Ivana Bančić, University of Juraj Dobrila, Croatia

Rethinking the Notion of National Identity in the Novel The Redbreast by Jo Nesbo

Abstract

This paper sets out to examine the extent to which the novel The Redbreast by Jo Nesbo confirms the hypothesis that in the 21st century the crime novel has become a platform suitable for the examination of national identity and the nature of violence in given social surroundings. The paper introduces the hypothesis that there is an undercurrent of unease perceivable in contemporary Norwegian society. The existence of the supporters of the Nazi regime in the history of the nation which after World War II has constituted itself as a modern, tolerant and multicultural society, causes a crisis of identity and evokes a new take-off of right-wing politics. Therefore, the policy of resistance to Nazism and the celebration of tolerance and multiculturalism are on slippery ground. But Nesbo's re-examination of national identity is not conducted solely for the purpose of questioning the absoluteness of ethical positions of good and evil; Nesbo transposes the contemporary Norwegian crime novel from the domain of subjective violence into the realm of objective violence. The paper argues that Nesbo explores the categories of the immoral and the righteous within Norwegian society, pinpointing thereby the dangers of a policy which uses the fear of immigrants as a means of mobilising the nation.

Keywords: crime fiction, national identity, multiculturalism, violence

Crime and Fiction: a Broader Perspective

It could be argued that at the beginning of the 21st century, thanks to a diverse typology of the genre, crime fiction has been triumphantly inaugurated as a top-ranking literary genre, and has consequently become part of the mainstream culture. The popularity of the genre derives from a

broad base of readers and the fact that publishing houses devote entire series precisely to crime fiction (Erdmann 11). Also, recent anthologies of detective and crime fiction speculate that critical interest in detective fiction might be a function of a number of factors, including "the primacy (and relative simplicity) of formal pattern in the genre, its adaptability to other forms and modes, its usefulness as a gauge of popular tastes or of key ideological shifts, or its susceptibility to psychoanalytic speculation about displaced aggression and other latent forces" (Walker and Frazer ii, qtd. in Malmgren, "Anatomy of Murder" 116).

During the historical development of the genre, we have witnessed the emergence of different terms, which were used to facilitate classification, but crime has always been the backbone of the genre, while the emphasis on criminal investigation was fickle. In his article "Anatomy of Murder: Mystery, Detective, and Crime Fiction," Carl D. Malmgren sets out to identify three basic forms of murder fiction: mystery, detective and crime fiction. He also investigates the interrelations and pinpoints their differences, seeking out to explain why these genres take the forms they do. As he explains, mysteries presuppose a static world, "in which neither social order nor human nature is subject to radical change" ("Anatomy of Murder" 119). As he puts it, the static nature of the world of mysteries, presents one of the real consolations of the form. The idea that the signs and clues in a mystery are fully motivated presents the dominant aspect of the genre: "mystery unfolds in a pre-Saussurian world in which the relation between signifiers and signifieds is not arbitrary, not subject to the play of difference" ("Anatomy of Murder" 119). As it can be deduced from its name, the central interest of mystery fiction lies in its plot, which progresses in order to find the solution of the mystery generated by a crime. As Malmgren explains, "[t]he reader's interest in characters – victim, criminal, suspects – is downplayed; the narrative holds these characters at arm's length" ("Anatomy of Murder" 121).

In his essay "The Simple Art of Murder," Chandler explains that detective fiction came into existence as an opposition to mystery fiction, breaking with the conventions of the latter discourse. It can be argued that detective fiction presents readers with the "real" world, which is different from the "whodunit" enclosed universe. Todorov argues that the whodunit in its purest form has a dual structure. It contains "not one but two stories: the story of the crime and the story of the investigation" (Todorov 227). These two stories have no point in common, as the first story ends

before the second begins. The order of the "whodunit" universe is established through the second story, i.e. the story of investigation. The characters involved in it do not act, they learn. Also, as the genre postulates the detective's immunity, nothing can happen to them (Todorov 227).

