IL GIALLO IN COLONIA: ITALIAN POST-IMPERIAL CRIME NOVELS

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In un mondo delle doppie immagini, attraversato dalle inquietudini della coscienza malata dei colonizzatori, ogni possibilità di conoscere e comunicare con l'altro svanisce.

(Tommasello 214)

Summary: This article analyzes several crime stories set during Italian imperial history, in particular Andrea Camilleri's *La presa di Macallè* (2003) and *Il nipote del Negus* (2010); Carlo Lucarelli's *L'ottava vibrazione* (2008) and *Albergo Italia* (2014); and Giorgio Ballario's *Morire è un attimo* (2008) and *Una donna di troppo* (2009). It focuses on the representation of Italian and local characters, placing particular attention on the portrayal of the detective and his sidekick, as well as female characters. It also analyzes how the relationship between Italy and its colonies is generally portrayed in these crime novels. It shows how crime fiction can be an effective instrument with which to explore a controversial topic such as the colonial era, also by linking it to present practices.

This article analyzes the various literary outcomes of the encounter between the contemporary crime genre and Italian imperial history. The aim is to identify and specify the particular characteristics of crime fiction set in the colonies, and in particular the treatment of the various Italian and local characters, placing particular attention on the portrayal of female characters and how it differs according to ethnicity, and to examine how that controversial colonial era and its protagonists are represented in such stories in order to understand what the authors' strategies and more or less political agendas are, if any, with respect to Italy's colonial past. The obvious choice was to focus specifically on the novels set in the colonies written by the popular contemporary writers Andrea Camilleri, Carlo Lucarelli and Giorgio Ballario.

Compared to other European nations, Italy was a late colonizer. The Kingdom of Italy was proclaimed in March 1861, and it was not until the 1880s, after settling internal affairs, that the government commenced its imperial campaigns and acquired Eritrea and Somalia (Calchi Novati 18). Italy attempted to invade Ethiopia as well but retreated after the defeat of the Battle of Adwa. No further attempts to colonize Ethiopia were made until the 1930s, when under Mussolini's rule the African nation was attacked and the Empire was proclaimed on 9 May 1936 (Derobertis 117). Italy lost its colonies after the Second World War but ruled Somalia from 1950 to 1960 under a United Nations' mandate. After the demise of the Empire and the proclamation of the Italian Republic, Italy's colonial heritage virtually disappeared from the public mind. Indeed, a firm denial of Italian imperial responsibility and the myth of Italians as *brava gente* have characterized the development of a post-World War II republican society.¹ This occurred despite the development of a structured body of research within the postcolonial field that began within Historical Studies mainly thanks to the work of Angelo Del Boca and Nicola Labanca. Unfortunately, academic interest and public debate have not proceeded at the same rate, and the process of rethinking the colonial era, and therefore contemporary Italian society, is still in its infancy and not yet capable of a sophisticated engagement with the nation's imperialistic past and its postcolonial present.

Since 2004, however, novels and short stories written in Italian by postcolonial authors have proliferated, a phenomenon that has encouraged not only the development of Postcolonial Studies as such but that has also attracted the attention of the related field of Literary Studies.² This burgeoning interest in postcolonial works has led to a more pointed, probing discussion about post-imperial novels.³ Here we are using the distinction proposed by Isabel Moutinho in *The Colonial Wars in Contemporary Portuguese Literature* between “postcolonial

¹ For a precise chronological description of how Italy, as a nation, processed the memories of its colonial past, see Lombardi-Diop and Romero 11.

² Recognizing the very existence of this literature is a significant step for the Italian academic community. Firstly, this means a long-due public acknowledgment of the Italian colonial past and its consequences after years of denial. Secondly, it supports a better understanding of the current social changes happening in Italy by placing the emphasis on the intense relationship that some African populations maintained with Italy after their own country obtained independence, namely that of still considering it their motherland. See Bontempelli, Lombardi-Diop and Romero (13), Lori (26) and Ponzanesi (47).

