* speaking a given language’, see Saunders, ‘Uncanny Presence’, p. 88 (emphasis in original).

25 *Ibid.*

26 The term ‘African migrants’ may, admittedly, also obscure the multiple backgrounds and identities of migrants. I use it here as a more ‘neutral’ alternative to terms such as ‘foreign nationals’, used frequently in South African public discourse, which mainly foregrounds the foreignness of African migrants.

27 Emphasising the problematic role played by the media, Francis Nyamnjoh writes that ‘[i]n view of such sensational and uncritical reporting, hostile attitudes towards black Makwerekwere could be described as partly driven not by experience but by mass-mediated stereotypes and myths of the dangerous, depleting and encroaching “Other” from the “Heart of Darkness” north of South Africa’ – F. Nyamnjoh, ‘Media and Belonging in Africa: Reflections on Exclusionary Articulation of Racial and Ethnic Identities in Cameroon and South Africa’, in W. Mano (ed.), *Racism, Ethnicity and the Media in Africa: Mediating Conflict in the Twenty-First Century* (London, I.B. Tauris, 2015), p. 45.

28 C. Tagwirei, ‘State Narratives of “Foreignness” and “Criminality” in South Africa’, *Communicatio*, 42, 2 (2016), p. 197.

29 Anderson *et al.*, ‘The Foreign’, p. 1.

breach of these conventions – envisage the power-laden discourse of South Africa’s relationship to other parts of Africa and African migrants who have chosen to come to South Africa for multiple reasons. Given that the world of crime fiction is at times inhabited by character types, can we assume the presence of similarly typified African settings and African migrant characters in these works? It seems crucial here to read crime novels outside the resistance–domination paradigm, and ask how popular fiction with its conventional teleological narrative drive towards moral closure none the less engages with the ambiguities and contradictions of postcolonial, post-apartheid power formations.

I examine five texts in this article: Mike Nicol’s metaphysical detective novel *The Ibis Tapestry* (1998), his thriller trilogy *Payback* (2008), *Killer Country* (2010) and *Black Heart* (2011), and H.J. Golakai’s novel *The Lazarus Effect* (2011). *The Ibis Tapestry* is, in large part, set in an unnamed African country and both makes and unmakes other parts of Africa as ‘foreign’ spaces by inscribing the fictitious country as ‘other’ and simultaneously drawing attention to the semantic instability of ‘the foreign’. Nicol’s Revenge trilogy includes a number of African migrant characters and frequently comments on xenophobic attitudes adopted by local characters and the state. Yet in contrast to *The Ibis Tapestry*, the trilogy seems to render natural the ‘foreignness’ of its main female migrant character. Golakai’s *The Lazarus Effect* can be regarded as the first crime novel in the South African context that features an African migrant detective. What makes this novel most intriguing is its hybridisation of multiple formulas of the crime genre. The author not only questions traditional generic conceptions of gender, sexuality and ‘the foreign’, but also combines elements of ‘chick lit’³⁰ with the crime plot. Golakai therefore joins local South African female crime writers, such as Angela Makholwa, who ‘is recognised as South Africa’s first black woman detective novelist’³¹ and who is the first South African crime writer to mix the crime and chick-lit genres.³²

The chosen novels are by no means the only examples of South African crime fiction that are set in other African countries and/or address African migration and the issue of xenophobia. Novels such as Andrew Brown’s *Coldsleep Lullaby* (2005), Michiel Heyns’s *Lost Ground* (2011), Richard Kunzmann’s *Bloody Harvests* (2006), Mike Nicol’s *Of Cops and Robbers* (2014), Deon Meyer’s *Heart of the Hunter* (2003) and *Thirteen Hours* (2009) and others equally engage with these topical issues.³³ I have selected the five novels mentioned earlier as indicative of three dominant engagements with the ‘African foreign’ in contemporary South African crime fiction: the inclusion of a setting in other parts of Africa, a sustained attention to the lives of African migrants, and the perspective of the migrant detective. These novels stand out not only for their narrative engagements with new socio-political issues, but also for illustrating the complicated and contradictory ways in which African settings and African migrants are framed in post-apartheid South Africa.

The present article begins with a discussion of the use of a north African setting in Nicol’s postmodern detective novel *The Ibis Tapestry*. I then turn to Nicol’s Revenge trilogy and its portrayal of African migrant characters, particularly Mace Bishop’s Malian wife Oumou

30 Stephanie Davis-Kahl defines the subject matter of chick lit as ‘modern women struggling and succeeding with work, relationships, motherhood, infertility, finance and yes, the right shoes to wear with the right dress’ – S. Davis-Kahl, ‘The Case for Chick Lit in Academic Libraries’, *Collection Building*, 27, 1 (2008), p. 18.

31 Christensen, ‘Managed Risk’, p. 320.

32 Warnes, ‘Writing Crime’, p. 982.

33 A. Brown, *Coldsleep Lullaby* (Cape Town, Zebra, 2005); M. Heyns, *Lost Ground* (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball, 2011); R. Kunzmann, *Bloody Harvests* (New York, Thomas Dunne Books, 2006); M. Nicol, *Of Cops and Robbers* (Brecon, Old Street, 2014); D. Meyer, *Heart of the Hunter* (Boston, Little, Brown, 2003); D. Meyer, *Thirteen Hours* (New York, Atlantic Monthly Press, 2009). Moreover, the short stories ‘Louis Botha Avenue’ by David Dison, ‘What Molly Knew’ by Tim Keegan, and Jane Taylor’s ‘The Labourer Is Worthy of His Hire’ from the anthology *Bad Company* all deal with the so-called xenophobic violence of 2008. See J. Hichens, *Bad Company: Stories of Intrigue, Suspense and Thrills* (Johannesburg, Pan Macmillan, 2008).