On the other hand, as Malmgren states, "[t]he decentered world of detective fiction undermines mystery's basic predicates: order, stability, necessity, causality and resolution" ("Anatomy of Murder" 123). As he points out, while mystery fiction serves Truth, in detective fiction "the fact that signs are unstable and that signification is problematic undercuts the ultimate disclosure of Truth" ("Anatomy of Murder" 125). As a consequence, in detective fiction the detective usually identifies and catches the perpetrator, "but fails to provide the 'whole truth'" (Malmgren, "Anatomy of Murder" 125). The only stable point in detective fiction is the detective: consequently, detective fiction can be said to be "more preoccupied with the character of its hero, the society it investigates, and the adventures he encounters, than with the central mystery, which gets pushed aside by individual scenes and situations" (Grella 115).

Various sub-genres have arisen as a result of the incorporation of various settings and locations into mystery and detective fiction. As Scaggs reports, "the most frequently visited of these include the country-house mystery and the locked-room mystery, in which various ingenious methods of committing murder in a hermetically sealed environment formed the core" (51). The locked-room mystery, where the readers encounter a puzzle to solve, due to the fact that a crime has happened in a contained location, was very well received by the inter-war reading public, because it reduced the world "to self-contained, enclosed, manageable proportions and dimensions" (Scaggs 52), which provided consolation during a period of political and social instability.

In addition to mystery story and detective fiction, Malmgren identifies crime fiction as the third type of murder fiction. Unlike the mystery novel or the detective stories, crime fiction presents the story from the perspective of the criminal or of someone implicated in the crime ("Anatomy of Murder" 127). As he explains, "[t]he crime novel lives up to its name by violating a basic convention of mystery and detective fiction; it tells the story from the point of view of the perpetrator – the pursued criminal becomes the main protagonist" (Malmgren, "The Pursuit" 160).[1]

Mystery fiction saw its heyday during the Golden Age[2] , but the situation has changed significantly since then. It is safe to state that the detective story has become immensely popular since Poe's times, adapting itself to the modern attitudes and reality: as Malmgren states, "[o]ffering the integrity of the investigator, the locus of value and meaning, as compensation, detective fiction finally divides its interest between the heroic detective and the squalid world he or she inhabits" ("Anatomy of Murder" 131). One of the explanations of the popularity of the genre in general terms was provided by Cawelti:

> *The criminal act disrupts the social fabric, and the detective must use his unique investigative skills to sew it back together again. In the process, the skilful writer can reveal certain aspects of a culture that otherwise remain hidden, and this may be one reason the genre has increasingly proliferated into the representation of different national, regional, and ethnic cultures. These developments should prove a fascinating area of analysis for future students of the mystery. (55)*

Thanks to the presence of the crime genre on television screens in all its diversity, the criminal investigation cemented its position in the lives of modern consumers and participants in popular culture. Chasing the criminal and solving the crimes have developed into a kind of cultural code, even a cultural ritual. Discussing the evolution of crime novels, Erdmann explains that the real boom of the genre occurred during the 1970s, and asserts that the series detective novel imposed itself as the dominant form. However, Erdmann notes that in these novels, the focus of attention is divided between criminal cases and the daily life of a detective, in other words, professional and personal successes and crises are equally thoroughly analysed (12).

Upon the investigation of the dominant features of contemporary crime novels, Erdmann concludes that over the past decade the focus has shifted from the crime itself to the description and processing of the geographic, social and political environment within which the detectives or victims act. The environment in which the investigation is set is currently being described in such a manner that the crime falls into the background, thus constituting just one of the focal points of a novel. In other words, "[i]t almost seems as if the inventories of criminal motives and case histories have been exhausted, so that crime fiction's primary distinguishing characteristic has become the locus criminalis" (Erdmann 12).

However, apart from the crime scene as a geographical fact, contemporary crime novels have become a platform for reviewing the social climate and political and historical forces that actually shape it. Therefore, many detective novels can be considered studies of a milieu or social novels, or, as Erdmann concludes, reading crime novels has become a sort of ethnographic reading, while the crime scene has become a place of cultural tragedy (13).

