

Immacolata Amodeo, Eva Erdmann (Eds.)

Crime and Nation

Political and Cultural Mappings of Criminality
in New and Traditional Media

Immacolata Amodeo, Brendan Dooley (Eds.)

INTERCULTURAL KNOWLEDGE

Volume 1

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Introduction

Immacolata Amodeo / Eva Erdmann

The essays collected in this volume are the result of the conference "Crime & Nation. Political and Cultural Mappings of Nationality and Criminality in Traditional and in New Media", which was organised by Jacobs University Bremen (formerly International University Bremen) in cooperation with Universität Erfurt, and held in Bremen from December 8 to December 10 in 2005. This volume presents most of the conference papers, which have been edited for publication.

The point of interest and departure for the conference has been the continuous success as well as the broad popular and critical recognition of the crime novel since the start of the 21st century. Within this genre particularly those works have found high acclaim, which mirror persistent geographical structures, follow current political and cultural changes, or even envision completely new topographies. While this recent boom of the crime novel initiated the conference, the papers mapped a far more multimedia and multi-century space for the debate about the crime novel as such. The essays at hand identify a close connection between Crime & Nation that transcends different media and cultural and political borders, and can be retraced far back into the bygone centuries of cultural and media history. The contributions to this volume account for the complex entanglement of Crime & Nation by considering their relationship within the context of contemporary perspectives and historical dimensions.

The essential plurality intrinsic to the combination of criminal topoi in the light of questions of nationality and its prevailing importance had already been anticipated by the conference invitations for participation to scholars from various disciplines and different national and diverse international backgrounds. All contributions primarily confirm two assumptions of the conference agenda: firstly, the frame of geographically or culturally delineated spaces – such as the region, the city, or any particular area – fulfils a constitutive function within the thematizations of crime. This holds true for all media where the thematization of crime has been established. This particular framework allows for a first, definite outcome as it entails a new bonding of the crime novel to specific spaces, which runs counter to the putative dissolution of boundaries in the spheres of economics, communication, and information transfer. A second interesting result is the significance of nationality as a changeable cipher for either new or already established political spaces, since this counteracts political and cultural segmentations that have been predominant – at least in the European context – since the beginning of the 21st century, replacing nineteenth-century legacies of firmly established concepts of national cultures.

On one hand, therefore "nation" denotes first of all a generic structural element; the respective polity and society are individually defined in every essay and the narrative analyses their precise functions. Among others, this volume addresses Italy, Germany, Africa, the American South, and Transylvania. On the other hand, it is common to all essays that they respond to and analyse a trend that runs counter to the development of intercultural communication. The correlation between "Crime & Nation" assumes an idiosyncratic form respective of its specific context, and with regard to its function within society, its importance within a market strategic environment, and its stereotyping or innovating potential for the portrayal of foreign cultures, which, in turn, also allows for an introspection of ones own culture.

The authors in this volume choose a very broad approach towards the initial question of a correlation between crime and nation in different media. The first section of this volume, entitled "Crime & Nation: Literature – Contemporary Issues", addresses topics of current discussion. Both Jeanne E. Glesener (Luxemburg / Aix en Provence) and Marieke Krajenbrink (Limerick) attest to the plurality of meaning within the genre of the contemporary crime novel. Time and again, both essays provide examples for how local details in the form of cultural patterns and stereotypes pervade and interweave with global patterns. The concurrence of the local and the global creates multiple and hybrid identities, while the character of the 'ethnic detective' functions as a cultural diplomat. This section furthermore reflects upon the interrelation between crime fiction and empirical evidence. In particular Sélom Gbanou's (Calgary) essay demonstrates how fluid the transition between fact and fiction can be. The author describes the African crime novel in its process of coming into being. He argues that the genre emerges from a narrative prose that realistically portrays the violence prevalent in African societies. Within the genre of the African crime novel, the crime itself can only be presented in conjunction with actual social inequity. Hence, the fictionalisation of authentic patterns of crime and violence becomes an intrinsic necessity. Based on a detailed empirical data acquisition concerning the internet presentation of an international online book retailer, Margrit Schreier (Bremen) demonstrates that occasional discrepancies occur between the marketing strategies of publishing houses and readers' interests and expectations. Although publishers try to stress and highlight the connection between "Crime & Nation" by emphasising cultural and national types, readers' comments show that this does not always mirror their prime interest in the novels.

Among other contributions, K. Ludwig Pfeiffer's (Bremen) article on Sherlock Holmes as a classic within the genre of crime fiction complements the media-historical reconstruction of "Crime & Nation" in different entertainment media, addressed in the second section of this volume, "Crime & Nation: Literature: Historical Issues". In his paper on Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Holt Meyer (Erfurt) introduced the provocative set phrase "the Empire bites back". As further outlined in his essay, Meyer shows that certain circumstances allow for the abolition and replacement of cultural boundaries by blood brotherhood. This act of 'genetic' overcoming ultimately – and seemingly