³ For a more in-depth explanation of the term, and analysis of post-imperial literature, see Lori (39–52).

literature,” which refers to the works created within the culture of the colonized country, and “post-imperial literature,” for texts written by authors from the country responsible for the imperialist aggression.⁴

The most famous novel of Italian post-imperial literature is Ennio Flaiano’s *Tempo di uccidere* (1947), but in the years immediately following the loss of the colonies there were other publications that, unlike Flaiano’s, were built “sui luoghi comuni più ovvi del colonialismo nazionale e dai toni accentuatamente apologetici e nostalgici” (Tommasello 200). These works include Mario Tobino’s *Deserto della Libia* (1951) and Giuseppe Berto’s *Guerra in camicia nera* (1967). It was only decades later, at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the new millennium, that there appeared several more publications either set during colonial times or dealing with the colonial period.⁵

Contemporary post-imperialist literature leans towards crime fiction, which is the focus of this article. There are already a number of crime novels that deal with the colonial era, such as Andrea Camilleri’s *La presa di Macallè* (2003) and *Il nipote del Negus* (2010); Carlo Lucarelli’s *Lottava vibrazione* (2008) and *Albergo Italia* (2014); and Giorgio Ballario’s trilogy *Morire è un attimo* (2008), *Una donna di troppo* (2009) and *Le rose di Axum* (2012). Therefore, as Marco Sangiorgi suggests, we might ask ourselves the extent to which Italian crime fiction has tackled the key issues of national politics and how it has been able to interpret its history (130).

⁴ For an example of the current debate on terminology, see Negro (40).

⁵ There are texts that attempt to tell the history of the relations between Italy and its former colonies, normally through the stories of individuals personally involved in it, such as Mario Curradi’s *Cera e oro* (2002), Stefano Rizzo’s *Mohammed* (2003) and Mario Domenichelli’s *Lugemalé* (2005). There are novels that merely have a colonial setting, an appeal to a lingering exoticism, apparently difficult to eradicate, like *Un mattino a Irgalem*, written by Davide Longo (2001), and Fabrizio Coscia’s *Notte abissina* (2006). However, there is also another specific trend within post-imperialist literature in Italian: that of novels in which an adult son or daughter looks into the pages of Italian colonial history to find information that will allow him or her to get closer to his or her father, a soldier at the time of the imperialistic expansion. At least three novels have this plot: Alessandro Tamburini’s *L’onore delle armi* (1997), Annamaria Guadagni’s *L’ultima notte* (1998) and Franca Cavagnoli’s *Una pioggia bruciante* (2000).

The detective and his sidekick

Both of Lucarelli's crime novels take place in Eritrea. In *Albergo Italia*, a more classical detective story set in Massaua and Asmara, the two characters Cristina and Vittorio scheme to kill Cristina's husband. *Lottava vibrazione*, on the other hand, may be seen as straddling the genres of *noir* and *giallo*, and if the main focus is on Brigadier Serra's attempts to catch the suspected serial killer Major Flaminio, Lucarelli has packed many different stories and narrative levels into this intricate text. Indeed, woven through the main storylines are the affairs of various minor characters and the vicissitudes of the newly arrived soldiers. Lucarelli employs multiple narrators, flashbacks and other storytelling stratagems, such as inserting documents and describing photos, to offer the reader a kaleidoscopic image of the colony before the Adwa defeat. Giuliana Pias argues that "*Lottava vibrazione* è un ottimo esempio di come il noir possa essere messo al servizio [della] rivisitazione postcoloniale della Storia" (340).

The representation of otherness provides an indication of just how strenuously Lucarelli challenges the usual colonial iconography in his works. A telling example of this is the unusual pair of officers in *Albergo Italia*—Colaprico, the captain of the *Regi Carabinieri*, and the *zaptiè* Ogbà,⁶ the "Abyssinian Sherlock Holmes," who is more than a simple aide:

– Per cortesia, signor maresciallo – disse Colaprico, – quando il *buluk-ba-sci* Ogbà parla io lo ascolto sempre. Sa come lo chiamo? Lo Sherlock Holmes abissino’.