The situation is particularly interesting in societies which produce a very complex theoretical discourse on multiculturalism, i.e. in countries which consider multiculturalism as part of their political self-determination and national identity. Specifically, as a result of social and political turmoil in these societies, the return of the urge to review the status of their own nationality becomes evident. In Europe, where the formation of nations took place during the 19th century, it is possible to notice a tendency toward the resuscitation of the culture of nationalism. During the second half of the twentieth century, at first gradually and then more and more, as the production of crime novels grew, the search for criminals has been replaced by the search for cultural identity (Erdmann 19). In other words, the criminal pursuit that followed the trail of evidence moved to the field of cultural anthropology, ethnographic and national characteristics. Consequently, the contemporary crime novel is characterized by different territorial contexts involving ethnic groups, nations, regions, provinces and cities.

Democratic Dystopia: Social and Historical Causes of Violence

The burning issue of immigration policy, which has become unsatisfactory in the new social and political turmoil that has engulfed much of the European continent, is present in the collective consciousness of Scandinavians as Scandinavian countries have been attractive as countries of social justice and economic prosperity. While the crime novel during the early stages of its evolution focused on the criminal act itself, its perpetrators and investigation, contemporary Scandinavian authors of crime novels have not remained immune to the signs of violation of democratic principles and the radical changes taking place in their societies. The situation at hand encouraged them to use the well-known and popular genre of crime fiction as a platform for examining the changes brought on by the current political, social and cultural processes, which steer Scandinavian societies away from the image of the social idyll of the earlier historical periods.

The democratic foundations of Norwegian society are being eroded by the problems associated with the growing trend of resistance to multicultural societies in Europe. Besides the Sami people in the far north, Scandinavian countries have been predominately ethnically homogeneous societies without the political or intellectual tradition of xenophobia or racism.[3] Throughout history, the official ideologies were based on the ideas of tolerance and humanism, although earlier smaller waves of immigration have caused unrest among the population (Bjorklund and Andersen 2). Although "guest workers" appeared during the late 1960s, immigration did not present a political problem. Specifically, the number of immigrants pouring into Norway at that time was relatively insignificant. Also, since unemployment did not present an issue, immigrants were not perceived as a threat to the local population. In the early seventies, the import of labour force was restricted: while the political left and right were focused on different things (competition in the labour market and social security), they still agreed on the measure. The issue re-emerged in the focus of public interest when refugees replaced the cheap workforce. Consequently, the trend of political polarization has increased since the mid-1980s. Although the empirical evidence from the 1970s shows the prevalence of intolerance and prejudice, these were not politically articulated.

However, the mid-1980s were marked by the dramatic increase in the number of asylum seekers in Norway. Consequently, the issue of immigration became one of the important political issues and the support of the political right was growing. In addition, a drastic change in immigration trends in Norway occurred at the same time: the number of asylum seekers increased from 200 to 8,613 between 1983 and 1987. During the 1990s, the population of immigrants skyrocketed, consequently raising interest for language problems, juvenile delinquency, unemployment, dependence on welfare and other social problems. The aforementioned factors have triggered the interest of voters to solve the problem of uncontrolled immigration (Bjorklund and Andersen 3-4).

The history of right-wing extremism in Norway can be outlined by distinguishing its four phases, as it is stated in the report on preventing and countering far-right extremism issued by the Swedish Ministry of Justice and Institute for Strategic Dialogue (42 – 24). The first phase lasted from the turn of the century into the late 1920s. This period was marked by the emergence of political groupings with fascist tendencies. The second phase, which was characterised by the rise of organised fascism, developed in the early 1930s. As it is stated in the Report (43), variety of

groups, including the National Unity Party led by Vidkun Quisling, were inspired by the rise of Nazism in Germany. However, anti-Semitism did not play a significant role in their early years and electorally, the party was a huge failure (Report 43). However, as a consequence of Germany's occupation of Norway during World War II, the third phase saw the party gain power. The fourth phase ensued during the 1970s, and was marked by the formation of neo-Nazi parties (Report 43). In the late 70s, a party called the Norwegian Front (Norsk Front), which was later renamed to the National People's Party, tried to run for election, but after electoral failure in 1977, it turned into a more violent extra-parliamentary group. Although the party officially dissolved in 1991 (after bombing a mosque in Oslo in 1985), this was not the end of extreme right-wing activity.

