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Post-industrial America and Neo-imperialism in Russell Banks's Novel *Rule of the Bone*

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Russell Banks's *Rule of the Bone* (1995) is a rare instance of a contemporary socially engaged American novel of development and maturation that rests, as this paper argues, on a systemic analysis of post-industrial Western reality and contemporary forms of Western-led imperialism. Grasping this reality and not coming to terms with it constitutes an essential part of the adolescent's trajectory of growth and maturation. *Rule of the Bone* is America's post-industrial working-class novel of maturation, the understanding of which lies at the intersection of Marxist and postcolonial theory. The novel addresses these complex social issues on a more basic but still insightful level accessible to teenagers and at the same time on a more intricate level that easily engages a more informed adult readership. In this sense, *Rule of the Bone* stands for what can be termed a crossover novel. Targeted primarily at an adult readership, it can prove to be of huge benefit to adolescents seeking to break out of the generic confines of contemporary, mainstream adolescent literature.

Keywords: male *bildungsroman*, post-industrial America, labour, neo-colonialism, tourist industry, Marxism

Russell Banks is a socially engaged writer, and one of those contemporary American authors whom Philip Roth has defined as fully dedicated to “trying to understand, and then describe, and then make credible, much of the American reality”, which is interlinked with global imperialism and processes of class and racial oppression (Roth quoted in O'Donnell 2010: 34).¹ In his works, Russell Banks, not surprisingly,

¹ Gender oppression is also inherent to the system but *Rule of the Bone* leaves it out of the picture. Despite its progressive and illuminative take on class and race, *Rule of the Bone* remains a traditional male-centred *bildungsroman*. All of the human bonds and forms of social engagement

traces the fate of the American working class in the post-industrial USA and chronicles the plight of racialised migrant workers along with the neo-colonised peoples, all the time also keeping in the foreground the side effects of structurally induced deprivation, such as alcoholism and drug addiction. *Rule of the Bone*, published in 1995, is no exception to this line of literary investigation. Yet, *Rule of the Bone* is a coming-of-age novel that does much more than just document and critically examine what mainstream critics euphemistically refer to as “the bleaker aspects of American working-class life” (“Banks, Russell”, *The Columbia Encyclopaedia*). It also denounces the socio-economic structures and along with them American late capitalism that is conducive to the ongoing impoverishment and social marginalisation of domestic and migrant labour. In this sense, Banks makes recourse to adolescence in order to use it “as a vehicle for social critique” (Millard 2007: 13), which is also a way of extracting the figure of a teenager from the prevailing Western construct/stereotype of a solipsistic, socially disconnected and disinterested individual.

Rule of the Bone has been greeted as a modern version of Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (O’Loughlin 2002). Told in the form of the first-person confessional narrative, it features a fourteen-year-old white boy from a working-class environment, a school dropout and social outcast in search of his biological father, who teams up with a black man, an immigrant worker from Jamaica. The boy and the adult strike up a partnership and before drifting to Jamaica they squat first in an abandoned school bus behind a shopping mall complex on the outskirts of a small American town. The gutted bus perches on the top of chemical waste, which has been left over from what the narrator lets us know is one in a series of post-WWII wars waged on the part of the American military-industrial complex, that is, “from when they stored poison and radioactive stuff out there for the air force years ago in case the Russians attacked” (Banks 1995:166). The middle-aged Rastafarian man and the boy he apprentices nevertheless manage to survive mainly on home-grown food, which is due to the older man’s agricultural ability and sharpness of perception that enables him to spot “the narrow strip of dirt that wasn’t like contaminated and dangerous or rocky even” (166).

are entirely men-centred, with women being of hardly any significance at all. They feature merely as sidekicks to the boy’s trajectory of development or other men’s life trajectories. As a result, the novel ends up re-enforcing homosocial ties. Women appear in the side roles either as objects of sexual gratification or, equally problematically, as convenient scapegoats for what are in fact larger social ills. While the protagonist’s father’s mistress in Jamaica ends up being utterly sexualised and objectified, serving as a vehicle for the boy’s initiation into heteronormative sexuality, the protagonist’s mother back in the USA ends up being blamed for allowing sexual abuse to take place in the family. Even though it is the stepfather who mistreats the boy and demands that, when still a child, the boy perform fellatio on him, it is the mother that the narrative saddles with all the blame. She is charged with a lack of responsibility towards her own child for not noticing what is going on as a result of supposedly drinking too much and preferring to believe her partner on whom, as a part-timer, she is financially dependent. Similarly, the mother of the little girl that the protagonist saves from the clutches of a pornographer also ends up being blamed for the misfortune befalling the girl on account of being a single mother who by default supposedly cannot cope with the situation and prefers to take recourse to drugs. In these ways, the novel unwittingly reproduces the conservative discourse on women as fostered in the US at the turn of the 21st century. Post-industrial America therefore is still awaiting its contemporary version of a working-class, socially engaged female *bildungsroman* of development and maturation.

However, surviving on home-grown food alone is next to impossible in a devastated urban landscape with a high rate of un- and under-employment. The white working-class boy and the black migrant worker must complement this with the growing and selling of ganja and with the scavenging for food from supermarket dustbins where they come across an array of other destitute people. The Rastafarian man, called I-Man, becomes a mentor and a substitute father to the white teenage boy. It is to the 14-year-old Chappie, renamed Bone, that he imparts not only basic survival skills but the knowledge of the world as he also “proceeds to teach him hemispheric history” (Carton 2015: 744). The migrant worker introduces the boy to the current forms of racialised and expansionist politics of the US empire on its home turf and abroad. The white boy and the black man thus inevitably embark on a journey that takes them from the shopping malls and urban devastation of the US to a seemingly paradisiacal, but in fact plundered island of Jamaica. It is here that Bone finally comes face to face with his white biological father, or, as the novel lets us know, with the real face of American foreign policy. The protagonist finds him stationed in a refurbished 19th-century colonial mansion from where the white father, or, symbolically, hegemonic America itself, controls the formal and runs the informal economy of the Caribbean island.

As a novel of maturation and development, *Rule of the Bone* provides an insight into “the gritty particulars of existence on the peripheries”, which include the “blue-collar towns of the rural Northeast” in the US and “the villages on the Caribbean islands” (Hulbert 1995: 40). It focuses on the structural divisions between the rich and the poor and contemporary forms of enslavement, all the time, as this contribution argues, linking the plight of a working-class white boy with that of a Jamaican immigrant worker. This is accomplished through the journey they take together, which structurally connects seemingly isolated dots on the American landscape and what the US capitalist elite considers its backyard, that is, Latin America and the Caribbean (Livingstone 2009), into a larger, interconnected picture. What is revealed as a result is not only the mechanics of American capitalism but also the underbelly of the US empire, whose practices and very existence are based on oppressive class and racial policies enforced both at home and abroad. This jolts the fourteen-year-old protagonist into the acquisition of a new, informed and socially engaged consciousness, and into a new, no longer solipsistic but relational and historically grounded sense of self.