Sangaré. In the final section, I provide a reading of Golakai's innovative use of a migrant detective in her novel *The Lazarus Effect*.

North African Settings in Nicol's *The Ibis Tapestry*

Mike Nicol's 1998 novel *The Ibis Tapestry* at first glance appears as a typical whodunnit thriller.³⁴ Set in the mid 1990s, the novel is narrated by Richard Poley, author of airport thrillers, who comes to investigate the death of Christo Mercer, a former South African Defence Force (SADF) soldier who later works for Precision Engineering and International Ventures, presumably Armscor fronts that are involved in arms trafficking. Mercer's shady business repeatedly leads him to an unnamed country in the Sahara desert, where he is eventually murdered in the fictitious town of Malitia in 1995. One day, Poley mysteriously receives documents and a laptop that provide information on Mercer's tangled life.

While initially adopting the form of a whodunnit thriller with a murder in an exotic, foreign setting, the novel soon becomes uncoupled from generic conventions in the manner of a metaphysical detective story.³⁵ For Andries Walter Oliphant, Nicol uses 'the formulaic regime of the crime thriller [...] only [...] as a mock pattern'.³⁶ This is achieved particularly through the achronological and ateleological unfolding of the narrative, its 'post-structuralist questioning of truth',³⁷ the narrator's metatextual commentary, and a panoply of intertextual references, most notably to Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great*. A striking parallel between Nicol's novel and the Elizabethan play is the sacrifice of four virgins by the governor of Damascus, in Marlowe, and by the governor of the fictitious Saharan town Djano, in Nicol's novel, to appease approaching warlords. Mercer, who has developed an obsession with Marlowe's play, writes down the story of the mutilated Salma, the only survivor in the Saharan plot, which is integrated into the text, mainly in italics, as a first-person narration. Salma's story of suffering and her incessant accusation of the warlord el-Tamaru alludes to Mercer's own guilty conscience about past atrocities that he committed.

Critics have read Nicol's novel mainly in relation to what Ato Quayson calls the 'category of the truth-and-reconciliation genre of literary writing that has been evident in South Africa since the end of apartheid'.³⁸ The novel's division into four parts, titled 'reconstruction', 'development', 'truth' and 'reconciliation', already indicates its preoccupation with the transformation process of the immediate post-apartheid years. Ken Barris, for instance, contends that '[t]he novel is structured along the lines of a forensic investigation that aims, like the TRC, to uncover hidden truths'.³⁹ He suggests that the novel not only subverts the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), as Michael Titlestad and Mike Kissack argue in their article 'The Secularization of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission', but that Nicol also engages with white, and therewith his own, complicity in apartheid.⁴⁰ The narrative events taking place in the Saharan

34 M. Nicol, *The Ibis Tapestry* (New York, Vintage, 1999). Further page references are given in the text.

35 According to Merivale and Sweeney, a 'metaphysical detective story is a text that parodies or subverts traditional detective-story conventions [...] with the intention [...] of asking questions about mysteries of being and knowing which transcend the mere machinations of the mystery plot'; P. Merivale and S.E. Sweeney, 'The Game's Afoot: On the Trail of the Metaphysical Detective Story', in P. Merivale and S.E. Sweeney (eds), *Detecting Texts: The Metaphysical Detective Story from Poe to Postmodernism* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), p. 2.

36 A. Oliphant, 'Will the Real Author Please Raise His Arms?', review of Nicol's *The Ibis Tapestry*, *Sunday Independent*, Johannesburg, 14 February 1999, p. 20.

37 M. Samuelson, 'Cracked Vases and Untidy Seams: Narrative Structure and Closure in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and South African Fiction', *Current Writing*, 15, 2 (2003), p. 69.

38 A. Quayson, *Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 225.

39 K. Barris, 'Interrogations of Guilt and Amnesia in Mike Nicol's *The Ibis Tapestry*, and *Wall of Days* by Alastair Bruce', *English Academy Review*, 29, 2 (2012), p. 49.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 51.

setting, in this vein, become an allegory of post-apartheid South Africa in these accounts, particularly in Sten Pultz Moslund's reading of the Malitia plot through a South African lens:

In *The Ibis Tapestry*, Salma's survival drives Sarra, el-Tamaru's wife and Zenocrate's [Tamburlaine's wife in Marlowe's play] equivalent, to commit suicide. She considers herself as responsible as her husband in causing Salma's misery (with an obvious reference to the guilt of all South Africans who either granted the National Party their support in elections or indirectly by remaining passive).⁴¹

While Salma's writing down of her own story echoes the TRC's attempt to write history from the victims' perspectives, her refusal to forgive el-Tamaru stands, for Moslund, for the novel's critique of the commission's 'appeal to forgiveness'.⁴²

The available scholarship on the novel rightly praises Nicol's neglected text for its innovative narrative style and critical stance towards the TRC. However, none of the articles discusses the text in the light of the tradition of foreign settings in crime writing. What do the parallels that Nicol sets up between South Africa and north Africa reveal about the African setting? And how does the novel configure South Africa's (often awkward) relationship with other countries on the continent?