Il maresciallo non dice niente e neppure Ogbà. Nessuno dei due aveva mai letto i romanzi di Arthur Conan Doyle che il capitano si portava dall'Italia tutte le volte che tornava dalla licenza. Ogbà [...] però sa che è un complimento. (*Albergo* 11)

Lucarelli tries a similar technique in *Lottava vibrazione* with Brigadier Serra and the *zaptiè* Isàias, known as Dante by the Italians, although in this case the author does not offer the reader an in-depth psychological rendering of the character. Dante and Ogbà indirectly meet in Lucarelli's latest novel set in the colonies, *Il tempo delle iene*, when Ogbà remembers when he first joined the *Regi Carabinieri*

⁶ "Zaptiè" was the designation given to locally raised gendarmerie units in the Italian colonies in Africa.

and Dante was his instructor. The author uses the brief digression to tell the reader that Isàias was disappointed when he discovered that his nickname came from a simple *amari*, a storyteller, and not a great warrior as he had thought before. Isàias/Dante taught Ogbà a valuable lesson: “T’liàn fetiunní ilkà aitiaguès,” that is, “Italians always do useless things” (*Il tempo* 108). Lucarelli creates a parallel narration in which the perspective is reversed and the “Other” is the Italians and their obscure actions.

There are similarities with Lucarelli in Giorgio Ballario’s trilogy, where one of the main characters is Tesfaghì, a soldier belonging to the indigenous troops, the *sciumbasci* (the highest military rank achievable by local troops in the Italian army), but Ballario’s portrayal is much less positive:

Mi rivolsi a Tesfaghì, che non aveva ancora aperto bocca e attendeva il suo turno seduto impettito sulla sedia. Teneva in mano un taccuino. Anche se sapeva appena leggere e scrivere, un giorno me l’ero visto comparire con quadernetto e matita. Aveva notato che sia io che il maresciallo, durante le indagini, ci annotavamo i particolari più importanti, e aveva pensato di imitarci. (*Una donna* 50)

Since Lucarelli’s Ogbà is as ignorant about Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes as the Italian Marshal Bertone is, his ignorance does not sound like a racial affront. On the other hand, Tesfaghì is depicted almost like a monkey or, at best, like a child who is simply copying and caricaturing the two soldiers. The latter are Major Morosini, the narrator and protagonist, and his right-hand man Marshal Barbagallo. Tesfaghì, who is pivotal in their investigations, is portrayed as an egregious colonial cliché. For example, he does not speak proper Italian:

“Sono resti di antica città di Adùli” – spiegò lo sciumbasci rompendo il silenzio in cui era sprofondato sin dalla partenza – “una volta grande porto, molto importante per l’impero abissino. Poi venne grande onda e distruggere tutto. Città mai tornò a essere come prima”. (*Una donna* 31)

Furthermore, he has animal-like physical abilities:

Provai a guardare con il binocolo, ma nel buio più assoluto lo strumento ottico non serviva a nulla, per cui preferii affidarmi agli occhi di Tesfaghì.

Lo sciumbasci osservò a lungo le due piccole conche, finché mi fece un cenno con la mano.

— Laggiù io vede piccola luce. (*Le rose* 114)

Tesfaghi's behaviour is also more animal than human:

Il sottufficiale eritreo era un pezzo di pane, nonché uno dei migliori soldati indigeni di cui disponevamo, ma sfortunatamente non conosceva la Convenzione di Ginevra e tanto meno le leggi del Regno che proibiscono la tortura. Proveniva da un popolo dove l'incolumità di un prigioniero non è considerata un grande valore. Pensai con orrore ai metodi che Tesfaghi avrebbe usato per far parlare i due sospettati e mi precipitai con Calderoni nelle camere di sicurezza della caserma. Arrivammo in tempo. Quasi. Lo sciumbasci aveva già cominciato a lavorarsi uno degli abissini con il billao d'ordinanza. (*Una donna* 90)

Even from these few examples, it is quite clear that Ballario neither challenges nor criticizes colonial and Fascist mentalities. His assessment of Italy's colonial past is considerably less nuanced in a personal interview in which he openly asks for a revision of the current negative reading of the Italian colonial experience ("Un'intervista"). While Ballario openly acknowledges his nostalgic approach and the persistence of his taste for exoticism, Lucarelli is more critical. As Pias argues, Lucarelli deconstructs themes of the old colonial ideology through a formal, narrative and rhetorical process that calls into question the interpretative paradigms of cultural and postcolonial studies (347).