All of this also sets *Rule of the Bone* apart from traditional coming-of-age novels that focus on seemingly self-sufficient and self-enclosed inner worlds of teenage protagonists, starting with Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye*, and from their modern versions that today come in the form of single-issue problem novels, a trend entrenched by the cultural turn in the 1980s, and which by default still fall short of systemic analysis and wholesome awareness. *Rule of the Bone* is instead a rare type of contemporary American novel of development and maturation, in which “the contemporary moment of coming-of-age” is socio-historically situated or, as put by Millard in his general introduction to the contemporary American *bildungsroman*, “contextualized gradually by a consciousness of historical events” (2007: 10). It is through this kind of historical revelation or socio-political contextualisation that Banks’s revision of the coming-

of-age genre transcends and “accomplishes more than the outline of the plight of a beleaguered individual innocent” (ibid.). *Rule of the Bone*, then, is a novel which, through the protagonist’s unique teenage voice of a sixteen-year-old recounting in retrospect his experiences of a social outcast at the age of 14 and through his trajectory of coming of age, foregrounds and encompasses both the individual and the external social reality informed by a larger geopolitical context that inevitably conditions the modes of existence and possibilities of becoming for any individual, be it an adult or an adult-to-be. In this respect, *Rule of the Bone* is a novel “about the knowledge of [the not so innocent or immaculate] American history” and it is a systemic and wholesome acquisition of this very “knowledge [that] becomes a significant part of the protagonist’s coming of age” (Millard 2007: 10). While some literary critics have only pointed to some of these aspects in sporadic and descriptive terms, most often in short reviews or blurbs, this article is concerned with a detailed and interdisciplinary-based systemic analysis of the ways in which coming of age in Banks’s contemporary *bildungsroman* facilitates one’s maturation into critical consciousness and social awareness. This in turn also serves as a formative experience for the readership, be it young or adult. It functions as a template for our ongoing and critical understanding of contemporary America as a hegemonic power, as well as of the workings of globalised capitalism in general. In this sense, to re-adapt Sandra L. Beckett’s title (2012) applied to children’s literature, Banks’s contemporary but much overlooked novel of social development and maturation also represents its own version of what could be termed a *crossover* novel, a novel for all ages, that is, for adolescents and adults alike.

Through the critical lens of a working-class teenager: US capitalism on its home turf

Rule of the Bone offers a multi-layered dissection of American society. It sheds light on its current forms of segregation and the accompanying segmentation of its residents, as well as its colonised others, into various categories of underprivileged and working poor, with a small stratum of the affluent elite at the very top. The journey of development and maturation that the protagonist undertakes is thus first and foremost a “journey through the various strata of [American] society” (O’Loughlin 2002: 36). Importantly, with every change in location – starting first with the dilapidated urban landscape in the US and then moving on to the US’s geopolitical spheres of interest such as Jamaica or the Caribbean in general – there follows a major epiphany on the part of the teenage protagonist and an expansion of his horizons. Or, as also noticed by O’Loughlin in a slightly different context, “a shift in location” parallels “an important shift in subjectivity”, so much so that every “new place is coterminous with a significantly new sense of self” (ibid.). Each change of location functions as an eye-opener: it serves as a face-to-face encounter with the gritty reality of contemporary capitalist America that has nothing to do with the simulacra of splendour and the myth of American innocence or, for that matter, the myth of its imperial benevolence.

Urban waste-scape and the re-creation of the working-class as a disposable other

The novel opens with a description of the urban landscape as a veritable prison house and wasteland. Hopelessness and bleak survival prospects govern the lives of individuals, including Bone's parents, which in turn wreak havoc on their personal relationships. The deepening poverty and hopelessness are linked to the processes associated with the so-called post-Fordist reconstruction of the capitalist economy in the imperial centres, which has in turn led to a systemic worsening of working conditions, increased insecurity and the further depression of wages. The novel captures this post-Fordist reality with Bone constantly referring to his parents having "cheesy jobs" in spite of being skilled workers and finding themselves confined to the lower echelons of the extremely polarised service sector. This process has been marked by the downgrading and contraction of manufacturing in the West and the offshoring of most of its intensive labour production processes to neo-colonised countries, most often through the combined forces of diplomacy, coercive financial mechanisms and US military interventions (Chomsky 2000; Peterson 2003).

The downgrading of manufacturing, as the novel proceeds to show, has been marked by a shift to and a rapid expansion of the service industry, and a concomitant restructuring of work processes, skills, types of jobs and forms of remuneration, again to the benefit of the capitalist elite. These complexities are astutely captured in Bone's description of his parents' jobs included, pointedly, in one of the opening paragraphs of the novel (Banks 1995: 2):

My mom and [stepfather] both had these cheesy jobs and didn't own anything you could rob at least not without them noticing right away it was gone. Ken worked as a maintenance man out at the airbase which is like being a janitor only he said he was a building services technician and my mom was a bookkeeper at the clinic which is also a nothing job looking at a computer screen all day and punching numbers into it.

It is significant that Bone's observation starts on the note of his parents' jobs being "cheesy", but then acquires a more exact undertone when the jobs are described as being devalued, that is, as having undergone a redefinition and downscaling to "nothing jobs" in the newly expanded and restructured service economy of the global North. As noted by social researchers, an emphasis on so-called information or intangible knowledge production and its manipulation, which has put the banking and finance industry in the forefront, has also put in place a new hierarchical division of labour and skill evaluation within the service sector (Peterson 2003). In this new restructured economy, the service sector is hierarchically polarised, with some of the skills associated with the production and manipulation of information and digital knowledge being overrated and overvalued, while the rest are systematically devalorised so that the employed can be rendered deskilled in order to be paid less. The result is sharp income polarisation between a handful of over-valorised "skilled and high waged professional-managerial jobs" in banking, insurance, legal, health and education services, and devalorised "semi-, unskilled and poorly paid jobs" in so-called support services such as telemarketing, data

processing, bank-telling, cleaning, retail, maintenance, and care (Peterson 2003: 52). This systemic de-valorisation and deskilling of most of the jobs in the service sector is camouflaged through the use of fancy terminology for job positions, which the workers are expected to adopt as their own. Bone's stepfather, who is in fact a maintenance man or a janitor at an air base, now goes by the name of a building services technician, which imparts a false sense of importance. It seemingly elevates his job status, while the actual conditions of work (e.g. contract employment through private agencies as a result of the military's privatisation) and remuneration have been severely undermined.