Malitia is both oblique and real in *The Ibis Tapestry*. Having studied Mercer's documents, Poley imagines how the gunrunner would have envisaged the four virgins:

[h]e pictured them walking out of an old walled town of mosques and casbah, alleys, lanes, wells, date palms, the houses rising against one another cool and shattered [...], a town that could be in Mali, Libya, Chad, or Morocco, anywhere in Saharan Africa. Towns he knew well: whether Malitia, where he had an office, or Djano, where he sometimes stayed with the old warlord Ibn el-Tamaru, or Bilo, Misana, Taghazi, and Murzuk, where he'd met an array of men wanting to buy arms and ammunition. (pp. 4–5)

The lack of geographical specificity and distinguishing features of various countries and towns, in conjunction with the exoticism evoked in the description of the town, is consistent with the use of the exotic in many crime fiction novels. Besides this geographical anonymity, there is a notable absence of historical contextualisation, which is evident when Mercer describes Salma's life in greater detail. According to Mercer's documents, the girl had been a refugee in Djano for only three years when she was 'chosen to face the gunmen' (p. 17): Salma's parents

wanted a town that knew nothing of bloodletting, of corpses in the street, of the hourly terror of dying [...]. They wanted this because they'd been forced to flee from so many places carrying what they could [...]. Too often they'd looked back at villages that had become pillars of flame, or they'd walked through fields of burnt crops [...]. Too often they'd had to bury their kin along the road, as they'd had to bury Salma's younger sister and brother. Too often they'd been raped and beaten. And so for them Djano was a sanctuary beyond the reach of warring men. Protected by the desert, it was untouchable. (p. 17)

Precluding the specific details of the conflict, the novel positions Djano as yet another 'African' desert town, a mere exotic setting for Mercer's dubious gun deals.

Similarly, Mercer's lover in Malitia, Oumou, appears as an exotic beauty to Poley when he finally travels to the desert town himself to find answers about Mercer's murder: '[s]he had the most beautiful, irresistible neck I had ever seen: glossy mahogany. I wanted to reach out and stroke it. She smiled. Her teeth were uneven but nonetheless charming' (p. 183). And her hands are 'cool, firm, silky' (p. 183). In line with the stereotypical image of exotic female libidinousness, Oumou asks Poley to sleep with him during their trip across the desert. He succumbs to the temptation, even though he does not have a condom and fears contracting HIV and dying of AIDS (p. 197).

41 S.K. Moslund, *Making Use of History in New South African Fiction: An Analysis of Historical Perspectives in Three Post-Apartheid Novels* (Copenhagen, Museum Tusulanum Press, University of Copenhagen, 2003), p. 77.

42 *Ibid.*, p.79.

While *The Ibis Tapestry* invokes the foreign, exotic setting of many crime thrillers, the text's postmodern questioning of truth at the same time undermines this portrayal. The novel thus partakes simultaneously in the reproduction and deconstruction of genre stereotypes. Poley, for instance, mocks the clichéd portrayal of characters in the genre fiction that he writes, 'the high-action low-demand escapades where the women are beautiful and dangerous or beautiful and submissive, and the men [...] drive 4x4s, take their holidays in deserts or forests, shoot lions, fish for marlin, fuck whatever broads are available' (p. 96). Poley's statement here can be read as metafictional commentary and a proleptic self-critique of his sexual intercourse with Oumou and, by extension, his depiction of the desert town and the construction of foreignness.

Moreover, Mercer's narration of Salma's story is reminiscent of central tenets of the metaphysical detective story, in which the sleuth, '[r]ather than definitively solving a crime', often 'finds himself confronting the insoluble mysteries of his own interpretation and his own identity'.⁴³ Salma posits that the foreign journalists visiting Djano 'know nothing about me. They would not believe my story if one of them asked me to tell it. [...] Sometimes they pose with me in the photographs, imposing themselves on my history. But they can't see what has been' (p. 47). In the final scene of the novel, Poley watches the sunrise outside Djano with Salma and Oumou, reminding himself that he has come 'here to imagine the deaths of the three girls and the wounding of Salma', but concludes that he failed in his mission (pp. 200–201). The ultimate failure of Poley's imagination is thus also an incisive metatextual comment on exotic settings in conventional crime fiction that can only be imperfect, inchoate approximations of these spaces. In metaphysical detective fiction, with its endless enquiry into modes of being and knowing, the attempt to control and render 'natural' foreign bodies that characterises more conventional crime fiction shifts towards a probing into the notion of foreignness itself, acknowledging its instability and location outside 'proper meaning'.⁴⁴

The novel's intertextual play, its tapestry of geographical parallels and emphasis on fractured, uncertain identities also introduce yet another layer of detection for South African readers: the investigation of their own identities and position in Africa. For the North African echo of the TRC process seems suggestive of an interlaced textual network that points towards the porous boundaries between South African experiences of political transition and those elsewhere on the continent.⁴⁵ In this sense, Nicol's 1997 text constitutes an early example of post-apartheid disillusionment that plays with the presumed 'difference' of the 'other Africa' to trace South Africa's relatedness to other African postcolonial polities. Its demonstrative awareness of the constructedness of 'the foreign' thus questions the naturalisation of 'the African' as foreign and foreigner in contemporary South Africa. The *Revenge* trilogy, in contrast, seems to allot a more constrained identity to African migrant characters.

African Migrants in Nicol's *Revenge* Trilogy

'Praised for the panache of its slick prose style', Naidu writes, 'Mike Nicol's thriller trilogy – *Payback* (2008), *Killer Country* (2010) and *Black Heart* (2011) – is reminiscent of American hard-boiled and *noir* fiction'.⁴⁶ The trilogy follows the lives of business partners and long-term friends Mace Bishop and Pylon Buso. Both are former soldiers of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the armed wing of the African National Congress, as well as gunrunners, and are now owners of Complete Security, protecting rich and famous international travellers on their beauty/safari

43 Merivale and Sweeney, 'The Game's Afoot', p. 2.

44 Saunders, 'The Agony', p. 219.

45 See Thurman's discussion of post-apartheid allegorical texts with an 'African' setting. C. Thurman, 'Places Elsewhere, Then and Now: Allegory "Before" and "After" South Africa's Transition?', *English Studies in Africa*, 53, 1 (2010), p. 98.

