

In Focus

African Literature

Vol. 2, Issue 1 (June, 2016)

An International Journal of World Literatures & Cultures

Detecting Postcolonial McCall Smith's *Lady Detective* and Botswanian Crime Scene

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Abstract: Detective fiction is not inherently a conservative genre but fluid in nature as evident from the constant revision the genre has gone through rereading and rewriting. Still the popularity of the genre remains unhindered, like any other popular work of art, for its combination of familiarity and uniqueness. Crime fictions from postcolonial world take part in this subversion of the genre in a prominent manner, primarily to comment on socio-political predicament of contemporary society. Detective fiction, a genre founded in the West, is defined by its rigid structure: starting with a crime/murder, entrance of a white male detective figure, ending with the solution of crime by the intellectually superior detective. Therefore manipulating the genre can be a natural way of 'writing back,' and indeed postcolonial detectives have been breaking away from all the stereotypes established by the western detectives. However, this breaking away has not been as unambiguous as one might expect especially when it is the white writers who pioneered the adoption of the genre in postcolonial setting. Set in Botswana Alexander McCall Smith's immensely successful The No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency Series is probably the best example. The black female detective Mme Ramotswe undeniably changed the African crime fiction scenario by overturning conventional features, but at the same time it seems to be exoticizing Africa. This paper would like to explore how the western detection and African detection cohabits in Mme Ramotswe mysteries which can be termed as a postcolonial detective fiction for its attempt to inhabit what Homi Bhabha called 'liminal space'. I would like to argue, in trying to make

peace with the dichotomy existing in the postcolonial African society The No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency Series (as authored by a sympathetic ex-colonizer) cannot help but reflecting and reconciling differences that exist in these two worlds through both the genre's structure and content rather than 'writing back', as a result simultaneously breaking away and following the stereotypes of the genre and its representation of Africa.

Keywords: *postcolonial Botswana, post-colonial detective, liminal space.*

Detective fiction has long been deprived of scholarly attention due to being labelled as 'low' literature. However in recent times it has attracted attention of scholars for its undeniable social, cultural and political portrayal which is closer to life. Thus in crime fiction setting, the scene of the crime, plays pivotal role; rooted in psychology these fictions are highly affected by the place and physical settings (as psychology is rooted in setting). At the beginning the crime scene was mostly the western world from where the genre was adopted by the 'other,'¹ or a colonial/postcolonial crime scene presented from the western perspective. Therefore emergence of crime fiction from the postcolonial writers set about a different sort of crime, criminal, investigation, and investigator.

In recent days Africa has produced considerable number of postcolonial detective fictions worth studying. But popular literature has been mostly overlooked for serious studies. Postcolonial discourse in African context has always revolved around 'serious' authors such as Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong² et al. But now the importance of popular literature is emerging in shaping the identity and representation of a nation. In fact Muff Anderson and Elsie Cloete have considered the "emergence of popular detective fiction in Africa as part of a new third wave of literature"² (Anderson and Cloete 123).

Still there is a lack of crime fiction dealing with postcolonial conditions when compared to other forms of postcolonial literature. Indigenous writers strictly followed the Western tradition of the genre or concentrated on 'serious' literature. It is ex-colonizers who pioneered the creation of postcolonial detectives, 'generally white men who have lived in the countries they write about or who have studied them

sympathetically' (Christian 2010a: 283). Set in Botswana Alexander McCall Smith's immensely successful. The *No.1 Ladies Detective Agency* Series belongs to this group of writing. Alexander McCall Smith undeniably changed the African crime fiction scenario by creating the black female detective Mme Precious Ramotswe. Born in Southern Rhodesia (now called Zimbabwe), the British writer later moved to Scotland and currently is a professor of Medical law at the University of Edinburg. Though he has been lecturing in different African universities, even helped in setting up a new law school at the University of Botswana, his representation of African crime scene requires investigation to measure up how much he is breaking or perpetuating colonial stereotypes of Africa and if he has been able to create a postcolonial detective fiction in true sense. The eighteen novels in the series, till date, vouch for the popularity the series has gained. Beyond being just popular books, as I would like to argue, the series represents the conflicting position of the author: the novels are overturning conventional features of the detective genre to halt western hegemony, but at the same time they seem to be exoticizing or stereotyping Africa and sometimes even condescending. The paper is mostly focused on the first two novels of the series: *The No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency* (1998) and *Tears of the Giraffe* (2000).