Equally significant, as astutely captured in Bone's observation above, is also the further internal hierarchisation within individual service sectors, and along with it gender polarisation and gendered division of labour. In this economy, it is no coincidence that men's service jobs, and consequently the stepfather's job, gravitate to and are incorporated into the military-industrial complex (associated with technology and prowess), while the majority of women, along with immigrants, are confined to the personal and social service sectors. Here they are most often excluded from collective bargaining and reduced to dead-end, below-minimum-pay jobs. This dead-endedness is the result of a specific kind of deskilling which itself is the result of knowledge and skills being systematically redefined as non-knowledge and mere competences, and all the more so if the job also involves work with computers. Namely, within the information technology sector, "men are more likely to be found in higher-paying, creative work of software development or internet start-ups, whereas the work force of single-tasked [... computer] work, such as cashiers or data-entry workers is now predominantly female and low-paid" (Peterson 2003: 55). The fact that Bone's mother is an accountant, which requires specific knowledge and competences, is made insignificant in the new, polarised reorganisation of the service sector and its internal structural division of labour. Knowledge and experience are dismissed and reconfigured as mere competences precisely through the introduction of computer technology, which helps to obscure the real extent of work experience and the complex knowledge needed to keep the finances of the clinic where the mother works in order. Instead, the work the mother does no longer counts as knowledge but mere data or info processing. Or, as Bone puts it, it is now redefined as mere looking at the computer all day and "punching numbers into it". It is thus artificially devalorised as a deskilled and a seemingly routine job, which in turn translates into a much lower wage and a "nothing job".

With most people being caught in the grinding machinery of deskilling and wage depressions, this state of affairs has a detrimental effect on their possibilities of survival and their interpersonal relationships. The novel captures this most succinctly by repeatedly placing the teenage protagonist at what is the heart of the service and consumer economy of late capitalism, that is, the shopping mall. Here, Bone with nothing to do "sit[s] around on the benches and watch[es] all these cheesy couples doing their Christmas shopping" (Banks 1995: 16). He cannot help but notice that (ibid.):

At Christmas the malls're filled with people who feel rotten because they don't have enough money so they fight a lot and yank on their kids' arms. The carols and blinking

lights and the guys in Santa suits are supposed to make you forget your troubles but in reality it's the opposite.

To endure this state of affairs, Bone prefers to get high on marihuana, with the shopping mall thus serving also as a place from which he can run his small-scale business of dealing pot to sustain himself. The formal and informal economy, with the latter being spurred by inadequate, that is, poverty wages in the formal sector as the novel subtly demonstrates, thus go hand in hand. With the shopping malls taking over the urban landscape, the narration neatly evokes the significance of shopping malls as the only available spaces where people can still congregate and seem to socialise through the purchase of goods they help to produce but which they cannot afford. A shopping mall is a place that represents the microcosm of the service sector economy with “cheesy” security jobs reserved for black men such as Bart (who sometimes chases Bone away from the premises while on other occasions he tends to procure grass from him) and “cheesy” shop assistant jobs reserved for women, with equally underpaid and deskilled people doing their shopping, and feeling equally downtrodden and depressed or “rotten” in the face of the machinery that grinds them all down. *Rule of the Bone* thus indeed paints a very bleak but veritable picture of everyday reality facing ordinary people in post-industrial America.

Young adults and unemployment: Bone's own terrifying reality

Bone is eventually turned out of his parents' house for stealing and pawning his mother's valuable coin collection in order to sustain his ever more addictive habit of marijuana use. He turns to his 16-year-old friend, Russ, and stays in his apartment together with his subtenants, a gang of bikers who are heavily into drugs, alcohol and pornography and eventually into stealing and selling electronics under the counter. This first significant change in location leaves the protagonist on his own, fending for himself for the first time, and, in doing so, it brings the teenage narrator face to face with another structurally related “bleak aspect” of America's contemporary reality. It concerns limited job prospects as well as deteriorating working conditions and increasing job and welfare insecurity facing the youth itself. The expansion and reconfiguration of the service sector in the North has not only led to a systemic devaluation of job positions but also to an increasing flexibilisation of forms of employment, with women no longer being the main or the only target (Peterson 2003). Flexibilisation now also affects the youth and migrants and rests on the proliferation of part-time, casual and temporary jobs, which fall outside basic protection, social benefit provision and union organising (Harris 2004). Flexibilised jobs, as Bone soon discovers, do not guarantee a minimum living wage, which further cements the bleak survival prospects and compounds the social marginalisation of the majority of the youth, especially the working-class youth. Bone's rumination on this point is crucial to understand the bleak survival prospects that the youth face in late capitalist America (Banks 1995: 43):

Russ had hooked up with [the bikers] because of his job at the Video Den [...]. But the job was only part-time days and he couldn't afford the apartment over the store on

his own so he offered to share it with this one guy he knew [...]. The squat was this big funky apartment [...] with three bedrooms and a bunch of mostly broken furniture. The stove partially worked though and the refrigerator but I remember the toilet was stopped up a lot that winter.

All a part-timer can afford is a dilapidated flat at best, providing one shares it with other tenants. To make it through the month, flexibilised youth employees must seek more than one part-time job, which results in burnout, while still having to contend with no welfare security at all. Or, and as a result of the contracted manufacturing sector and there being fierce competition for these kinds of jobs too, they must supplement their meagre earnings with activities in the informal economy, which inevitably means turning to petty crime as Russ and Bone eventually do. This state of affairs is made poignantly evident as Bone and Russ contemplate their job opportunities, which they realise are not only limited but in fact non-existent (Banks 1995: 56–57):

We sat out on the back steps [of the Video Den] in silence. I said, What're you gonna do, man? Get a job at the mall?

Yeah, right, Chappie. The mall. The line forms at the end, man. They got fucking college graduates up there flipping Big Macs and carrying out garbage. Forget it, man.

Bone and Russ are fictional characters and real life characters too. They are the epitome of the disadvantaged youth pushed to the bottom ranks and beyond as they are superseded by more qualified graduates who too have been forced to scramble for precarious and flexibilised jobs in the polarised service sector with a few top positions reserved only for a handful of professionals (Harris 2004).

Bone and Russ are fictional and real-case examples of the working-class youth facing long-term unemployment, thus fitting Anita Harris's observation in another and just as sinister aspect (2004: 57):

Long-term unemployment is a reality for many disadvantaged youth who do not find a job quickly after leaving school [...]. These are the young people that face the prospect of never having a career as such, and they must attempt to get by through a combination of meagre and intermittent government support, insecure work opportunities, and forays into the informal and criminal economies. These are the youth surviving in the most precarious circumstances, having fallen through the gaps of school, training, and work; they become statistically absent as a consequence.

Facing no meaningful job prospect, Bone observes himself becoming such a statistically non-existent human entity. Amidst the proliferation of dead-end and below-poverty jobs and with even the majority of these out of reach of a working-class youth like Bone, the teenage protagonist like any prototypical youth he resembles is bound to slip through an imaginary or what is at best only a very fragile security net. In order to ensure his survival, Bone comes to understand he will have to resort to informal and illegal activities, whether he is up to it or not, leaving him locked in a vicious circle, from which there is no escape. This is bound to wreak havoc on one's psyche, making one feel completely and irrevocably worthless. The novel thus works against the mainstream discourse that blames the victims, and instead goes to the core of the

problem, revealing the structural causes that push one to petty crime. Bone thus records (Banks 1995: 68–69):

From dealing [drugs] to stealing [and selling electronics under the counter], man. From dealing to stealing, man. I mean, which is better? Think about it. They are both fucking illegal so which is better? [...] The whole thing was scary. It made you feel like once you stepped across the line you could never get back and were doomed from then on to a life of crime. [...] You had to be a cat like Willie or a little kid like I once was not to be a criminal and for a human being like I was now that was impossible.