As illustrated in the statistics presented in the Report, the 1990s saw a rise in activity from similar movements:

> *Not only did Norway foster a more active neo-Nazi subculture during this decade, with groups such as the Boot Boys, Djerv, and Viking (the latter may have had as many as 100 members), there were also a number of political parties, including The Fatherland's Party (Fedrelandspartiet) and the White Election Alliance (Hvit Valgallianse) which unsuccessfully ran for election. (43)*

However, until the atrocious events of 22 July 2011[4] , the extreme right movement has tended not to be a key issue for the media and public debate (Report 43). The most prominent form of extreme right mobilisation in recent years has been the emergence of Islamophobic groups. The most visible groups include the English-inspired Norwegian Defence League (NDL) and the Stop Islamization of Norway (Stopp islamiseringen av Norge), SIAN. However, according to the numbers presented in the Report, extreme right parties face electoral failure. Nevertheless, it is alarming that

> *[…] the internet and social media (most notably Facebook) seem to function as recruiting and cultivating platforms for a growing array of Islamophobic groups. Furthermore, attitudes associated with extreme right ideology (e.g. anti- Semitism, Islamophobia, extreme nationalism and xenophobia, and profound hostility towards parliamentary democracy and political parties) are still present in contemporary Norway, though they are relatively marginal when compared to other European countries. (Report 42)*

The genre of the detective novel could not remain indifferent to the described social climate. According to Hansen, the Scandinavian crime novel is preoccupied with the conditions and violent interruptions of democracy and the welfare state (Hansen 1). Through the analysis of the works by Henning Mankell, Hansen detects the existence of the so-called "Swedish discomfort," which is a symptom of the eroding foundations of the democratic order and a stable welfare state and presents the destruction of the illusion of a social and political idyll. The current discomfort can, according to Hansen, present the unconscious guilt of the society, which is in the form of social criticism identified and dealt with through the medium of literature. As Geherin states in his study The Dragon Tattoo and Its Long Tail: The New Wave of European Crime Fiction in America, "Wallander frets so much about issues big and small" (27). As Stenport argues, Wallander's state can be perceived as the reflection of Sweden's concerns in general (qtd. in Geherin 27)[5] .

However, the specificity of the Norwegian political views during the Second World War and the consequences of (not) dealing with the problematic part of history in Norwegian society make the Norwegian perspective with regard to the multicultural society substantially different. In fact, in addition to the new generation of neo-Nazis, Norwegian society is burdened by the clash of ideologies inherited from the Second World War: the collaborationist ideology and the ideology of resistance. Specifically, King Haakon VII and the government immigrated to Great Britain after the German attack on Norway. Also, a resistance movement was established in order to oppose the Germans and the government of Abraham Vidkun Quisling. After the end of World War II, a problem of coexistence of Norwegians who voluntarily fought for the occupiers and the members of the resistance movement arose. Giving support to the Quisling government, several thousand Norwegians volunteered to fight for their beliefs on the German side: in total around 5,000 Norwegians fought on the Eastern Front (Dear 640). The survivors returned to Norway, which was calling for revenge, and many have become victims of a witch hunt hitherto unseen in Norwegian history. In 1945, Norway re-introduced the death penalty, but the exact number of executions is a source of heated debate, since many death sentences were changed into life sentences and numerous collaborators were exonerated. Also, over the last two years of the war in Norway, the resistance executed hundreds of collaborators (Elster 152). Quisling's followers were stripped off their properties and were denied the right to vote. The medical staff who volunteered in the war

providing assistance to the wounded of all nationalities, but acted under the auspices of the German Red Cross, were also prosecuted for their actions.

In the interview by Jesper Stein Larsen, Nesbo remarked that Norwegians would like to convey to other nations an image of themselves as victors in the war, who stood alongside the British and the Americans, organizing the resistance and blowing up German trains. However, Nesbo shatters the myth of the one-sidedness of Norwegian history, arguing that most people did nothing. He also added that the claims of the existence of 20,000 or 30,000 members of the resistance movement present merely an image the Norwegians want to uphold. According to Nesbo, Norwegians often lose sight of the fact that in 1942, while the outcome of the war was still unpredictable, the number of volunteers supporting the German occupiers was twice as big as the number of the members of the resistance movement.