The trend of writing crime fiction in postcolonial world has stemmed from the Western crime writing tradition. However the writings cannot help but reflect differences that exist in these two worlds. The question is how far the postcolonial crime investigators can use the codes and conventions of a western genre to retrieve and promote the concept associated with it without falling victim to the colonial ideology. The probable answer would be, in Homi Bhaba's words, by inhabiting 'liminal space'. It is the 'interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy' (Bhabha 4). Thus a postcolonial detective works in the borderline of western and indigenous epistemologies. Many White writers have attempted this feat with different degrees of success. This paper would like to explore how Western detection and African detection cohabits in Mme Ramotswe mysteries and if they can be termed as works of postcolonial detective fiction.

Detective fiction as a genre

Popularly Edgar Allan Poe is considered to be the inventor of detective genre. Though his first work of the genre *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841) was inspired by both the form and content of William Godwin's earlier novel *Caleb Williams* (1794), he is the reason behind the genre's popularity among readers and authors. With Arthur Conan Doyle, the form reaches its first summit which was followed by less popular works of G.K. Chesterton. Then came the 'Golden Age' dominated by Agatha Christie. In the USA, in opposition to genteel 'English' detective novel, the hardboiled private eye fiction was born in the writings of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler. These novels were set in threatening and alienating urban spaces symbolically representing sterile modernity. Furthermore unlike investigation as a leisurely engagement of the English detectives, the American detective is "a professional investigator who works for a living, and, more significantly, who works for him- or herself" (Scaggs 60). Since then any work in the genre has been seen as a descendant of the either traditions set by England and USA.

The classical detective fictions like Sherlock Holmes stories follow very clear pattern of narration starting with crime and then the narration exposes the means of crime, tracing the criminal and re-establishment of order. In the Post-World War Two period the emerging postmodern literature used this 'assumption of detective fiction (as a foil) that mind can solve all; by twisting the details just the opposite becomes the case' (Holoquist 155). The perception of classical detective fiction that by unmasking the mystery, the criminal, familiarity can be restored changed by postmodern fictions and especially by the metaphysical detective fiction that restored strangeness not familiarity, 'a strangeness that more often than not is the result of jumbling the well-known patterns of classical detective stories' (Holoquist 155). Thus metaphysical crime fiction subverts the classical conventions. Merrivale and Sweeney lists the six characteristic themes of a metaphysical detective novel: 'the defeated sleuth'; 'the world, city, or text as labyrinth'; 'the ambiguity, ubiquity, eerie meaningfulness, or sheer meaninglessness of clues and evidences'; 'the missing person, the double, and the lost, stolen or exchanged identity'; 'absence, falseness, circularity, or self-defeating nature of any kind of closure to the investigation' (Merrivale and

Sweeney 8). Postcolonial crime fiction too use these tropes to question the colonial epistemology and by prioritizing the investigation of the concept of truth and justice more than the crime and the criminal. Postcolonial crime scene combining with metaphysical detective novel's tropes result in an experimental crime fiction of its own kind that befits to represent, analyse and detect the condition of postcolonial society. The essence of this experimental crime fiction's form, Eugene Schleh writes, 'Is a fruitful clash between the artist's view of life and the previously established forms of detective fiction' in addition to five more characteristics as expressed by Carter in his essay "Ismael Reed's Neo-Hoodoo Detection":

1) It combines elements of detective and crime fiction with the devices of mainstream and/or experimental fiction; 2) it reshapes the elements of detective and crime fiction to fit a personal vision; 3) it usually examines the mysteries of the spirit and/or skeletons in the closets of societies (it generally aims at exposing the spiritual weaknesses of entire societies rather than ferreting out the hidden villainy of a single individual; it is closer to metaphysics and sociology than to intellectual gamesmanship and psychology); 4) it may or may not resolve any puzzle or problem it poses; and 5) the detective and crime novel element must play a major role in the work as a whole (Carter 1976; 273-274).