As the novel points out, whether the boy manages to cling on to low-waged jobs in the formal sector or resorts to illegal activities in the informal sector of the contemporary capitalist economy, in both cases he is a doomed individual, a person facing permanent erasure as a human being. Going from one semi-formal or illegal job to another further accentuates and exacerbates this dead-end situation.

The only form of temporary escape seems to be the military, which is also in line with the official discourse of mercenary military recruitment being a temporary alleviation of poverty. But to turn to the private military-industrial complex in reality does not mean escaping flexibilised forms of employment and, just as sinisterly, it means partaking in the imposition of a global neo-colonial order and thereby in the instalment of the very same suffocating economic order on a worldwide scale (Chomsky 2000). Not surprisingly, the novel finishes this first leg of the protagonist's journey towards maturation, that is, towards the acquisition of social awareness and critical reflection, by drawing our attention to urban wasteland, which is symbolically ensconced in and surrounded by the detritus of the military-industrial complex. While the military waste stands for the omnipotent presence of the American military-industrial complex and American global hegemony, the sprawl of shopping malls with people quarrelling on the inside for the lack of money and scavenging on the outside on account of the lack of food, which poverty wages cannot buy, stands for the spread of the post-Fordist type of service sector and the explosion of flexibilised and devalorised, deskilled job positions. Capitalism and the military combine: they work in unison, with the latter supporting the former. At this stage, the teenage protagonist comes to realise that capitalist America, contrary to the myth of being the land of opportunity, is a land or a system of little or no opportunities for the majority of people, teenagers and their parents alike, which, under the auspices of the military-industrial complex and in the service of larger interests, tends to be exported elsewhere on a global scale. The "wastescape" is therefore not limited to the US, which is why it is essential for the young protagonist to meet the people directly affected by these policies and expand his horizons beyond his immediate and seemingly isolated local environment.

State-endorsed, legalised exploitation of migrants

A precursor to this watershed moment, and a major shift in the protagonist's consciousness, occurs when the narrator escapes the dilapidated apartment above the video store and joins forces with the homeless Jamaican migrant worker instead.

He apprentices himself to the older man and joins him in his temporary abode in a wrecked and abandoned school bus that symbolically sits in the middle of the American wasteland, that is, in an abandoned field on top of military waste and behind the shopping mall belt. Structurally, this second change of geographical location – with the boy moving from the dilapidated inner-city to the town’s outer shopping-mall rim, which by definition is the most devastated urban area – signifies a detachment from the narrator’s solipsistic self and a gradual transformation into a socially aware and historically informed self. The white working-class boy’s encounter with a black migrant worker spurs into motion the exploration of “the permeability of divisions between African-American and European American” working-class (Parker 2010: 286) and it is this encounter, significantly titled “School Days”, that signifies the beginning of “Bone’s real education” (Millard 2007: 24) or true awakening. The narrator at this point brings its readership face to face with the exploitative nature of migrant labour, showing the way a secondary economic and racialised status is legally imposed upon Latin American and Caribbean immigrants as a result of government policies and the demands of US capital.

Bone begins to learn that the living and working conditions of the white working poor on the home turf of the American empire structurally overlap with the fate of systematically dispossessed and forcefully displaced immigrant workers from the re-colonised Latin American and Caribbean states under US influence. Significantly, one of his and the readership’s first lessons is the realisation that the systemic exploitation of the American working-class goes hand in hand with the legalised exploitation of those whom the US immigration laws and government policies consistently cast as a modern version of unfree and racialised, indentured labour. This is most poignantly captured in the section where we see the teenage narrator beginning to grasp the operating principles of this vicious circle of systemic exploitation as the fate of his Jamaican mentor and surrogate father begins to unravel in detail (Banks 1995: 155–156):

He’d come up from Jamaica in April with a crew of migrant farm workers [...] they were supposed to work on the apple trees in the spring and then in June the same crew was supposed to go to Florida on a bus and cut sugarcane all summer for a different company and come back north in the fall and pick apples. Once you signed on you couldn’t quit until six months were up without losing all the money that you’d earned so far and your work permit so if you left the camp you were like an international outlaw, an illegal alien plus you were broke.

Bone’s new benefactor and mentor, who has renounced his slave name and goes by the name of I-Man, faces the kind of living and working conditions that literally turn him into a shadow presence. His lot, just like the fate of other Latin American and Caribbean migrant workers, is revealed not to be a result of coincidence and personal misfortune, as official discourse would have it and which Bone begins to see through, but of carefully designated policies. Their aim, as Bone learns from I-Man, is to secure a pool of unprotected workers without recourse to social benefits, union bargaining and other means of appeal available to workers with US citizenship, which confers the status

of modern semi-bondage upon the people thus affected. Upon entering the US legally, I-Man as a Jamaican migrant worker is officially labelled as a permanent temporary and therefore non-immigrant worker with no right to settlement or citizenship. This kind of categorisation means that he is “legally exempted from laws on minimum employment standards, collective bargaining and the provision of social services and programs such as unemployment insurance, social assistance, old age pensions, etc” (Sharma 2001: 427). This goes to show that “migrant workers are not inherently cheap and flexible” as the official propaganda has it, but that their “exploitability must be produced and reproduced” (Paret 2014: 104), that is, institutionally and consistently reinforced. Temporary workers like I-Man constitute so-called racialised “captive labour” (Camayd-Freixas 2013: 154). To legally enter the US, as Bone begins to realise, Latin Americans and Caribbean people must be already contracted to their employers in advance, unlike other people entering the US, and are required to put in at least six months of work before they can change their employer otherwise they lose the money they have earned. These legal conditions have been designed so as to constitute a fertile ground for even greater exploitation. Should they resist oppressive conditions, inadequate housing and rampant exploitation like I-Man does, migrant workers designated as temporary are rendered subject to immediate deportation and their status reverts from legal to illegal migrants. In other words, their work or stay permits are revoked. It is for this reason that I-Man enters the US a legal migrant but leaves it an illegal one. As observed by Bone: “I-Man was [now] a Jamaican illegal alien trying to get by and eventually get home without getting busted by the American government” (Banks 1995: 167) while he was still owed the money he had legally earned.