Nesbo's novel The Redbreast revisits the year 1944 and a unit of Norwegian soldiers in German uniforms in the trenches outside Leningrad on the Eastern Front. The unit includes members different on the grounds of their social status, political beliefs and motivation for being there. However, one of them, Daniel Gudeson, the soldier renowned for his boldness, is shot and his body is laid in a mass grave. Nevertheless, some time later, in a military hospital in Vienna, a wounded Norwegian soldier turns up. A nurse, Helene, falls in love with him and they plan to escape because the soldier is called up by the Wehrmacht to be sent to certain death on the Eastern Front. However, the novel does not follow just the plot line set in the period of World War II. In 1999, an old man is facing a fatal diagnosis from his doctor and is plotting to go on his final mission. Nesbo's detective Harry Hole is at the same time investigating a gang of arm dealers with possible connections to old and new Nazis and the death of an ex-Eastern Front soldier. Through his investigations, Hole uncovers the connections between the events from World War II and the present, introducing characters of collaborators, Nazis and neo-Nazis.

It is precisely Nesbo's attempt to revisit and reconsider historical events in The Redbreast that confirms Erdmann's hypothesis that in the detective novel of the 21st century the background of the criminal investigation becomes an increasingly important component: the crime novel becomes a platform suitable for the examination of national identity and the nature of violence in certain social situations.

As Nesbo asserts in the aforementioned interview, Oslo presented in crime novels is not a socially idyllic city: at every intersection Nesbo's characters meet women with covered heads or groups of dark-skinned young men speaking in exotic languages. Nesbo illustrates the Norwegian version of discomfort, which can be quantified. For example, in Norway, the percentage of voters who listed the issue of immigration as the most important parameter for choosing a party rose from 4% in 1989 to 7% in 1995 (Bjorklund and Andersen 3). It is interesting, however, that, according to the conclusions of the research, xenophobia is not associated with the number of immigrants, but rather the opposite. From the findings of the research, it can be concluded that the attitude and behaviour of people is in most cases influenced by the political debate on the issue of immigration and not based on personal experience. Despite the uneasiness over the increasing number of immigrants who pour into Norway, Nesbo selected an aged participant of World War II on the Eastern Front as the main villain in the novel, indicating that the Norwegian society has a much deeper problem than the fear of immigrants: the divisions within the Norwegian society.

After World War II, Norwegian society constituted itself as a member of the movement of resistance, also the winner in the war, condemning on the other hand, the opponents. The ethical component of the clash of two ideologies (one being the ideology of resistance, which was enthroned as the winning policy, and consequently seen as a fundamental legacy of Norwegian society) is dragged into the spotlight, when Nesbo's character Even Juul, a historian, claims:

> *Many people believe that right and wrong are fixed absolutes. That is incorrect, they change over time. The job of the historian is primarily to find the historical truth, to look at what the sources say and present them, objectively and dispassionately. If historians were to stand in judgment on human folly, our work would seem to posterity like fossils – the remnants of the orthodoxy of their time. (Nesbo 240)*

By re-examining the absoluteness of the categories of good and evil, Nesbo reminds his readers of the possibility of the opposite outcome, opening the door not only to the feeling of discomfort, but also to the probability of the breakdown of the democratic order. Modern Norwegian society is based on a declaratory condemnation of Nazism. However, in the search for criminals, Nesbo reveals occasional sins committed under the auspices of the anti-Nazi ideology. Consequently, the

foundations of justice and righteousness of Norwegian society become questionable. Also, these dilemmas raise questions of the corruptedness of the society which sent its own members to prisons and, on the other hand, apparently welcomes immigrants cordially. Nesbo shows the fragmentation of Norwegian society, in which the supporters of anti-immigration policies are supported by the old ideologies, relics of World War II. Since the basic ideological preferences toward the resistance to Nazism, which have evolved over the years and helped build the image of Norway as a tolerant country of social justice, have their opponents in two different generations, a serious analysis regarding the true identity of Norwegian society should be conducted.