Therefore postcolonial detective fiction is more in par with American sub-genre at the same time challenging its formulas too. *The No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency* Series consists of elements from both sub-genres but there are too few occasions where the novels challenge the established norms set by the western genre to consider it as postcolonial detective fiction. Postcolonial detective fiction problematizes the very functions of investigator, victim and perpetrator. Sometimes the perpetrator himself/herself is a victim or the investigator is the perpetrator. This dynamic relations is outcome of the difficulty of defining 'right' and 'wrong', 'justice' and 'law' in a world still haunted by its colonial epistemology. The detective fictions that are being discussed here make no such challenges to colonial epistemology but adds its postcolonial concern to it to occupy an 'in-between' place.

The narrative follows primarily British 'whodunit' fiction for the nature of the perpetrator; in detective fictions like Christie's or Doyle's the criminal is rarely professional. Equipped with extraordinary rational thinking the detective can set the society back to normal- so is the fraudster with nine fingers who fakes injury for insurance money (McCall Smith 1998) or the university professor who causes someone's death by accident (McCall Smith 2000). Set in a city, petty crimes are not the focus of hard-boiled fictions but crimes that have greater impact on the whole society. The novels rarely deal with such momentous crimes. One such rare case is in *The No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency* where Mma Ramotswe saved a boy from getting murdered by a traditional medicine man. *Muti* killing or killing for human organs is a critical issue Botswana has to face till day. The case is based on an actual medicine murder that shook Botswana in 1994- the killing of a 14-year-old girl whose body parts were removed. In the story though the boy was saved by her, justice was not served most probably in attempt to avoid a serious ambience in otherwise light narrative⁴.

Classical detective fictions associate criminality with an individual rather than tracing it back to society- crime is a single social disruption till the detective solves it and puts everything back to normal. From this aspect, postcolonial crime fictions tend to follow American hard-boiled genre where society plays dominant role in creation of crime and criminality. *The No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency* Series, as discussed above, more focused on individual crime than presenting it as social phenomenon. Many of them are small crimes or even mere immoral acts.

Then question could be raised how far the series can be reckoned as belonging to the detective genre. In a detective genre crime is the main focus, any subplot or digression must relate to it. McCall Smith has visibly shifted the focus from crime and placed number of digression in his works. Mr Obed Ramotswe's narrative in *The No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency* (McCall Smith 1998: 25-47) or Mma Makutsi and her brother's story in *Tears of the Giraffe* are not related to the crime or detection plot any way.

According to popular definition, a detective fiction consists of a crime, a criminal, a victim and a detective. *The No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency* Series though contains all of the four elements what it lacks is a detailed process of detection. But the readers are given equal clues and

details regarding crime as the detective to get involved and identify with the investigator. In fact, there are few narratives of the crime accessible only to the reader. John Scaggs has associated classical ‘whodunit’ fiction with ‘readerly’ and hard-boiled with ‘writerly’ text⁵. Considering the simple cases presented in the novels, there are no rooms left for reader’s interpretation. Mma Ramotswe’s solution is the only plausible solution. Therefore as a text the series follows classical ‘whodunit’ and is definitely ‘readerly’.

The No.1 Ladies’ Detective Agency Series then borrows elements from both the sub-genres and adds African attributes to it. Victor Turner defines liminality as a moment “when the past has lost its grip and the future has not yet taken definite shape” (Turner 133). McCall Smith’s fiction is not challenging the established genre (as postcolonial detective fiction does), as we have observed, but incorporating Africanness to it. In this light, these works do seem to dwell in liminal space where they are breaking away from the rigid form of detective genre to provide enough measures in conceiving of a genre that aptly expresses situation of postcolonial Botswana. Thereby the works inhabit the ‘liminal space’ between Western and postcolonial detective fiction.

Postcolonial Africa as the setting of crime

Detective fiction writers have set their mysteries in Africa from time to time. However the representations are varied in nature and set apart by the writings of colonialism and postcolonialism. In western world both crime fiction and colonial literature became an established genre in the nineteenth century. Besides influencing the public view of crime and justice, crime fiction also coincides with colonial fictions that it criminalizes its colonial subjects to justify expansion of empire. Therefore, the colonized were not absent from this West-developed genre. Inevitably the colonized was turned into a potential criminal whose crime was to violate and transgress the law and order set by the colonizer. As Abdul R. Janmohamed contends that the reason behind it is to conceal the ‘contradiction between the theoretical justification of the exploitation and the barbarity of its actual practice’ by ‘obsessively portraying the supposed inferiority and barbarity of the racial ‘Other’, thereby insisting on the profound moral difference between self and ‘Other’ (Janmohamed 23). Further many writers set the crime scene in Africa to heighten the vicious environment apt for criminal encounter.