This experience conditioned by this very specific change in location becomes a major eye-opener for the narrator and for the readership. These insights, which have to do with an ever more systemic understanding of the system of exploitation, drive the story of development and maturation forward. To finally come face to face with the capitalist machinery of systemic exploitation and gain a full understanding of its operating mechanisms eventually means also departing abroad. Joining I-Man on his journey back home to Jamaica is therefore also a way of coming home for the teenage protagonist. He comes face to face with contemporary forms of American (economic) imperialism and worldwide capital accumulation that rests on the systemic dispossession and marginalisation of the peoples residing in America’s and other Western spheres of so-called economic interests. This coming face to face with the way American capital operates on a worldwide scale and the way it constitutes its neo-colonial peripheries in order to plunder them under the pretext of foreign aid and development (Chomsky 2000) in turn completes the protagonist’s cycle of social awakening or maturation.

Bone’s coming “home”: neo-colonial exploitation rendered nakedly visible

In joining I-Man on his journey back home, this final change of geopolitical location enables Bone to see through and beyond the postcard image of the Caribbean islands as promoted heavily by the international corporate tourist industry. These are

the images that in a typical neo-colonial manner feature “peopleless wilderness spaces and pristine, white sandy beaches” (Devine and Ojeda 2017: 608), thus hiding the violent processes of land grab and privatisation of prime beach locations and other resources, which rest upon the dispossession and cultural erasure of local peoples, that is, upon their literal removal from the picture. This is the modern-day reinforcement of the old colonial myth of the virgin and empty land (McClintock 1995), supposedly freely available to corporations and white tourists alike. If the presence of the locals is admitted at all, the image found in the promotion literature of big Western tourist corporations is invariably that of welcoming and hospitable locals, who by default are objectified and cast either as sex-appealing and inviting bodies or as supplicant bodies that are there to serve and thus accommodate the needs of white tourists (Pratt 1992). For Bone to begin to unravel the machinery of neo-colonial exploitation, it is essential that he undertakes this final leg of his journey towards full social awareness under the mentorship of the black man that he has come to love and respect. As a result, the young adult as part of his growing up not only comes to question the constructs of race but also to identify as one with the people the West has constructed as its “racialized Other”. Only by defecting to the other side, that is, by abandoning whiteness as a political category of privilege and going native in order to feel and see with the eyes of the people the West continues to construct as dehumanised others, can Bone also become a reliable or informed narrator.

For Bone, as a result, racist ideology does not hold sway as it does for his fellow American passengers on the plane, who, on their way to enclaved beach resorts in Jamaica, display all the mental trappings of modern-day colonial travellers. Bone aptly labels and dismisses his white compatriots as “party animals” (Banks 1995: 294), which is also a way of creating a symbolic and actual rift between him and the rest of the American crowd. Unlike the rest of the whites who are there “to get seriously laid a lot and by black people if possible” (1995: 252) and whose comfort of cheap all-inclusive tourist packages depends on the invisible and much exploited labour of these very same people, Bone sides with I-Man and undergoes a complete makeover. By joining I-Man’s native community instead, he is able to give the hotel resorts a wide berth. This is the community that, unlike the rest of the islanders who have already been dispossessed, still lives off communally shared land: “[T]heir environment was now mine and the ant farm was definitely not some package-tour hotel for Miller-timers from Indiana” (262).

As somebody becoming ever more attuned to the local social circumstances, Bone cannot but notice that Jamaica, like the rest of the Caribbean states, is a “poor country” (1995: 294), which over the last three decades has been made dependent on the foreign-owned and foreign-controlled tourist industry. This has been imposed on Jamaica and the rest of the Caribbean island states through the US-controlled IMF and World Bank to the advantage of Western tour operators, airlines and hotel chain companies, which is why holidays in the enclavic hotel resorts in Third World countries also come in a package (Kothari 2015: 249). As a result, the locals are again left out of the frame or

left with next to nothing. In this sense, the first scene the narrator recounts immediately after touch-down in Jamaica is more than telling and shows the line of investigation the protagonist, and along with him the reader too, will pursue from now on, and which will drive his trajectory of maturation forward (Banks 1995: 254):

We are suddenly out in the main part of the airport which is open to the street and there's all the Jamaicans with vans and taxis and even buses waiting and a whole bunch of women carrying huge trays of souvenirs and Jamaican shirts and straw hats and so on and some skinny kids standing around ready to panhandle or whatever and these tall cool dudes in sunglasses even though it's night with [...] their belts undone and their flies half open, [...] guys who are trying to look generally available for white chicks from Indiana and everybody's watching the gates and waiting to pounce as soon as they see a regular American come out. There were some cops too [...] who were mainly watching the Jamaican civilians, probably to keep them from scaring the party animals when they came out and realized that they hadn't been safely herded inside their hotel yet.

This opening scene draws attention to the ways in which the Western tourist industry is implicated in deepening the poverty and in replicating and upholding the old white-black racialised divide, that is, the imposed master-servant relationship, in a new guise. White Americans pouring in to be immediately transported to tourist enclaves or what are effectively “walled-in resort complexes” (Padilla 2007: 50) reserved for whites or Northerners stand in stark opposition to penniless locals. Officially dispossessed of their lands and means of subsistence (either through the land grab on the part of foreign-owned agribusinesses or in the case of fisheries and coastal areas by multinational hotel businesses), the ordinary locals are forced to survive on trifles in the shadow economy of these very same tourist complexes by falling back on the informal economy and petty jobs like trinket trade or prostitution. The scene witnessed by Bone and by others in real life is a symbolic delineation of the new tectonic fault line between the global North and the global South. It lays bare another form of class division brought on and sustained by neo-colonialism, with working-class Americans and those Bone refers to as party animals who were “older singles in their twenties and thirties from Indiana” (1995: 189) only imaginarily better off than those whom the official propaganda of imperial centres has taught them to view as eternally underdeveloped and freely available others.

The protagonist's growing awareness of the systemic poverty he sees around him provides a foray into the understanding of contemporary imperialism, systemic impoverishment and modern-day enslavement of the Caribbean and Latin America. One of the contemporary methods of keeping former and newly established colonies dependent is through the destruction of local industries and subsistence farming and through the imposition of mostly foreign-controlled export agriculture and export-oriented industry that specialises only in the growing of a few crops or in the production of a limited array of (half-finished) products for export (Petras & Veltmeyer 2016). This has resulted in the displacement of subsistence farmers and in the loss of skilled jobs in the much shrunken or evaporated industrial sector, with an overall new dependence of

the countries in the global South on imported finished products and foodstuff. This in turn increases prices while states are forced into debt peonage to sustain the high import level of basic goods imported from the West or dumped by Western corporations, and, ironically, most often made from the natural resources extracted from these very same Latin American and Caribbean countries (Petras & Veltmeyer 2007). The promotion of the enclavised tourist industry by international financial institutions, such as the IMF and WTO – with an emphasis on exclusive and privatised beach resort complexes catering to Western tourists only and touted as a “development strategy” for the countries the West continues to under-develop to its own advantage – is, as the novel perfidiously makes us aware, part of the same neo-colonial pattern of systemic plunder and structural impoverishment.