In order to depict the complexity of the situation connected to the motivation of former collaborators, Nesbo presents the fact that the majority of Norwegian soldiers who fought on the side of the German occupiers had been taken in by the ideology of national pride and went to war convinced that they were fighting for commendable patriotic motives, i.e. preserving their own people and race. However, although the ideology of Nazism was defeated, the agenda connected to it was obviously not successfully eradicated with the execution of Vidkun Quisling and his followers. In Nesbo's novel, the aforementioned ideology is present in a slightly different form in the generation represented by Sverre Olsen, a member of the Norwegian neo-Nazi movement. The fact that Norwegian society encompasses advocates of both ideologies generates the Norwegian type of discomfort: the very existence of the support for the Nazi regime in the past creates a crisis of identity in the present. The crisis is also stirred up by the new takeoff of the right-wing politics. Therefore, the justification of the retribution exacted on collaborators after the war is questionable, and the basis of social order, i.e. the policy of resistance to Nazism and the celebration of tolerance and multiculturalism, is on slippery ground.

The Social Situation as a Platform for Violence

According to Slavoj Žižek, the most significant event in 2006 was the crossing of the anti-immigrant policy into the mainstream and its breakaway from the extreme right-wing views. Specifically, the newfound pride in cultural and historical identity has enabled the parties to express their attitude according to which immigrants are guests who must accept the cultural values of the host society. However, the tolerance towards the "different ones" is accompanied by an obsessive fear of

intrusion. As Žižek explains: the Other is acceptable only if its presence is not intrusive, or more precisely, if the Other is not really different" (41). Thus, the situation in which the immigrant refuses to yield to social norms of the host becomes a potential cause of conflict and, consequently, violence.

Discussing the social changes in Scandinavian societies, Andrew Nestingen asserts that violence is an emotional response to social symptoms (239). In this case, crime becomes the starting point for raising a set of abstract questions about the fundamental historical forces that shape the social and political reality. At the very beginning of the novel, Nesbo begins the process of disclosing the key driving forces through the trial of Sverre Olsen, who is charged with racial intolerance. Nesbo examines the causes of violence, which is spreading across the Norwegian society like an infection. Through Olsen, Nesbo illustrates the standing of Norwegian neo-Nazis:

Since 1945, National Socialism's enemies have been masters of the land; they have developed and put into practice their democratic and economic principles. Consequently, not on one single day has the sun gone down on a world without war. Even here in Europe we have experienced war and genocide. In the Third World millions starve to death – and Europe is threatened by mass immigration and the resultant chaos, deprivation and struggle for survival. […] There is little to separate us from oblivious affluence and the day we have to rely on ourselves and the community around us. A war, an economic or ecological disaster, and the entire network of laws and rules which turns us all too quickly into passive social clients is suddenly no longer there. The previous great betrayal took place on 9 April 1940, when our so-called national leaders fled from the enemy to save their own skins, and took the gold reserves with them to finance a life of luxury in London. Now the enemy is here again. And those who are supposed to protect our interests have let us down once more. They let the enemy build mosques in our midst, let them rob our old folk and mingle blood with our women. It is no more than our duty as Norwegians to protect our race and to eliminate those who fail us. (Nesbo 13-4)

Here Nesbo articulates the standings of the extreme right wing groups, disclosing their mode of providing justification and historical background for the violence committed against immigrants. However, as the excerpt illustrates, the hatred of Norwegian neo-Nazis is not expressed solely through xenophobia: the government and all the segments of Norwegian society which are enabling multiculturalism present an additional target. In order to pursue this thread even further,

Nesbo provides another explanation of the causes of the new wave of Nazism and the evolution of the ideology of empowerment in Norway through the statement made by his character Even Juul:

[…] the new movement was not merely a reaction to factors in the current social situation, such as unemployment and immigration; it wanted to set up an alternative social democracy. The catchword was re-armament – moral, military and racial. The decline of Christianity was used as an example of moral decay, as well as HIV and the increase in drug abuse. And the image of the enemy was also to some extent new: champions of the EU who broke down national and racial boundaries; NATO people who held out a hand to Russian and Slav Untermenschen; and the new Asian capital barons who had taken on the Jews' role as world bankers. (Nesbo 159)

Žižek confirms Nestingen's hypothesis on the emergence of violence as a symptom of social turmoil in his study on the existence of subjective and objective violence. Specifically, exploring the kinds of violence, Žižek states that the subjective, directly visible violence, which was caused by a subject, can be identified unambiguously. However, he warns that it is necessary to identify the background that generates the subjective type of violence. The violence which is no longer attributable to concrete individuals and their "evil" intentions, but is purely 'objective' and anonymous" is termed systemic violence (Žižek 13) and is classified as a type of objective violence (Žižek 11).