For example in “Death on the Nile,” Agatha Christie presented the nature itself as an influencing element of immorality:

There was a savage aspect about the sheet of water in front of them, the masses of rock without vegetation that came down to the water’s edge . . . ‘There’s something about this country that makes me feel – wicked. It brings to the surface all the things that are boiling inside one. Everything’s so unfair – so unjust’ (Christie 252-253).

Postcolonial Africa as the setting of crime has moved away from such extreme representation. Now the crime is set in an Africa emerging from its colonial past; grappling with dichotomy of tradition and modernity. McCall Smith’s view of Africa is at the same time critical and welcoming of both modernisation and the traditional ways.

Crime fiction is literary perspective of crime in the society. It opens up the door to possible criminality lurking under the seemingly peaceful society. However McCall Smith appears to be utilizing the genre for reverse purpose; reassuring the reader of relative peacefulness of Botswana despite of its surrounding disorder and lawlessness. For example Nigeria has been described as a place opposite to heaven (McCall Smith 1998:12), Johannesburg is the centre of random crime and superstitious practises such as *muti* killing: ‘Johannesberg, she thought, [is] where people fell victim to *tsostis*⁶ who prowled about at night, to car thieves who were prepared to use their guns, and to random acts of indiscriminate violence by young men with no sense of the value of life’ (McCall Smith 2000:297). Botswana, on the other hand, is ‘much safer than other countries in that part of Africa’ (McCall Smith 2000:269). It is true that Botswana is flaunted as the single postcolonial African success story for its constant political stability and economic growth since independence. However serious issues that trouble Botswana like AIDS merely gets mentioned. Mma Makutsi’s brother is dying from “cruel disease...like a drought dries up a landscape” (McCall Smith 2001:58) is the only hint dropped by the author. Therefore one might wonder if it is not to romanticize a Botswana free from any troubles amid the chaotic African scene. In fact, McCall Smith’s deliberate choice of a relatively peaceful country suggest his unwillingness to engage with social and political injustice unlike the

detectives of hard-boiled genre. He preferred his detective to concentrate on ‘matters of individual moral failure. Such individual failures extend to issues of greed, avarice, petty fraud and life’s mysteries such as missing or dishonest spouses’ (Anderson and Cloete 130).

Rise of detective stems from modernisation. Before modernisation ‘there was neither a need for detectives nor detective agencies. Neighbours were each other’s sleuths and the fact that everybody knew everyone else’s business kept traditional communities relatively balanced and in check’ (Anderson and Cloete 126). But with the growing modernisation the complication of life increases and the sense of community is lost. Therefore modernisation has not been looked at as a positive progress, it has been measured in terms of number of Mercedes-Benz in the country. Mma Ramotswe and Mma Makutsi discuss the negative influence:

These Mercedes-Benz cars have not been a good thing for Africa. They are very fine cars, I believe, but all the ambitious people in Africa want one before they have earned it. That has made for big problems.” “The more Mercedes- Benzes there are in a country,” offered Mma Makutsi, “the worse that country is. If there is a country without any Mercedes-Benzes, then that will be a good place. You can count on that. (McCall Smith 2000:189)

Mma Ramotswe’s solving crimes is, in a way, her attempt to restore old Botswana values and beliefs: ‘These solutions, even if they are in Mma Ramotswe’s own mind, restore equilibrium. Individual moral failure, guilt and lack of virtue are exposed, are found out and then expelled’ (Anderson and Cloete 126). Because ‘Mma Ramotswe did not want Africa to change. She did not want her people to become like everybody else, soulless, selfish, forgetful of what it means to be an African, or, worse still, ashamed of Africa’ (McCall Smith 1998:320). Therefore the setting plays a major role in changing the lady detective’s ways of pursuing the crime and the criminal.