This is the very understanding that I-Man imparts to Bone long before they embark on their journey to Jamaica in order to meet, so to say, the West or Uncle Sam again. This issue is first raised when Bone reports on I-Man talking about his Rastafarian religion as (Banks 1995: 157):

[...] a way to be free of control by white people, English people mainly whom he said had taken his ascendants out of Africa and made slaves of them in Jamaica and many other places. Then later on when the English found out how colonization was a cheaper and less vexatious way than slavery for getting rich without having to leave London except on vacation, they went and freed all their slaves and colonized them instead. And after that when the English queen finally died and they had to let Jamaica go free the Americans and Canadians invented tourism which was the same colonization, he said only without the citizens of the colony needing to make or grow anything.

Far from being the source of development as the official economic mantra spun by Western institutions has it, the tourist industry run for the benefit of Western tourist corporations, as the novel demonstrates, is a source of violent, large-scale dispossession and a generator of poverty among local inhabitants. As explained by Peterson, “the profits generated return primarily to the rich states and transnational corporations associated with the tourist industry” with patterns like this “reflecting colonial histories” (2003: 105). Indeed, the so-called investment schemes are based upon land enclosure and displacement of local inhabitants from prime areas, which, under the pressure of the IMF and WTO and Western-based development agencies, are either given free of charge or virtually gifted to multinational corporations for a symbolic price. In return for their “investment”, multinationals also demand from the states, which they claim to be developing, extensive tax breaks and tax exemptions on the profits generated. In the end, this represents a double form of expropriation, the inevitable result of which is the loss of property rights on the part of the state and indigenous populations as well as the loss or the so-called “leakage” of tax revenues, with most of the profits directly transferred to the imperial centres (Padilla 2007: 54). The corporate-run tourist industry does not invest in the education of the local workforce either, which it prefers to see unskilled and therefore confined en masse to the lowest paid jobs in the industry. Here people are forced to vie for only a few types of jobs and only so many openings, and

it is this in combination with their unskilled jobs that makes this workforce docile and pliant or easily replaceable in the case of strikes or attempts at union organising. It is for this reason that this branch of Western industry tends to export its own managerial and administrative staff to its resorts worldwide while “systematically excluding the locals from skilled positions” (2007: 52). As aptly put by Kothari, foreign controlled multinational resort complexes are in fact modern-day replicas of “the colonial relations of the plantation system through their autocratic management, overseas repatriation of profits, white managers, primarily non-white, subservient staff servicing the needs of mainly white tourists, exclusion of the locals from facilities and beaches and the regressive representation of the locals in promotional literature” (2015: 261). As we come to see through Bone’s very eyes in his daily encounter with the actual reality, the tourist industry touted as a source of revenue and new job positions for developing countries turns out to be anything but. As Bone realises, this kind of tourism acts as an extended hand of Western interests and a tool of neo-colonialism.

One of the first insights into how these walled-in, enclavised hotel resorts function as a contemporary version of former colonial estates has to do with the restriction of movement and denial of access to the majority of the locals. Bone notices that access to these hotel resorts for him as a white kid is easy even though he is not a paying customer, but not so for the locals: “the pools and the bars and beachfronts [...] were off limits” to the local population (Banks 1995: 336). Hotel resorts are run like modern-day colonial estates, with a clear segregation line kept between the privileged guests and the dispossessed locals. As put by Kothari in her discussion of neo-colonial resorts, this “echoes previous colonial strategies to separate the colonizer from the colonized, with the installation of exclusive areas for Europeans” (2015: 253). The setting up of these boundaries creates and maintains a hierarchy of access with prime beach areas out of reach of the local population, and a newly imposed social hierarchy with the locals automatically relegated to a secondary and subordinate position instead. This demarcation line between the privileged and the disenfranchised is also maintained through all-inclusive packages and resorts being organised as walled-in entertainment, leisure and shopping communities. This in turn prevents the mixing of the European/American guests with the locals, thus restricting and “minimiz[ing the need for any] social contact” of the Western guests “with the outside” (Kothari 2015: 249). The adolescent narrator perceptively notices that (195: 341):

[...] [a p]rivate beach club [came] with a bunch of fancy shops and restaurants in the neighbourhood and white people all over the place strolling hand in hand and buying things and getting suntanned and feeling safe from attack or deception by the natives [...].

In this way, by minimising the contact of the guests with the hosts, those inhabiting the outside world or the world on the artificially established margin also come again to be constructed as the ultimate other. And in line with this colonial imaginary, they are constructed as mired in their “unchanging and timeless cultures” of charming but, according to a hardly changed Western orientalist imaginary, still “primitive” or

“savage” pasts (Rosaldo quoted in Kothari 2015: 252). Bone’s bitter realisation of what is going on in these premises also announces his ever more obvious distancing from his American compatriots and their neo-colonial mind-sets.

The fact that hotel resort complexes are exclusive areas for whites only and run as modern-day colonial plantations is also demonstrated in the way they are maintained. While local inhabitants are simultaneously barred from accessing the sites and leisure facilities as potential customers, they are also systematically kept from skilled positions as workers on these very same sites. Their admittance comes only at the backdoor as workers confined to the lowest job positions, so that they end up being associated primarily with servitude, and with an increasing “reservoir of a new kind of sexual labour” (Padilla 2007: 47). In both cases, this resonates with the old and new processes of racialised othering whereby the locals are dehumanised to be constructed and treated in terms of utter availability, that is, as freely available or servile bodies, as another natural resource of a country, freely available for extraction or plucking. While local people are structurally forced into prostitution as a result of the shortage of jobs, with the agricultural and industrial sector gone or kept to a minimum, the image of the locals’ seemingly inherent sexual availability rests on the evocation of old colonial tropes re-produced and maintained through Western promotional literature. Local inhabitants, just like their predecessors during the early stages of European colonialism, are re-constructed as ones with a lush and abundant nature and as a result are presented as being more prone to sensuality and hedonistic lifestyles (Kothari 2015: 252). As noticed by Bone already on his flight to Jamaica, in the Western imaginary of modern-day colonial travel this projected servitude and sexual availability of the locals comes as part of the holiday package (Banks 1995: 252):

[...] our fellow passengers after the Miami airport anyhow were mostly tourists [...]. I asked [one] why he was going to Jamaica now instead of waiting for winter. It’s off season, kid. Cheaper, he said. Plus it’s a package. Which means you don’t have to leave the hotel for *anything*. You know what I’m saying? Whatever you want, they got it right there at the hotel. You get me, kid? he says like wink-wink nudge-nudge.
Yeah but don’t you want to travel around some? You know, like maybe get out and see the country, do some tramposing, man.
Naw. We’re comin’ to party!
[...] Jamaica’s long ways for a party, I said.
He goes, Yeah! Like that’s the point. They looked like they were into getting seriously laid a lot and by black people if possible and smoking some heavy reefer and snorting coke only they were too uptight to do it in America [...].