After a close analysis of the crimes described in the novel The Redbreast and the motives behind them, it becomes obvious that they contain elements of subjective violence. However, elements of systemic violence, which actually acted as the generator of physical violence, can also be traced. Specifically, the crimes that are committed in the novel during World War II can be categorised as a direct consequence of an ideology and consequently systemic violence, while the crimes committed after the war (the murders of Ellen Gjelten, Dale Hallgrim, Bernt Brandhaug and Sverre Olsen) are the result of the overarching social chaos. The evidence of the ambivalent nature of violence can be found in the following statement:

'I know what you are thinking,' Fauke said. 'But I was a soldier who had been given orders to kill. If I hadn't been given the orders, I wouldn't have done it. But this I do know my family were among the ranks of those who cheated our country.' (Nesbo 269)

According to Žižek, subjective violence, because of its immediacy and transparency, serves as a decoy to divert attention from the objective, systemic violence, which engendered the subjective kind. This situation raises the question of the responsibility of an individual for committing a specific act of subjective, i.e. physical violence, provided that the individual is acting under the aegis of the ruling ideology. As Nesbo pinpoints, most cases of objective violence occur at the moment of the overturn of the ruling ideology. Certain social groups are then automatically excluded from the social life. For example, as Žižek points out, the capitalist system by its nature excludes the poor strata from the society (12). Similarly, Norwegian collaborators were excluded from their society during the trial after the end of World War II. In other words, the social group which at one point in history occupied a place of honour becomes an undesirable piece of a puzzle after the political shift occurs. It is important to stress that Nesbo does not justify the Nazi regime and its supporters – quite the contrary. Nevertheless, he warns about the collateral damage done by the Nazi ideology in connection to the problem of collaborators. The ethical component is drawn into the spotlight when Sindre Fauke claims that “[m]ost of the volunteers thought mainly of Norway and little of politics. The turning point for me came when I realized I was fighting another country’s war” (Nesbo 267).

Conclusion

While searching for the perpetrators, Nesbo brings to the surface the ghosts of World War II, disturbing the seemingly idyllic facade of Norwegian society. But Nesbo's questioning of national identity is not conducted solely for the purpose of questioning the absoluteness of the ethical positions of good and evil. In addition to providing a kind of spiritual catharsis, Nesbo transposes the contemporary Norwegian crime novel from the domain of subjective violence into the realm of objective violence, offering a new perspective on the category of sinners within Norwegian society and warning about the dangers of a politics which uses the fear of immigrants as a means of mobilisation.

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[1] However, in this paper, the term crime fiction will be used as a term covering the sub-genres of mystery, detective and crime stories.

[2] The Golden Age of crime fiction is usually defined as the period between 1918 and 1945 and includes classical works and major authors, such as Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, Margery Allingham, John Dickson Carr, Ellery Queen, S. S. Van Dine, Edmund Crispin, Freeman Wills Crofts, Josephine Tey, A. E. W. Mason, Georgette Heyer, Ngaio Marsh, and Gladys Mitchell. See: Rzepka, Horsley.

[3] However, during the 1930s, restrictions on immigration were sometimes justified by the argument that could be considered racist. For example, it was considered that closed borders were needed in order to preserve the Nordic race. (Bjorklund and Andersen 2).

[4] On 22 July 2011, Anders Behring Breivik planted a bomb in the Government quarter in the centre of Oslo. A few hours later, he massacred politically engaged youth at the Workers' Youth League summer camp on Utoya. Eight people lost their lives in Oslo and about 30 were wounded. On Utoya, 69 people were shot and 66 wounded.

[5] Kurt Wallander is a character created by crime writer Henning Mankell. He is the inspector and protagonist in several Mankell's novels.


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