Femme fatale or colonial subject?

This does not mean that Lucarelli himself is immune to criticism, especially regarding the female characters of his novels, all of whom somehow create the impression that they are figures that are negative or, at best, not positive. As Igiaba Scego says about *Albergo Italia*, "Le due protagoniste femminili (una bianca e una nera) ne escono come violente 'puttane'. Ma nemmeno mi indigno sapete? [...] Sessismo e noia un binomio micidiale."

Scego is perhaps too readily dismissive. It may be possible that Lucarelli sought to create two anti-heroines willing to use their bodies to obtain what they

wanted, and in doing so, he consciously adopted the narrative style of old colonial novels. This narrative stratagem could be misinterpreted as emanating from an originally patronizing and patriarchal attitude. But as Monica Di Barbara cautions, Italian women were rarely represented as part of the colonial experience, and when they were, it was usually as nuns (195), so Lucarelli at least has the virtue of giving them a pivotal part in his colonial novels instead of relegating them to a marginal role as has generally been the case. On the other hand, his heroines tend to overcome the dualism of the Dark Woman/femme fatale and the Blonde, as outlined by Jennifer Yee in her discussion of French novels set in colonial Indochina:

The symbolic value of blondness is, of course, all the more important in the context of French colonial expansion. The dark-haired femme fatale, firmly anchored in the Orientalist literary and iconographic tradition, acts as a focus for the ambient exoticism. In these particular novels she, far more than the minor “native” characters, embodies the glamour and the horror of Otherness. And although she is never likened to the “native” women, the femme fatale is often of doubtful origin or of mixed race. (476)

In both *L'ottava vibrazione* and *Albergo Italia*, in fact, there are two pairs of women, one indigenous and one Italian; all four of them try to commit murder, and some succeed. In *L'ottava vibrazione*, Lucarelli describes Aicha's act of poisoning her rival Cristina's glass:

Scioglie il cordino che lega il sacchetto e lo apre sul palmo della mano. Dentro c'è una pallina di pasta bianca, sembra mollica. Aicha la schiaccia tra i polpastrelli, preme il pollice fino a farne un disco. Ci versa sopra l'acqua della caraffa, poca, appena per scioglierla, poi ci sputa anche, perché vuole che ci sia qualcosa di suo. Nel palmo adesso ha una schiuma densa come la bava di una lumaca, ci intinge dentro le dita e la spalma sul bordo della caraffa, ne dipinge il becco di vetro, accarezzandolo con i polpastrelli. Fa lo stesso con il bicchiere, fuori, sul bordo, dove si appoggiano le labbra, e dentro, come se lo lavasse con la sabbia [...] Arre, l'altra: lei deve morire. Gitè-bo. Un attimo dopo non pensa più a niente. Quando si muove così, Aicha non ha parole, non ha pensieri, solo sensazioni, come una iena o un gatto nero. (*L'ottava* 234)

In Lucarelli's description, Aicha becomes an animal, a beast, because he is not portraying a woman or a colonial subject but the would-be perpetrator of a crime, and the reader must bear this in mind. Because her cousin Cristoforo will drink from the deadly glass that Aisha is preparing, Cristina will not be poisoned. She, for her part, does kill her husband Leo, as his aunt and his grandmother asked her to do to prevent him from wasting the family fortune on his utopian agricultural projects. She drowns him during a trip on a small boat and later has an argument with her lover Vittorio, accusing him of not being there when she needed him:

Cristina si prese la stoffa della sottoveste, sui fianchi, e la tirò su, la arro-
tolò tra le dita e la sollevò fino al petto. Era nuda, sotto, ma Vittorio non
si ferma a guardarla come avrebbe fatto di solito, e quello che sente non è
desiderio, ma un'altra cosa, paura, dolore, orrore, un'altra cosa.