The white teenage protagonist, and along with him the reader, comes to realise that the Western corporate tourist industry is not a remedy for the structurally impoverished, but another curse in a series of foreign-imposed development strategies. It serves a duplicitous nature, as in a roundabout turn it ends up “advocat[ing] the concept that rich white folks can help the economy of a poor black country by turning its people into servants, drug dealers, pimps, meatboys and [prostitutes]” (Mowry 1995: 829).

It is in this context and with this kind of maturity that the white American adolescent finally also comes face to face with his biological white father, literally and symbolically speaking. This is the Father or the face of America that has evaded and refused to pay child support and wife alimony, while all the time accumulating capital (on home turf and) in his neo-colonial mansion in the Caribbean. The father, whom the boy has since his early days naively pictured as a benevolent figure and as a JFK double in his appearance, struts around the island as an American physician or aide affiliated to the local government. He is a self-proclaimed curator of locals' needs on behalf of external agents, whose credentials and diploma certificate are of course phoney. Simultaneously, he also sits at the centre of the island's most lucrative section of the informal economy based on drug production, with local men like I-Man acting merely as field workers.² The white Father turns out to be at the centre of operations directly affecting the structurally exploited South, and the mind-set on the basis of which this is carried out is underlined by racism. The Father's exact words when he defends his appropriated wealth, whether it comes in the form of the goods or people he imagines himself to possess, are overtly racist: "what's mine is mine [...]. And when some little nigger comes into my house and takes what's mine, he has to pay. [...] And the only thing that nigger owns is his worthless life, so that's what he'll have to pay with" (Banks 1995: 302). Not surprisingly, the white Father's manor that overlooks the entire capital city, and which Bone describes as "this huge white-stone two-story ancient house from France and England" (277) is a faithful replica of former colonial estates and contemporary enclavic hotel resorts. Or to rely on Millard's insight, "run like a 19th-century plantation with contemporary forms of enslavement", the father's colonnaded manor that comes with a luxurious pool is the system of neo-colonial exploitation in miniature. As we come to see through Bone's eyes, this is the seemingly private world where all the structural forces that ensure the exploitation and second-ratedness of the majority on the outside are an integral and nakedly visible part of the inside too (Banks 1995: 286–287):

Except for the three or four little kids from the neighbourhood who did yard chores and ran errands for tips, the Jamaicans were natties, these good-looking young dudes with [...] terrific builds [...] in only loose shorts that sometimes showed their units and making out on the couches and suchlike with the white American women and I suppose hooking up with them later. [...]

² The allusion is of course to the American war on drugs the US exports to its spheres of interest in Latin America in order to reinforce the American presence there by planting military bases. And the reference is also to the historical role the US intelligence agencies have had in developing drug traffic in Latin America to raise extra money in order to fund contra-revolutionary paramilitaries, most notoriously those in Nicaragua (Livingstone 2009). US military invasions and the drug trade sit side by side, a point driven home by Bone seemingly describing what on the surface appears to be only the process of growing ganja: "while the plants were still babies we ran strings from poles and hung these humongous thin camouflage sheets that I-Man said'd been left behind in Grenada after the United States Army finished invading and went home. Dem hiding sheets spread all over de Caribbean now, mon" (Banks 1995: 247).

It's hard to explain. I usually don't give a shit what other people do so long as it's what they want to do. But it was like the white American females were into young black guys and were probably scared of hitting on a regular black guy from the States who would've known where they were coming from and would've told them to fuck off so instead they hooked up with these black dudes who were basically permanently broke and didn't even know anybody they could steal off of for a living. I could tell the females felt superior to the natties, plus they could fly back to the States whenever they felt like it and live a regular life but the natties were stuck here hustling for ever. Rent-a-Rastas, I-Man called them [...].

It is this organised system of exploitation, which permeates the formal sphere and the private sphere under the direct or indirect rule of the newly imposed colonial masters, and which feeds on constructing native residents as permanently available and extractable bodies either in the form of waged slave labour or sex labour, that eventually makes Bone "want to puke" (1995: 286).

Bone's rite of passage demands that he not only recognises these structural inequalities but becomes fully aware of their historical or socio-economic origin, that is, the source that feeds them. His rite of passage rests on the recognition of there being a structural parallel between the former system of slavery and the contemporary capitalist world of exploitation based on people's systemic objectification and commodification. This defining moment, which Bone also refers to as the moment of coming to "see de true lights of I-self" (1995: 755), occurs when he is taken by I-Man to a community's ritual cave and is given a special mixture of herbs to smoke in a "cool little clay chillum made in the shape of a pregnant African woman" (1995: 317). What follows is a powerful drug-induced hallucination which takes him to the time when the mansion was a slavery plantation. Turned from a white boy into a Jamaican slave boy, he finds himself driving an ox-wagon loaded with sugar cane, which he delivers to a sugar factory where it is unloaded by "a bunch of older guys and women and teenaged kids, all blacks and really sweaty and filthy [...]. Nobody talks. They just work" while a black woman is stripped naked and beaten by the foreman. Then he is himself plucked from the wagon by one of the supervisors and sexually abused, while in the next scene he is witness to a hanging and finally to a slave rebellion. All the time, the emphasis is upon the construction and enforcement of the status of people as objects, that is, as freely available bodies. Bone himself thus undergoes the experience of total othering, of being and being acted upon as one of those available bodies, first as a labouring body and then as a body available for sexual gratification, all part of a package. To finally see and understand the structural parallel between plantation slavery and wage slavery, Bone must undergo the experience of walking in the shoes of those most exploited because racialised. What he finds at his father's contemporary manor is a form of waged and racialised sex slavery, which has, with all the big anticolonial movements squashed, obviously undergone a global expansion and final consolidation.

Bone's maturation or coming of age is premised, significantly, on his rejection of the "idea of people as property" (Millard 2007: 17), as extractable human resources

whether they be constructed as “white trash” or racialised others. In this sense, Bone’s formative process also rests on being finally “forced to acknowledge his participation in a racialized system” of the US empire (O’Loughlin 2002: 40). In his essay “Who Will Tell the People”, Banks draws our attention to the white hegemonic America and the operations of the US empire, of which the constant racialising or othering of those it seeks to control and exploit constitutes its hidden and basic structural principle. Banks (quoted in Carton 2015: 745) points out that:

There is no town, no country, no state in America that has not been profoundly affected by the events, characters, themes, and values dramatized by the story of race in America. It opens in the early seventeenth century, and it continues today in all the Americas and in Europe too, as a late chapter in the Tale of the Empire; and in Asia, as that chapter called the Vietnam War; and in Africa itself, in the chapters that describe Liberia’s and Sierra Leone’s tragic, ongoing civil wars, for instance. And you don’t have to be a prophet to see that, if this is indeed the era of American Empire, the African Diaspora is a tale with chapters that will be set worldwide, wherever there is an American “presence,” well into the next century as well.