46 S. Naidu, 'Fears and Desires in South African Crime Fiction', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 39, 3 (2013), p. 729 (emphasis in original).

trips to Cape Town. Connecting the three novels is an intricate revenge plot by the perfidious Sheemina February, whose hand Mace and Pylon mutilated during an interrogation in an Angolan MK camp, where she was taken for an apartheid spy. Whereas *The Ibis Tapestry* partly features the 'foreign' Saharan setting, the Revenge trilogy includes the figure of the 'foreigner' mainly in a South African context.⁴⁷ *Payback* and *Killer Country* feature Mace's wife Oumou Sangaré, from the fictional desert town Malitia, who now lives with him in Cape Town. In contrast to *The Ibis Tapestry*, the country in which Malitia is located is now identified as Mali. Mace and Oumou, *Payback* reveals, met in Malitia on one of his and Pylon's gunrunning trips.

For Titlestad and Ashlee Polatinsky, the difference between the characters of Oumou in the two novels dramatises the difference between the two novels on the whole. In *The Ibis Tapestry*, the authors contend, Oumou 'represents something like Kurtz's "African lover"' for Poley, 'the resplendent figure, festooned in gold jewelry, described in primitivist tropes.'⁴⁸ In *Payback*, by contrast, she is domesticated, having become a wife and mother, hoping that the ceramics exhibition that she is planning will help her husband to meet his bond payments.⁴⁹ While Titlestad and Polatinsky praise *The Ibis Tapestry* for its outspokenness on 'the limits of redress in the face of the politics of transition', they find fault with the embrace of 'the comforts of formulaic entertainment that turns on a wry and worldly acceptance of a corrupt post-apartheid polity'⁵⁰ adopted in *Payback*. Naidu disagrees with their reading of *Payback*, and South African crime writing on the whole, as 'a genre which lacks ideological commitment and which abandons history and politics in favour of generic conventions that offer the reader escapism and consolation'.⁵¹ Naidu's critique seems warranted, particularly in the light of the unconventional ending of the last part of the trilogy, which, admittedly, was published after Titlestad and Polatinsky's article. Even though *Black Heart* ends with a cautious step towards a rebonding between Mace and his estranged daughter, the final scene adds to the almost complete loss of everything meaningful in Mace's life the breakdown of his beloved red Alfa Romeo Spider. This absence of narrative closure thus echoes a distinctive feature of the metaphysical detective genre, even though the trilogy lacks its self-reflexive enquiry into the very processes of criminal enquiry.

Similarly, Michiel Heyns argues that *Payback* offers a trenchant critique of the state of the South African nation, 'including the prescient comment that "[l]ocals had a hatred for foreigners, especially those with enterprise"'.⁵² Throughout the trilogy, Nicol engages with South Africa's contemporary anxieties about immigration from other parts of Africa. The novels feature a number of minor characters from other African countries and include discussions by South African characters about the 'immigration problem'. In *Payback*, the Angolan car guards Cuito and Dr Roberto help Complete Security with the surveillance of a nightclub that has been attacked by the Islamist PAGAD movement. Unable to trace the two men after a few days, Mace presumes that they have been killed, noting that '[l]ocals had a hatred of foreigners, especially those with enterprise'.⁵³ *Killer Country* again narrates the plight of African migrants, who often take on menial, low-paid jobs despite being doctors or teachers.⁵⁴ Manga, one of the killers employed by Sheemina February, exhibits xenophobic sentiments when warning his companion Spitz against too much sun, which will make him 'go black like a Mozambican' or

47 In *Payback*, the partners once travel to Angola.

48 M. Titlestad and A. Polatinsky, 'Turning to Crime: Mike Nicol's *The Ibis Tapestry* and *Payback*', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 45, 2 (2010), p. 266.

49 M. Nicol *Payback* (London, Old Street, 2010 [2009]), p. 266.

50 Titlestad and Polatinsky, 'Turning to Crime', p. 269.

51 S. Naidu, 'Crime Fiction, South Africa: A Critical Introduction', *Current Writing*, 25, 2 (2013), p. 125.

52 M. Heyns, 'Cape Town's Beautiful People Show Ugly Side', review of Nicol's *Payback*, *Sunday Independent*, 8 June 2008, p. 17.

53 Nicol, *Payback*, p. 82.

54 M. Nicol, *Killer Country* (Cape Town, Umuzi, 2010), p. 48.

'[d]ead as a Somali trader in a township'.⁵⁵ In *Killer Country*, Mace's partner, Pylon, complains about the effects of an open-door policy towards refugees: "You let refugees in everything gets bugged up. [...] Zimbos. Yorubas. Congos. Angolans. Any place you can think of that's shot to hell. They're in there, slumming it"⁵⁶ Mace, it seems, becomes the author's politically correct mouthpiece, reminding his partner that many locals have been partaking in the degradation of Johannesburg's city centre.