Aprì la bocca, vedendo i graffi che Leo le aveva fatto sui fianchi e
sulla pancia, mentre lei lo teneva sott'acqua. (*L'ottava* 404)

In *Albergo Italia*, Margherita, too, bears the signs of her crime on her body:

Margherita [...] era nuda, gli voltava la schiena. Da quella distanza non si
vedevano le efelidi, però i due graffi paralleli in mezzo alle spalle, ancora
con la crosta rossa di qualche giorno, quelli si notavano bene.

– Non crederai che sia abbastanza forte da uccidere un uomo e at-
taccarlo ad un lampadario, vero? – provò.

– No, – disse Colaprico. – Però da tenerlo fermo mentre lo faceva
Stevano, sì. (*Albergo* 117)

Cristina wants Vittorio to kill Leo, and Margherita tries to deflect Colaprico's suspicion: these women use their bodies to seduce and as a murder weapon. This is in stark contrast with the usual image of the submissive Italian women—Yee's "blondes" described above—sent to the Horn of Africa to provide their husbands with some form of domestic stability and to diminish the risk of illegitimate progeny produced with local women (Poidimani 227). The fourth woman in *Albergo Italia*, Ualla, behaves in a very similar way, although there are also important differences. She is quite unlike the fragile Italian women who suffer in the Eritrean heat, are never without a parasol and are—paradoxically—escorted by the men they are eventually going to kill. Ualla, whose name in her language means

monella, as well as *ragazza facile*, appears in the novel's prologue while seducing a soldier so a gang of thieves can rob the warehouse he is supposed to be guarding. Later on she is incarcerated, and it is while she is in prison and attempting to make an escape that she will meet the poor guard again:

Ualla ha braccia forti da portatrice d'acqua, il soldato ha afferrato quello che lo strangola e tira ma riesce solo a riprendere fiato per soffiare il suo nome, Ualla, perché lei stringe di più, in ginocchio alle sue spalle, le dita dei piedi nudi agganciate alla sabbia, gli stacca le mani che scivolano sul sudore del suo avambraccio e raddrizza la schiena per impiccarlo meglio. (Albergo 96)

Finally, Aicha is the only female character who is described very much like a prostitute, but, in the end, she is the only one who does not kill, and, even in failing to do so, she uses the female weapon *par excellence*—poison. Attentive readers will realize, therefore, that Lucarelli eventually allows the hidden, beastly nature of the female characters, superficially portrayed as ladies, to emerge. Nevertheless, the novel closes with Aicha and Vittorio reunited, although locked within their unequal and unfair relationship.

Italy and its elsewhere

The last characteristic of the post-imperial crime stories we wish to examine here is how the relationship between Italy and the colonies emerges from these novels, especially from the fiction of Camilleri and Lucarelli. Camilleri's two Italian-based novels tackle the colonial issue indirectly. In both books, various crimes are committed and investigated by the police, not always successfully. The creator of Inspector Montalbano does nevertheless obliquely describe the relationship between Italy and Ethiopia in two different historical moments. *La presa di Macallè* is the story of Michelino, a young boy who loses his innocence—morally and sexually—in Sicily during the days of the Ethiopian campaign. He becomes a murderer, also guilty of patricide. *Il nipote del Negus*, set before the colonial aggression of 1929, narrates the confusion created in the small and imaginary Sicilian village of Vigàta by the enrolment in the local mining school of a purported Ethiopian prince, whom Mussolini wants to please—literally at any cost—in order to facilitate his own relations with the Negus and his Rases. With the pointed irony that is his

trademark, Camilleri criticizes the madness of the Fascist regime and its disastrous effects on civil society, even if he does not fully address the repercussions of the nation's colonial ambitions during this period. As Elgin Kirsten Eckert argues, "reconstructing the past has meant for Camilleri to convey a message regarding the present: his novel clearly warns against political and religious orthodoxy and indoctrination" (207).