The moral question is always at the centre of every case she undertakes. A detective is the moral centre of the narrative to ensure a fair solution at the end. But Mma Ramotswe goes further and judges the situation on basis of righteousness and the problem is dissolved according to her moral judgement rather than the law:

In a number of successful cases, she had gone beyond the finding of information. She had made decisions about the outcome, and these decisions had often proved to be momentous ones. For example, in the case of the woman whose husband had a stolen Mercedes-Benz, she had arranged for the return of the car to its owner. In the case of the fraudulent insurance claims by the man with thirteen fingers, she had made the decision not to report him to the police....So she did interfere in other people's lives and it was not true that all she did was provide information (McCall Smith 2000: 265).

Preservation of everything traditional affects the detective's point of view and investigation. The setting and the investigator mutually reflect each other. Mma Ramotswe's passion of detection is entwined with her love for Africa which is evident as the author introduces the detective to the reader: 'She was a good detective....a good woman in a good country....She loved her country, Botswana, which is a place of peace, and she loved Africa, for all its trials.' She loves all the people God has created, 'but I especially know how to love the people who lives in this place. They are ...my brothers and sisters. It is my duty to help them to solve the mysteries in their lives. This is what I am called to do' (McCall Smith 1998: 7).

The Postcolonial Lady detective

Many colonial detective fictions used Africa as setting but detectives, victims and main criminals were always European. Even if natives were present in the scene it is as a foil to the European, as Schleh observes: "The Africans were usually dismissed as inefficient, slow, superstitious witchcraft ridden, having no sense of time, or just having different though processes. At best they can take care of African aspects of a situation such as using a black policeman to question other Africans; to let them question whites would be too insulting' (Schleh 6)⁷. Postcolonial writers have transformed the genre by employing indigenous protagonists, most importantly the detective figure. Therefore, it affected other aspects of the story such as method of detection, type of crimes and so on. But the change might not have been as drastic as one would expect especially when the creator is a white author. Such detectives can be termed as 'detectives of transition', for they belong to the starting period

of adaptation of detective figure from European world to postcolonial world.

Detective fiction's emergence with colonial fiction highlights the fact that the colonizer used the narrative to support and expand their colonization of the native⁸. A 'post-colonial detective', therefore, has to work against its colonial legacy to build on a postcolonial way of detection to arrive at its own constructive way of dealing with crime and investigation. Ed Christian in his study *The Post-Colonial Detective* considers any indigenous detective irrespective of white or non-white creator to be post-colonial detective. Further he defines 'postcolonial detectives' as detectives who are:

always indigenous to or settlers in the countries where they work; they are usually marginalized in some way, which affects their ability to work at their full potential; they are always central and sympathetic characters; and their creators' interest usually lies in an exploration of how these detectives' approach to criminal investigation are influenced by their cultural attitudes. (Christian 2, 2010 b)

Basically a post-colonial detective is armed with indigenous knowledge and western method of detection. Therefore the figure can also be studied as a 'mimicry'- a colonial subject built by imitating the colonizers. Alexander McCall Smith's lady detective fits well with Christian's definition of Post-colonial detective.

Mma Ramotswe apparently mimicry of female detectives created by Agatha Christie, as she proudly refers to her while introducing herself: "Many women are detectives," said Mma Ramotswe, with dignity. "Have you not read Agatha Christie?" (McCall Smith 1998: 311). Other book she continuously refers to is fictional American author Clovis Anderson's *The Principles of Private Detection*. These books are disseminating Western ideologies in Mma Ramotswe's detection process. Ironically the lady detective, though an avid reader of *The Principles of Private Detection*, always acts exactly opposite to the method suggested in Anderson's book as they turn out to be unsuitable to implement in reality. In *Tears of the Giraffe* Mrs Curtis asks Mma Ramotswe to ascertain her son's possible death that have taken place ten years back. She understands "the author of her professional bible" would

have described the case “a stale inquiry” (McCall Smith 2000: 92), still she undertakes the task. McCall Smith in his interview with *The Atlantic* reveals Clovis Anderson to be ‘actually a failure...never really been a very good private investigator.’ In *The Limpopo Academy of Private Detection* Mma Ramotswe and Clovis Anderson meet and as it turns out he is not as sharp as Mma Ramotswe had thought him to be. Therefore Clovis Anderson’s *The Principles of Private Detection* becomes a sort of mockery of the Western knowledge system and a take on how anything Western occupies the place of authority by default. Mr J.L.B. Matekoni and Mma Potokwane’s discussion on Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, comically questions Western hegemony in world knowledge system:

“Some people are slow to give,” she said. “It is something to do with how their mothers brought them up. I have read all about this problem in a book. There is a doctor called Dr Freud who is very famous and has written many books about such people.”