In *Black Heart*, the gangsters hired by February to abduct an Indian American couple under Mace and Pylon's protection have a conversation about Cape Town's "Nigeria-town". "Those brothers", one of the men says, "catch you in the street, they're cannibals, they eat your heart while it's still beating"⁵⁷ Nicol not only exposes the xenophobic attitudes of 'ordinary' South Africans, but also points towards the complicity of the new (political) elite, who use pervasive anti-immigrant sentiments for their own political ends. The legal director, hired to talk the American couple out of their investment plans for township casinos, informs them about the recent murder of Somali shop owners in a Cape Town township: "They're seen as taking away livelihoods. They're not seen as competition, they're seen as invaders. A new sort of colonialism. [...] You understand what I'm saying"⁵⁸

Common public opinion and prejudices are communicated here through the novels' cast of minor and major protagonists. In contrast to early hard-boiled novels, Nicol's migrants are not positioned as placeholders of threatening 'others' to the social order that need to be contained.⁵⁹ Similarly, the texts' ethical commitment turns its back on 'the hard-boiled's supposed neutrality and detachment'.⁶⁰ While this making legible of prejudices and violence appears to denounce state discourse about African migrants, the trilogy fails to move familiar slogans into a context that is not immediately accessible and recognisable for the reader, which would render more ambiguous the very notion of 'African foreignness'. For the register used here equally risks reducing migrant characters to mere exteriors, upholding their confinement to the margins of society in the manner of what Dennis Porter calls the 'perpetual re-familiarization'⁶¹ of the existing social order in the hard-boiled. Unlike Porter, who conceives the hard-boiled genre as essentially conservative, Nicol troubles any clear-cut ideological alignment as his critique of anti-immigrant discourse gets interlaced with strategies of re-familiarisation.

With respect to the portrayal of Mace's wife, Oumou, I contend that the novel more directly confirms generic conventions of exoticness and conforms to traditional gender norms of hard-boiled fiction. Moreover, Oumou's murder is in line with the sensationalist brutality that women frequently experience in crime fiction. Oumou is the most caring partner to Mace, cooking fashionable dishes for the family, waiting patiently for her husband's return late at night before going to sleep, nursing his wounds when he is shot, providing comfort and sexual pleasure. Mace frequently describes the exotic beauty of the 'irresistible Oumou'⁶² with her 'ebony skin'.⁶³ Yet Mace's gentle, quiet Oumou is unlike the forthright sexual temptress in *The Ibis Tapestry*. Indeed, it seems far-fetched that the two are the same. *Payback* narrates that she

55 *Ibid.*, p. 207.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 246.

57 M. Nicol, *Black Heart* (London, Old Street, 2011), p. 44.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 94.

59 Writing about Raymond Chandler's second novel, *Farewell, My Lovely* (1940), Scaggs notes, "[t]he opening paragraph of the novel, even as it acknowledges the existence of an immigrant and black migrant population, either denies these inhabitants a presence in the narrative, or hints at Marlowe's racist fear of America being "overrun" by this population"; J. Scaggs, *Crime Fiction* (London, Routledge, 2005), p. 76.

60 A. Pepper, 'The "Hard-Boiled" Genre', in C.J. Rzapka and L. Horsley (eds), *A Companion to Crime Fiction* (Chichester, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p. 146.

61 D. Porter, *The Pursuit of Crime: Art and Ideology in Detective Fiction* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1981), p. 3.

62 Nicol, *Payback*, p. 161.

63 *Ibid.*, p. 76.

resisted Mace's advances initially in the same manner in which she earlier fought off French men during her stay in Paris, where she studied to be a ceramicist. We learn about an English man who used to teach her English during her youth, but Mercer's name is never mentioned, or the fact that she was his lover. In contrast to the lover of the gunrunner, Mace's Oumou is a pacifist, persistently fighting for a better world. For this reason, Mace gives up gunrunning and starts the security company with Pylon before getting married. For Joe Muller, Oumou is an 'African saint with the sublime pottery and tolerant demeanor', who 'lives with the horror memories of her violence drenched homeland, her name an almost-talisman (Oh no!) against new horrors certain to come'.⁶⁴ Repeatedly mentioned throughout the trilogy are Oumou's hallmark 'sad brown eyes',⁶⁵ representing to Mace 'the eyes of all the women who'd lived in the desert for thousands of years. [...] Brown pools of sadness'.⁶⁶ Equating the experiences of the desert women in this manner, Mace perceives them as timeless beings rather than independently acting agents.

In an interview with Muller, Nicol draws attention to the 'female tension to the *Payback* narrative', in which Oumou stands 'against the troika of Sheemina, Isabella and Vittoria'.⁶⁷ Throughout the trilogy, Oumou becomes the sympathetic and essentially good counter to the treacherous Sheemina February, a reincarnation of the classic *femme fatale* of classic hard-boiled US crime fiction in the 1920s. Sheemina is a dangerous, sexual woman, lethal even, who stops at nothing in her nefarious scheme of revenge on Mace.⁶⁸ Nicol intends to recast traditional gender roles in crime fiction by focusing on female perpetrators, yet he none the less resorts to the classic dichotomy of the 'angel in the house' and the 'monstrous woman'.⁶⁹ According to Sonja Altnoeder, the sexuality of female characters in conventional hard-boiled fiction is often 'represented as a site of social disruption and crime, hence rendering them either villains or victims, but hardly agents'.⁷⁰ While Oumou kills her attacker when she is brutally murdered towards the end of *Killer Country*, the spectacular representation of the scene is in line with the conventional, sensationalist brutality that women are frequently exposed to in the genre.