In Camilleri's book, Ethiopia is perceived by the Italian characters as a type of unreal elsewhere. It is the place where the Abyssinians come from and the place where the Italian soldiers go to fight and win but also to die. It is not a real country, with real people; it is more a place that exists only within Fascist propaganda, as this dialogue demonstrates:

- Ma si può sapiri come si chiamano?
- Cu?
- L'abissini!
- Cavaliere, volete mettervi a babbare? Come s'hanno a chiamare l'abissini? Abissini! ...
- Certo che lo so che l'abissini si chiamano abissini! Ma allora pir-chì li chiamano macari etiopi?
- Questo in cuscienza non ve lo so dire, cavaliere. Capace che quelli che stanno a nord si chiamano abissini e quelli che stanno a sud etiopi. O arriversa. (*Il nipote* 41)

This description implies the same concept:

L'indomani 'u papà portò una carta geografica dell'Abissinia e l'appizzò con le puntine da disegno supra la porta della càmmare di mangiari... I posti bissini avivano nomi strammi, Macallè, Tacazzè, Adigrat, Amba Alagi, Amba Aradam, Axum; i nomi poi dei generali bissini, che si sintivano dire alla radio, erano ancora più strammi: ras Sejum, ras Destà, ras Mangascià... (*La presa* 68)

Camilleri uses everything related to the colonial venture to ridicule the regime and its violence against the Italian population. As noted by Eckert, "it is during the young nation's most glorious moments (the Sieges of Adua, Axum, and Macallè), that the pain is first felt, as Michelino is raped by his tutor" (205). Michelino as

“Young Italy” and his rape “mirror Gadda’s belief that Fascism represented ‘a true rape of culture and civilization’” (205).

Lucarelli, on the other hand, sets his novel before the Fascist colonial enterprise, in 1896 and 1899. This is a daring move because very few people in Italy would know that Italian imperial aggression commenced during the nineteenth century. He goes further than that: in both novels he includes crimes committed in Italy that have repercussions in Eritrea. One such example is the military supplies scam that Vittorio in *L’ottava vibrazione* has to cover up in Massaua:

[Vittorio] faceva sparire le cose [...] A diluire l’impressione di fare qualcosa di disonesto c’erano due fattori.

Il primo: glielo aveva ordinato il Cavaliere, che era il capo di gabinetto di un sottosegretario al ministero degli Esteri, e quindi suo superiore.

Il secondo: quella roba non era mai esistita.

Era stata registrata sui documenti di imbarco, in patria, e regolarmente pagata dall’amministrazione coloniale, ma nessuno l’aveva mai realmente acquistata. Le fatture erano gonfiate.

Il suo compito era far sparire la merce inesistente al momento dello sbarco a Massaua. (*L’ottava* 7)

In Lucarelli’s books, Eritrea seems to be a representation of Italy. The author engages with Italy and its crimes and conspiracies through their effects and repercussions in Eritrea. Therefore, the impression is that neither of the authors fully addresses the imperial issue: rather, they use the colonial theme to pursue their goals, satirize Fascism and portray Italian historical crimes from different perspectives.

Postcolonial crime fiction or current affairs?

This overview of the characteristics of Italian crime novels set in the colonies or during the colonial era appears to support a “social noir” theory. According to Claudio Milanese, history and crime fiction now have a list of common themes, such as death, illness, information manipulation, terrorism, violence, vices and practices of power in the search (via narration) for the hidden causes of manifest events. Far from being just a simple game of riddles, the crime novel has become a sort of additional instrument with which to jog the reader’s memory and unveil

the dysfunctions of the past and present political and social system (Milanesi 16). Carlo Lucarelli himself seems to be on similar ground when, regarding the relationship between *noir* and the historical novel, he argues that the detective story always looks through to the darker side of things, thus becoming an exposé and a critical exercise (*Il giallo storico* 58; see also Somigli).