By absorbing and demonstrating this awareness, Bone’s narrative constitutes a very rare type of contemporary American coming-of-age novel. It involves the unmasking and rejection of racialised and class oppression on home turf as well as in the new colonies. This in turn leads to the undermining of the foundational myth of America, premised upon the official portrayal of the US as a country of innocent origin and benevolent purposes in the neo-colonial present (Millard 2007). An essential part of Bone’s growing up therefore has to do with seeing through and rejecting this myth after coming face to face with the devastating consequences of the workings of the Western empire with the US at its helm. In reference to the Fourth of July celebrations, Bone thus comments: “Birth of the nation man and all that. We do it every year, just blast the shit out of the sky with tons and tons of fireworks to remind us of all the wars won by America and all the people who got killed doing it. It’s like a fucking war dance, man. We’re celebrating our hard-won freedom to like kill people” (Banks 1995: 126). This kind of maturation therefore requires the denouncement of the father’s deeds and ultimately the rejection of the white Father, which is a final twist on the traditional male *bildungsroman* where heroes eventually end up replacing their fathers in their role as patriarchs. At the end of Banks’s coming-of-age novel, it transpires that the actual white father, a drug baron, is directly responsible for doing away with Bone’s surrogate black father. Bone’s life is spared because nobody wants to do in a white kid: he leaves Jamaica but avoids going home to America, for in another sense he has already come home. The white boy emerges as a new person, a person with a concrete social and historically insightful awareness that enables him to be perceptive and critically aware of the socio-political situation to which he refuses to lend support. By leaving behind the Blakean version of innocence, that is, ignorance that knows no age boundaries, the protagonist has come full circle. He can finally observe not only that “I’d changed in ways that even I didn’t understand yet” (347) but he can finally also see “how

different I was now from how I was then only a little less than a year ago” (358). In this respect, what Bone’s story of development and maturation brings to the surface is also a realisation that “a continuing belief in American innocence is part of a wilful denial of [its internal and external colonial] history” (Millard 2007: 7). Therefore, the task for the teenage protagonist is to “move [...] towards new forms of knowledge that are historically engaged rather than purely solipsistic” (Millard 2007: 30). The protagonist comes to understand how the majority of people are being transformed into disposable human resources, arranged further hierarchically on a racialised scale of assigned humanity and non-humanity. Only by knowing and understanding these processes can one also resist them. Bone’s growing up is then the kind that rests on a deeply informed understanding of contemporary social reality and a systemic awareness of one’s own situatedness in this world, which makes Banks’s novel *Rule of the Bone* a working-class novel, and a cross-over novel at that, par excellence and a very rare example of its kind.

Conclusion

Rule of the Bone is a coming-of-age novel that departs significantly from traditional teenage novels of development with their focus on solipsistic and inward-looking individuals cocooned in seemingly self-contained and sufficient worlds divorced from broader social reality. Today such narratives revolve around the teenage consumer culture, which they help to reinforce by placing focus on fashion, entertainment and celebrity cults and continue, just like their more traditional predecessors, to “eschew political debate, topical issues and significant areas of conflict” (Reynolds 2007: 79). *Rule of the Bone* also represents a significant departure from today’s mainstream versions of coming-of-age novels, the so-called problem novels that tend to focus on single social issues and are inevitably limited in their scope. According to Reynolds, they can “offer only restricted ways forward” while displaying “impotence in the face of complex, entrenched, and inter social and political systems” (2007: 82). *Rule of the Bone* instead offers a systemic analysis of the social system as a whole, which not only pervades but determines one’s living reality: far from being superfluous or external to the individual, it shows that social conditions are formative of rather than external to an individual. They inform one’s social reality and determine the possibilities of one’s existence along with the modes of acting and becoming in the contemporary world.

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Poslijeindustrijska Amerika i neoimperijalizam u romanu *Rule of the Bone* Russella Banksa

Rule of the Bone [Zakon Kosti] (1995) Russella Banksa rijedak je primjer suvremenoga, društveno angažiranoga američkoga romana o razvoju i sazrijevanju koji se, kako se tvrdi u ovome radu, oslanja na sustavnu analizu poslijeindustrijske zapadnjačke stvarnosti i suvremenih oblika zapadnjačkoga imperijalizma. Spoznavanje i neprihvatanje te stvarnosti predstavlja ključan dio adolescentske putanje rasta i sazrijevanja. *Rule of the Bone* američki je poslijeindustrijski roman o radničkoj klasi i sazrijevanju čije se razumijevanje krije na sjecištu marksističke i postkolonijalne teorije. O tim složenim društvenim problemima roman istovremeno progovara na dvjema razinama: osnovnoj, ali ipak pronicljivoj razini pristupačnoj tinejdžerima te složenijoj razini koja lako angažira bolje upućene, odrasle čitatelje, što *Rule of the Bone* čini ukriženim romanom. Namijenjen ponajprije odrasloj čitateljskoj publici, roman može biti iznimno koristan adolescentima koji traže izlaz iz žanrovskih ograda dominantne suvremene adolescentske književnosti.

Ključne riječi: muški roman o odrastanju, poslijeindustrijska Amerika, rad, neokolonijalizam, turistička industrija, marksizam

Das postindustrielle Amerika und der Neo-Imperialismus in Russell Banks' Roman *Rule of the Bone*

Russell Banks' Roman *Rule of the Bone* (1995) ist einer der seltenen zeitgenössischen sozialengagierten amerikanischen Romane zum Thema des Heranwachsens von Jugendlichen, der auf einer sachlichen Analyse der postindustriellen abendländischen Wirklichkeit und der zeitgenössischen Formen des westlichen Imperialismus beruht. Das Erkennen und die Ablehnung einer solchen Wirklichkeit sind entscheidende Momente im Entwicklungs- und Reifeprozess eines Jugendlichen. *Rule of the Bone* ist ein Roman über das Heranwachsen im Kontext der amerikanischen postindustriellen Arbeiterschaft, dessen Verständnis in der Schnittstelle zwischen marxistischer und postkolonialer Theorie zu erwerben ist. Im Roman werden die vielschichtigen sozialen Probleme auf mindestens zwei Ebenen behandelt: auf der einfacheren, den Heranwachsenden zugänglichen und dennoch tiefsinnigen sowie auf der komplexeren, auf der die schon in der Literatur bewanderten erwachsenen Leser angesprochen werden, weshalb dieser Roman als ein Crossover-Roman zu bezeichnen ist. Obwohl sich der Roman vor allem an Erwachsene richtet, ist er eine gute Lektüre auch für jene Jugendlichen, welche die derzeit dominierenden Gattungsgrenzen der zeitgenössischen Jugendliteratur überschreiten möchten.

Schlüsselwörter: Jugendroman über das Heranwachsen von Jungen, das postindustrielle Amerika, Arbeit, Neokolonialismus, Tourismusindustrie, Marxismus