Oumou's Malian background is frequently invoked in terms of an exotic, timeless landscape. With Mace as a focaliser, the narrative describes Oumou's home town as a 'desert village [...]. Medieval Tuaregs and goats. Nothing but Sahara sand, hazed distant mountains. He'd go mad'.⁷¹ The Bishops eventually move to a house of 'concrete and glass and chrome' that Oumou always wanted, '[s]omething as far removed from the mud towns of her desert life as she could get'.⁷² She tells Mace, "'I work with clay, Mace [...]. In my pottery are my memories. We must live in something modern'".⁷³ We learn of the violence she experienced as a young girl, the 'scars across her stomach'.⁷⁴ While her past suffering is repeatedly exposed in the trilogy, there is a striking absence of the political-historical context in which she grew up. It seems that the specificity of her historical experience, her upbringing in Mali in the 1970s, and the complexities

64 M. Nicol, 'An Interview with Joe Muller about *The Revenge Trilogy*', *Books Live*, n.d., available at <http://mikenicol.bookslive.co.za/an-interview-with-joe-muller-about-the-revenge-trilogy/>, retrieved 29 September 2016.

65 Nicol, *Payback*, p. 113.

66 Nicol, *Killer Country*, p. 68.

67 Muller, 'An Interview'.

68 In many ways, February is also rendered an abject, foreign body in the text.

69 S. Binder, 'Female Killers and Gender Politics in Contemporary South African Crime Fiction: Conversations with Crime Writers Jassy Mackenzie, Angela Makholwa, and Mike Nicol', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, doi: 10.1177/0021989415619466 (2015), p. 6.

70 S. Altnoeder, 'Transforming Genres: Subversive Potential and the Interface Between Hard-Boiled Detective Fiction and Chick Lit', in M. Effron (ed.), *The Millennial Detective: Essays on Trends in Crime Fiction, Film and Television, 1990-2010* (Jefferson, McFarland, 2011), p. 84.

71 Nicol, *Killer Country*, p. 23.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 34.

73 *Ibid.*

74 Nicol, *Payback*, p. 374.

inherent in any society are transmuted into an undifferentiated 'African' experience of war and suffering. This uniformity, in contrast to the frequent historical allusions in the South African context, signifies a different form of 'Africanness', opposed to the modernity of Cape Town. Certainly, Oumou cannot be reduced to a mere stock character, but the novels' quasi celebration of Oumou's innocence and goodness, in conjunction with her exotic appeal and traumatic past, transforms Oumou into South Africa's new post-apartheid exotic.

While *The Ibis Tapestry* equally lacks historical contextualisation, its postmodern critique of historiography and totalising narratives, which represent key aspects of the metaphysical detective genre, at the same time questions Mercer and Poley's undifferentiated portrayal of what Nicol calls 'Saharan Africa'. By contrast, in the Revenge trilogy, Oumou is confined to the conventional grammar of the hard-boiled crime fiction genre. This is not to say that the trilogy eschews political critique. Rather, it illustrates the hard-boiled being 'best understood in terms of an ambivalent political outlook [...] than a singular ideological orientation'.⁷⁵ The trilogy's simultaneous making and unmaking of 'African foreignness' thus appears symptomatic of the contradictions that characterize transitional textualities in South Africa, where power formations become increasingly complicated: seemingly irreducible to old binary configurations or their simple reversal, but equally evocative of former exclusionary practices.⁷⁶

Golakai's Hard-Boiled Chick Detective

Hawa Jande Golakai's 2011 novel *The Lazarus Effect*⁷⁷ introduces an unprecedented perspective to the South African crime fiction scene. Born in Frankfurt, Germany, Golakai lived in Liberia until the outbreak of the civil war in 1990. She has lived in various African countries, including South Africa, where she worked as a researcher in clinical and public healthcare. In the early 2010s, she returned to Monrovia. By publishing *The Lazarus Effect* in South Africa, Golakai joins a growing group of writers who grew up in other parts of Africa and have come to live and publish in South Africa after the country's transition to democracy. In the light of persisting xenophobic sentiments and frequent one-dimensional images of African migrants in the South African public sphere, an analysis of works by migrant writers themselves is indispensable in any attempt to gain a more differentiated picture of African migrants in South Africa.

The Lazarus Effect is the first crime fiction novel published in South Africa featuring a detective figure from elsewhere on the African continent, the Liberian investigative journalist Voinjama Johnson, affectionately known as Vee to her friends and colleagues. She works for the Cape Town-based magazine *Urban*, where she teams up with her assistant Chlöe, a white South African lesbian. Featuring a mixed-race investigative team and a lesbian detective, the novel inventively hybridises genre conventions. Incorporating west African pidgin English into direct speech, Golakai furthermore diversifies the linguistic landscape of South African crime fiction.

When Vee sees a photograph of the 'Air Girl' (p. 26), Jaqueline Paulsen, who has repeatedly appeared to her in visions, on the noticeboard of a private hospital, she begins investigating her disappearance and presumed murder two years previously. Focusing on strong African female characters from other African countries, Golakai rewrites the portrayal of 'the other Africa' and African women that are partly endorsed in Nicol's hard-boiled works. Indeed, the author herself stresses in a newspaper interview that 'I want to reclaim crime writing as an

75 Pepper, 'The "Hard-Boiled" Genre', p. 151.

76 For a discussion of the term 'transitional literatures', see A. Akpome, 'Towards a Reconceptualization of "(Post) Transitional" South African Cultural Expression', *English in Africa*, 43, 2 (2016), pp. 39–62.

77 H.J. Golakai, *The Lazarus Effect* (Cape Town, Kwela Books, 2011). Further page references are given in the text.

African woman'.⁷⁸ Noting that she intends to make Vee Johnson a series character, Golakai contemplates in the same interview that '[i]t would be wonderful to become the Agatha Christie of Africa'.⁷⁹ Yet in contrast to Christie and the larger 'British genteel country house tradition',⁸⁰ Golakai's employment of the classic whodunnit structure also features elements of the hard-boiled subgenre.

