Ex Africa semper aliquid novi is an ancient saying, reminding us that cultures are always in the business not only of self-mytof selJs

the policies of the powerful, who in the neo-colonial world continue to control, to the best of their ability and to their own advantage, remote peoples and places, such as those in Africa, through mechanisms such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, not to mention the Hollywood film. (The difficulty of finding outlets in Africa for African-made films is a case in point.) The competing neocolonialisms of the Soviets and Chinese of the last half-

offered in this edition of *EnterText* are, of course, just a glimpse of the range of possible engagements with these enormous questions. It is pleasing that several different parts of the continent are addressed in contributions from writers living in many different parts of the continent and the wider world (with diverse personal, often migratory, histories), representing several disciplines, though there is a preponderance of literary work. This is, after all, an online journal, which, though it is published from London, implicitly transcends national and geographic boundaries, though not so readily, perhaps, those of economics. Hopefully readers, whether inside or outside Africa, will be stimulated and challenged by what follows.

When the *EnterText* editorial team first proposed a special issue on Africa, it seemed a natural choice to ask our colleague Tim Fernyhough, an Africanist historian, to edit it. Sadly Tim died before embarking on the task. It seems fitting, then, to open the edition with Donald Crummey's contribution, which not only gives a survey of the field in which Tim's research featured, but also comes from his personal friend. It considers the history of banditry in late colonial times. Crummey roots his analysis in Eric Hobsbawm's seminal work *Bandits* which articulates the point at which such agents may rise above a self-serving criminality to become social interventionists. This work, however, does not address African examples, a lack which Crummey made good in a collection of essays he edited in 1986, *Banditry, Rebellion and Social Protest in Africa,* which took a rather different position from Hobsbawm's. It is the papers from this volume which he here surveys, quoting also from an uncollected study by Tim Fernyhough, before examining subsequent contributions to the field. He concludes that a neat association of banditry with anti-colonial agency may be deceptive, and, projecting his argument forwarcdtcthe poeseefalok a tthe

which is brought into sharp focus, but the wider international war-torn world. In particular, the predicament of impoverished women, with few choices but a pragmatic compromise with exploitative realities, is made urgently present to the audience. Like Brecht's, Abgoluaje's play is bitterly serious at the same time as being bitingly witty. It is particularly telling in its address to the issues of brutalisation and double standards in its story of one of the sons, who cannot understand why the violence he is asked to perform in war is regarded as heroic, but when he repeats it outside combat he is punished as a criminal. This updating of Brecht, which is also Brechtian, is very much a drama for our times.

This is followed by two creative pieces of an autobiographical character. Faith Adiele recounts her encounter with Nigeria, as an American returning to her father's homeland, at the time of the worldwide IMF/World Bank riots of the late 1980s, bringing into telling focus the relationship between the local, the national and the international, as she negotiates her way through an academic world in crisis. Dennis Walder, on the other hand, revisits the scene of childhood, in a memoir of South Africa in mid-twentieth-century apartheid. The growing child has to negotiate a culturally diverse heritage, a fracturing family, and a fraught society. What the narrative shows, however, is that a distinctive South African pluralism, now familiar as the mark of the modern, is already emerging, despite the gulfs of apartheid.

Myths of modernity are also central to Susan Gorman's essay on the film, *Divine Carcasse*, set in Benin, which centres on an archetype of commodity fetishism in our time, the private car. Dominique Loreau's 1998 film follows a Peugeot as it is transformed from an expatriate's vehicle, to a neighbourhood taxi, to an embodiment of a village deity, thus ironising conventional trajectories of "progress." (Western audiences may be more familiar with the television advertisement, set in India, which

of international concerns and of the plural and shifting cultural identities of her compatriots, particularly of women. The replacement of the reductionist traditional view of Sutherland with this nuanced reading is a welcome new departure for the critical debates around her work, which emerges as more subversive than is usually perceived.

The theme of a feminine culture is also Chielozona Eze's topic in the short story "Plaiting My Mother's Hair," in which a lovingly realised scene of domestic intimacy is eloquently enlarged into an extended metaphor. The concluding essay in this edition also addresses the feminine. Colomba Muriungi examines two female-authored Kenyan novels of the 1990s which tackle the thorny topic of prostitution. Muriungi's reading of Oludhe Macgoye's *Victoria and Murder in Majengo* and Genga-Idowu's *Lady in Chains* shows how the two novels subvert the conventional notion of the prostitute as home-breaker and moral degenerate, modelling instead the benefits which accrue from the resulting financial independence. Muriungi's discussion examines the use of euphemism to sanitize the actuality of prostitution, as compared with coverage by male authors, and considers the implications of the texts' projection of prostitution as a productive economic employment like any other. Once again, the pathways available to the impoverished, whether male or female, involve some harsh realities and can produce some unpopular and testing choices, which are rarely considered dispassionately. The paper is a reminder that the carefully mythified conventions and ethics associated with the dominant are frequently at odds with the actualities of ordinary people, particularly in conditions of crisis, poverty, vulnerability, and the dramatic social changes which these bring in their wake.

Paula Burnett, Editor

[1] Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House* (London: Methuen, 1992), 220.