It not surprising, therefore, that these authors use the crime genre to deal with controversial topics. This can be done critically, as we have seen, or in a more laudatory fashion. For example, some historical figures appear in Ballario's novels, including a very young Hugo Pratt, Colonel Graziani and the writer Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. Graziani and Marinetti in particular are controversial figures—the former having been guilty of atrocities and massacres, and the latter having been implicated with the Fascist regime. The focus of the narration is not the representation of historical figures, and the novel's fictional nature allows the author to portray these people in a positive and human light, briefly challenging their questionable characteristics and ultimately focussing on their better qualities, thus absolving them. Take, for example, this exchange with Marinetti:

– Permettete che vi presenti i miei amici e commilitoni, Renato Fontana e Filippo Tommaso Marinetti.
 – Marinetti? Intendete il famoso poeta? [...]
 – Sto lavorando a un nuovo progetto — disse [...] — Sto scrivendo il Poema africano della “Divisione XXVIII Ottobre”, in cui cerco di sintetizzare le emozioni che mi danno la guerra e questi aspri paesaggi abissini. Non trovate anche voi che un conflitto, in quest'ambiente africano, assume un fascino particolare? [...]

Sorrisi, ma temo che non riuscii a mascherare la mia perplessità di fronte a quella lettura entusiasta delle gesta belliche. Se non altro apprezzavo il fatto che, a differenza di tanti tromboni nella Camera o nei giornali, Marinetti e i suoi futuristi avessero il coraggio e la coerenza di vivere le loro opinioni in prima linea, rischiando anche la pelle. (*Le rose* 80)

It is revealing that a reactionary and part-time writer trying to create an alternative narrative places Marinetti in one of his books because, as Roberto Derobertis aptly explains, Marinetti is a symbol himself of a misleading representation of imperial aggression, portrayed in his works not as an ordinary war but as the inevitable victory of the machines against humanity (121).

If Ballario is trying to offer a different point of view on Marinetti and his loyalty to Fascism, portraying it in a positive light, it seems, however, that post-colonial crime fiction in general is striving to create an alternative narration of the colonial era and even a space, if not a place, in which to right society's wrongs. A very significant example of this intention can be found in Lucarelli's *Albergo Italia*, which includes a reference to the historic Banca Romana scandal (83), which causes the Secret Service to send their emissaries, Stevano and Margherita, to kill the victim, Farandola, who was blackmailing the intelligence department. After resisting Margherita's advances and solving the case, Colaprico is about to take the two culprits to Italy, where they are supposed to stand trial. He has a quick exchange with Stevano, who boasts that despite Colaprico's efforts, he will be imminently released:

Gli aveva detto: *saremo liberi prima ancora di arrivare in Italia* e lui gli aveva risposto: non importa.

Gli aveva detto: *puoi risparmiarti le catenelle, anzi, guarda, appena facciamo scalo ad Aden te le rispedisco indietro* e lui aveva risposto di nuovo: non importa. [...]

Allora: *sei un carabiniere, no? no?* E lui: sì.

Allora: *hai giurato fedeltà al re, no? no?* E lui: sì.

Allora: *io sono stato mandato qui per proteggere il re.*

E lui: *mi stai dicendo che c'era anche il nome del re su quelle carte?*

Allora: *silenzio.* [...]

Solo lo sguardo di un momento, poi, a Stevano: *ho giurato fedeltà al re ma anche alla legge. E magari sarai pure libero prima di arrivare in Italia, ma qui, dove ci sono io, te ne stai in catene.* (*Albergo* 120; italics in the original)

The *carabiniere* acknowledges his gesture as being symbolic and at the same time the only one he can in all conscience make, given the knowledge he has gained about what has happened, at least until higher orders overturn his judgement, rendering justice ineffective and burying the truth. This novel, like others examined here, may be about the past, but the subtle links to a frustrating present are tangible. Milanese persuasively argues that storytelling, over and above being a form of knowledge, is also a way to resist oppression, injustice and oblivion. Thus a novel can end up transforming itself into an attack weapon whose aim is to

restore, at least on a symbolic level, truth and justice—that reality systematically negates (Milanesi 22). Crime fiction—an accessible literary form easily available to and appreciated by a wide readership—can thus conceivably be an effective instrument with which to explore a controversial topic such as the colonial era, not only presenting it (and its protagonists) in a different light but also linking it to present practices via a sometimes very thin historical veil, thereby possibly advancing a process of rethinking and challenging the widely accepted, sanitized version of Italian colonial rule and its aftermath.

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