Vee, I suggest, can be termed an African hard-boiled chick detective. According to Naidu, the novel is 'tinged with the timbre of "chick lit"', and Vee is 'a smart-talking, ass-kicking, sexy, transnational character'.⁸¹ Naidu's description of Golakai's detective indicates a link between African chick lit and the hard-boiled novel. While central features of both genres at first glance appear to contradict each other, Golakai merges and rewrites both traditions from the perspective of an African migrant. This becomes most visible in the descriptions of her investigator's body, her past and her relation to others.

Vee exhibits the 'tough', 'at times callous and hard' and 'durable, surviving assault and injury'⁸² qualities of the hard-boiled detective. She is attacked repeatedly during her investigation by various suspects and does not shy away from fighting back. When assaulted by Jacqueline's ex-boyfriend Ashwin Venter, presumably the last person to have seen Jacqui alive before her disappearance, Vee quickly manages to get the upper hand in the fight. Yet her assistant Chlöe – '[j]udging from the manic look in her [Vee's] eye there would be no stopping until the stranger's head was a bloody mess' (p. 190) – has to pull her away forcibly from the scene. When Chlöe asks her 'boss lady' (p. 139) where she has acquired such combat skills, she receives only a 'Mona Lisa smile' (p. 192).

By employing the hard-boiled form, the novel thus rewrites notions of female migrant victimhood that Oumou partly embodies in Nicol's *Revenge* trilogy. From the beginning, Vee is introduced as an ambitious investigative journalist with clear career goals. Jonathan Amid, in his review of Golakai's novel for the webpage *Slipnet*, observes a resemblance between Vee and other powerful female detectives/investigators in South African crime fiction, such as Margie Orford's Clare Hart and Jassy Mackenzie's Jade De Jong. He writes that Vee 'is the antithesis of the often powerless and exploited female figures one encounters all too often in crime fiction'.⁸³ Yet, in opposition to the conventional hard-boiled form, Golakai also draws attention to the vulnerabilities of her detective hidden behind the tough façade, privileging her character's interior over mere action. She skilfully juxtaposes the novel's whodunnit thread with a parallel narrative strand that centres on the unearthing of her detective's past. Like many of the detectives in South African crime fiction of the past decade, most notably Deon Meyer's damaged male detectives,⁸⁴ Vee, we learn gradually, is haunted by a violent past.

Warnes observes that Meyer recasts the figure of the 'emotionally scarred alcoholic, violent detective, who in the hard-boiled tradition is unwilling or unable to confront his past'⁸⁵ by allowing the men to free themselves from the shackles imposed by genre conventions. Detection, Warnes argues, becomes a process of rehabilitation in Meyer's novels, which optimistically believe in the possibility of personal healing through the protection of others. Vee's way

78 P. McCracken, 'Patricia, an Agatha Christie for Africa', review of Golakai's *The Lazarus Effect*, *Business Day*, Johannesburg, 22 April 2014, p. 5.

79 *Ibid.* Golakai has since published a sequel to her debut novel – H.J. Golakai, *The Score* (Cape Town, Kwela, 2015).

80 C. Chambers, 'Postcolonial Noir: Vikram Chandra's "Kama"', in M. Singer and N. Pearson (eds), *Detective Fiction in a Postcolonial and Transnational World* (Burlington, Ashgate, 2009,) p. 32.

81 Naidu, 'Fears and Desires', p. 730.

82 H. Worthington, *Key Concepts in Crime Fiction* (New York, Palgrave, 2011), p. 122.

83 J. Amid, 'Crime Fiction and the "Metaphysics of Disorder"', review of Diale Tlholwe's *Counting the Coffins* and Golakai's *The Lazarus Effect*, *Slipnet*, Stellenbosch, 20 October 2011, available at <http://slipnet.co.za/view/reviews/crime-fiction-and-the-%E2%80%98metaphysics-of-disorder%E2%80%99>, retrieved 24 June 2015.

84 See Warnes, 'Writing Crime', p. 987.

85 *Ibid.*

towards healing is not as straightforward, but the novel, in a similar vein, regards detection as a possibility with which to engage and work through the detective's past trauma. Warnes reads the pain and emotional recovery of Meyer's male detectives as 'symptomatic of the challenges and opportunities for white masculinity in the post-apartheid period'.

In Golakai's novel, Vee's suffering testifies to the diverse social manifestations of trauma in South Africa over recent years that is no longer mainly rooted in the violent oppression of apartheid. By interweaving Vee's traumatic experiences as a child during the Liberian civil war with the suffering of the people with whom she engages during her investigation, Golakai's use of a migrant detective demands a re-examination of South African post-apartheid identities. Focusing on the interrelatedness of her Liberian and South African characters, rather than the exoticised difference and 'foreignness' of 'the other Africa', Golakai privileges forms of mutuality over separation. This is not to suggest, however, that the novel attempts to forge an all-inclusive South African or pan-African 'we', in which trauma becomes a uniting identity that papers over persistent forms of social exclusion.

During a visit of Jacqui's mother, Mrs Paulsen, Vee 'remembered her own time of misfortune: unwashed body and swollen eyes, perfectly happy to marinate in her own stink and pity were it not for those who loved her' (p. 44). Later, when she visits the mother again, who is visibly shaken by her grief, Vee resists a spontaneous impulse to touch her: '[n]ot everyone received touch in a comforting way when tortured by grief, as she'd learnt in the past' (p. 97). Talking to Jacqui's half-sister Rosie, who lost her brother Sean, Vee remembers that '[s]he knew something about lost brothers too' (p. 124). This empathic attunement that seems at the heart of her work as an investigator significantly modifies, I suggest, the hard-boiled genre in which the detective is unwilling to work through her past and mainly relies on physical force to solve the crime.