... ..

“It is a book from London. But it is very interesting. He says that all boys are in love with their mother.”

“That is natural,” said Mr J.L.B. Matekoni. “Of course boys love their mothers. Why should they not do so?”

Mma Potokwane shrugged. “I agree with you. I cannot see what is wrong with a boy loving his mother.”

“Then why is Dr Freud worried about this?” went on Mr J.L.B. Matekoni. “Surely he should be worried if they did not love their mothers.”

(McCall Smith 2000:115-116)

As a lady detective, Mma Ramotswe can be considered as a marginalized character as she took up a ‘man’s job’. But during her investigation she rarely seems to be discriminated for her gender, even though people assume a private detective is always a man. She is rather assertive of women’s right and power. In fact, she often points out women are better detectives as “women are the ones who know what’s going on...They are the ones with eyes” (McCall Smith 1998: 91). From the novels she comes out as a strong feminist character. Further Mma Ramotswe seems to be influencing a more affirmative view of woman on other characters.

Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni, her mechanic friend and later fiancé, approves his adopted daughter's interest in engines as 'Mma Ramotswe had taught him that there is no reason why women should not do anything they wanted....So if a girl might aspire becoming a detective, then why should she not aspire to entering the predominantly male world of cars and engines?' (McCall Smith 2000: 293).

Mma Ramotswe follows her intuition, without any logic to support it, in number of cases and successfully solves them. The binary division Orientalism makes between East and West is being merged by juxtaposition of intellect and intuition, the head and the heart, in Mma Ramotswe's detection process. In *Tears of the Giraffe* while searching for a missing American boy Mma Ramotswe depends on this power of intuition:

“And this intuition you felt at that place,” said Mma Makutsi hesitantly. “What did it tell you? Where this poor American boy was?”

“There,” said Mma Ramotswe quietly. “That young man is there.”

... ..

“He is living there? Still?”

“No,” said Mma Ramotswe. “He is dead. But he is there. Do you know what I am talking about?”

Mma Makutsi nodded. She knew. Any sensitive person in Africa would know what Mma Ramotswe meant. When we die, we do not leave the place we were in when we were alive. We are still there, in a sense; our spirit is there. It never goes away. This was something which white people simply did not understand. They called it superstition, and said that it was a sign of ignorance to believe in such things. But they were the ones who were ignorant. If they could not understand how we are part of the natural world about us, then they are the ones who have closed eyes, not us (McCall Smith 2000: 166-167).

Thus she becomes a figure of hybridity that combines both western and African knowledge system. Her method is more akin to American hard-boiled detectives' like Raymond Chandler's and Dashiell Hammett's, it

is more action-based than intellectually dependant, unlike classic detective genre. The American hard-boiled genre is being appropriated and subverted through the reversal of its rigid gender roles and stereotypes. Mma Ramotswe has chosen a profession, and a woman assistant Mma Makutsi, from where African women or even women are traditionally excluded. She is a strong figure who doesn't hesitate to kill a crocodile and slit through its belly to find evidence (McCall Smith 1998: 105-106). At the same time she does not mind using her feminine charm to solve her case. The traditional hard-boiled strong male detective and his misogynistic attitude is replaced by a woman who adds the emotional aspect to her hard-boiled method and it reflects in her dealing with crime and perpetrator. She seems to be defying the law set by patriarchal society bestowing justice in her own terms.

There are number of references to Agatha Christie and as a detective figure Mma Ramotswe seem to be modelled on Miss Marple, an old spinster who solves crime by using her excellent observation. Mma Ramotswe similarly relies on woman's powers of observation and woman's intuition. Though she is only 34 years old, Mma Ramotswe can be associated more with Miss Marple for her conservative manners than any other modern female detectives. However as the setting is changed from the genteel English community in countryside to postcolonial Botswana, the lady detective could not be an amateur sleuth who solves crime for pleasure but following American tradition she is a professional.

Hybrid in nature, Christian's post-colonial detectives display ambivalent feelings- the complex mix of attraction and repulsion to the colonial culture and tradition. As Robert Young has observed that hybridity results in an ambivalent feeling of desire and aversion: "a structure of attraction, where people and cultures intermix and merge, transforming themselves as a result, and a structure of repulsion, where the different elements remain distinct and are set against each other dialogically"(Young 18). Though Mma Ramotswe is follower of Western detectives at the same time she is repulsed by the otherness of the whites. Sometimes to an extent that results in reverse stereotyping. She judges her American client based on handshake: "Most white people shook hands very rudely, snatching just one hand and leaving their other hand to perform all sort of mischief. This woman had at least learned

something about how to behave” (McCall Smith 2000:36). Mma Ramotswe has created her binary of right/wrong where Botswana ways are right and others’ are wrong: “Ultimately the answer must be that it was wrong because the old Botswana morality said that it was wrong, and the old Botswana morality, as everybody knew, was so plainly right. It just *felt* right” (McCall Smith 2000:30).

A conventional detective fiction centres on a crime; it is the criminal who creates the detective. But in the novels of Mma Ramotswe, as it seems, crimes are invented for the lady detective. Little amount of space has been spent on the crimes and criminals involved, there are no puzzling clues, as found in ‘whodunit’ fictions, to ponder upon and the suspect is always the perpetrator. Her life story is given as much importance as her work as detective. To some extent, the novels can be read as Comedy of Manners instead of as detective fiction considering the novels laudable account of post-independent Botswana’s life, ideals and manners.

Conclusion

McCall Smith’s postcolonial genre fiction moves away from the colonial past in search for a better future, it is reflected quite well in Mma Ramotswe’s thoughts on past:

There was far too much interest in the past, she thought. People were forever digging up events that had taken place a long time ago. And what was the point in doing this if the effect was merely to poison the present? There were many wrongs in the past, but did it help to keep bringing them up and giving them a fresh airing? She thought of the Shona people and how they kept going on about what the Ndebele did to them under Mzilikazi and Lobengula. It is true that they did terrible things—after all, they were really Zulus and had always oppressed their neighbours—but surely that was no justification for continuing to talk about it. It would be better to forget all that once and for all. (McCall Smith 2000:93)

The idea is to reside in the ‘liminal space’ where colonizer and the colonized are influencing and depending on each other, where the monopoly of power is obliterated. His writing invokes us to see African identity not as singular and static but as pluralistic and fluid nature in

tandem with the modern Africa. Therefore the novels are what Homi Bhabha has termed as the 'Third Space' where the boundary between self and other, created by colonialism, dissolves to give birth to the postcolonial Africa.

NOTES

1. In colonial discourse 'other' refers to colonized subjects. The term reinforces the binary divisions created by colonizers to set the colonizing culture and world view as the norm.
2. Ngugi has employed the genre in a powerful way in his novel *Petals of Blood*. The novel manipulates the detective genre for the purpose of decolonisation and in the process turns itself into an anti-detective novel.
3. The first wave being the writing back to colonialism as a process of decolonisation in which writers like Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o belong and second wave consists of writers addressing post-colonial disillusionment as exemplified by Dambudzo Marechera. (Anderson and Cloete 123)
4. Unity Dow's *Screaming of the Innocent* (2002) is another detective fiction that takes up the same incident and questions the very notion of law and justice in Botswana.
5. Roland Barthes defines a text with fixed meaning as 'readerly.' In such texts meaning is predetermined, therefore, readers are expected to be passive for not having 'no more than the poor freedom either to accept or reject the text' (Barthes 4). 'Writerly' text, on the other hand, consists of multiple cultural and ideological indicators that demand subjective interpretation. And this interpretation is constantly challenged by the text influencing them to rewrite and revise it. Thereby turning the reader into a writer.
6. *Muti* is traditional African medicines made out of human organs and *tsostis* are young black urban criminals.
7. To support his study Schleh has cited following texts: Matthew Head's *The Cabinda Affair* (1981), Lavander Lloyd's *The Linton Memorial* (1957), K.R. Butler's *A Fall of Rock* (1967), M.M. Kaye's *Death in Kenya* (1983), Elspeth Huxley's *The African Poison Murders* (1981) and Jack Iams's *The Body Missed the Boat* (1947).
8. Pablo Upmanyu Mukherjee's *Crime and Empire* (2003) and Caroline Reitz's *Detecting the Nation: Fictions of Detection and Imperial Venture* (2004) are detailed and informative studies on this subject.

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