Aspects of chick lit⁸⁶ that the novel merges with the crime genre furthermore counter the perception of the hard-boiled detective's flawless body. The most prominent chick lit elements in Golakai's text is the incipient romance between Vee and her longtime friend and admirer Joshua Allen, the erstwhile best friend of her ex-fiancé Titus Wreh. Yet the love plot, which, in the chick lit genre, according to Juliette Wells, usually ends 'with the heroine happily paired off but not married',⁸⁷ is less clearly legible here than in conventional chick lit. While the novel ends with Vee in Joshua's arms, Titus complicates the love plot when, towards the end of the narrative, he reappears after a long absence. Most significantly, however, her friendship with Joshua also challenges Vee's idea of an inviolable, tough body. Her suffering from post-traumatic stress consistently causes panic attacks during which she can no longer control her body. Joshua takes on the role of a mentor, a common feature of chick lit, and advises her not to fight but to accept the outbreaks (p. 220). However, the novel leaves unanswered the question of whether Joshua's intervention will lead to a more direct engagement with her experiences during the civil war.

Golakai thus successfully employs the form of crime fiction to negotiate stereotypes against African migrants and to critique new forms of social hierarchies that have emerged in post-apartheid South Africa. Her innovative employment of a migrant hard-boiled and chick detective enables her to challenge traditional notions of the masculine detective, female migrant victimhood and the de-historicisation of other parts of Africa that partly characterises Nicol's trilogy.

86 According to Altnoeder, chick lit 'features single, mostly city-dwelling women in their late twenties and early thirties negotiating their often conflicting desires for professional and personal satisfaction', see Altnoeder, 'Transforming Genres', p. 87.

87 J. Wells, 'Mothers of Chick Lit? Women Writers, Readers, and Literary History', in S. Ferriss and M. Young (eds), *Chick Lit: The New Woman's Fiction* (New York, Routledge, 2006), p. 51.

Conclusion: 'Foreignness' and the Boundaries of Genre

The discussion of 'foreign' African settings, African migrant protagonists and an African migrant detective in the selected texts has demonstrated not only the appeal of 'the foreign' for contemporary South African crime writers, but has also shown that issues of migration and xenophobia have become a central focus of the authors' reconfigured post-apartheid political commitment. Next to its preoccupation with dominant themes such as the high crime rate, violence against women, corruption and failed leadership, South African crime fiction since the end of apartheid has begun to negotiate contradictory interpretations and shifting meanings of South African identities in light of the growing population of Africans born in other parts of the continent living in South Africa. I have mapped out three different engagements with the notion of 'the African foreign', the setting in other parts of Africa, the portrayal of African migrants and the employment of a migrant detective, all pointing towards the adaptability of the genre for socio-political criticism.

The Ibis Tapestry exhibits a tension between homogeneous, timeless images of north Africa and their deconstruction through a narrative awareness of its own exoticising effects and the constructedness and relationality of the notion of 'the foreign'. Nicol's play with genre conventions in his employment of the metaphysical detective form thus uncouples the Saharan locale from the iconography of traditional exotic crime fiction settings.

In the Revenge trilogy, the images of African migrants are more determined and restricted by genre formulae. Yet a reading of the difference between Nicol's *The Ibis Tapestry* and his Revenge trilogy in terms of the highbrow–lowbrow distinction and an accompanying abandonment of political commitment that Titlestad and Polatinsky propose does not seem to do justice to the complexities of the latter. The hard-boiled novels of the Revenge trilogy display a reframing of engaged writing similar to that in Nicol's earlier novel. But the later works demonstrate, as Andrew Pepper notes, that '[d]etection is a means of social control as well as social revolution',⁸⁸ in which conservative re-inscriptions of foreignness can easily stand next to a critique of pervasive stereotyping. Golakai's text most visibly hybridises traditional genre expectations by combining them with chick lit elements. Her innovative detective not only transgresses gender conventions, but also inflects the investigative process with the sensibilities of a migrant outsider.

All texts examined here, in particular *The Ibis Tapestry* and *The Lazarus Effect*, to some extent rewrite genre conventions within crime fiction. In this sense, these texts themselves become margin dwellers, 'foreign' to some of the characteristic textual features that define the sub-genres I have mentioned. Foregrounding the unstable boundaries of genres, these texts are productive sites for thinking about the power-laden construction of 'foreignness'. The concurrent unmaking and re-making of 'African foreignness' that characterizes the Revenge trilogy also draws attention to the paradoxical temporality of transitional literatures and a post-apartheid 'that never quite becomes "post"'.⁸⁹ Rendering 'natural' the foreignness of characters from others parts of the continent, these texts remind us that apartheid's incessant reiteration of the foreignness of those that it sought to oppress remains imprinted in contemporary South African cultural formations, albeit in a re-arranged framework of power constellations. While situated in the local, the texts at the same time are imbricated in wider transnational textual networks that negotiate vexed ideas of belonging and 'the exotic' within the matrix of popular fiction.

88 A. Pepper, *The Contemporary American Crime Novel: Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Class* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2001), p. 7.

89 R. West-Pavlov, 'Apocalypse Now, Never ... or Forever: Venter and Medalie on the Everyday Politics of Post-Apartheid South Africa', *English Studies in Africa*, 58, 1 (2015), p. 43.