

## **East African Detective Fiction: A Basic Anatomy**

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### **Abstract**

This paper provides a basic survey of the current state of the Swahili detective prose. The paper highlights some thematic and formal features that distinguish the East African detective prose. To foreground the basic features of the Swahili detective prose, the generic theory has been utilized. Data was collected through library research by reading primary texts on Swahili detective while secondary data was taken from critical works such as theses and academic papers. This data was analyzed qualitatively by extracting salient features in each text. The paper too highlights some of the factors responsible for the growth and popularity of the detective genre in the East African region. The researchers found out that some of the factors for the rapid growth and popularity of this genre are their use simple plots, attractive language, and the character of the detective figure among others.

**Key Words:** Crime, Detective Fiction, Kiswahili, genre, East Africa

### **Introduction**

Though popular literature is diverse generically, manifesting itself in such forms as detective, romance, adventure and crime novels, there are certain features of convergence. For instance, they are both produced for the mass consumption. This is evidenced by their accessibility in not only bookstores but also in the streets. Secondly, they are more often meant to entertain and this is why they are often written in a simple language and with colorfully attractive book jackets. This however, does not mean that the need to entertain overrides other objectives. As it will be shown in this paper, some detective works have didactic values just like the committed literature. Some of the main thematic areas addressed by the African detective fiction include postcolonial relations, exploitation, racial inequalities, corruption and ethnic beliefs and practices. This is what Naidu (2015) calls social detection alongside crime detection. She argues that postcolonial detective works have extended and reshaped the genre to address notions of community, beliefs, race, gender and social-political and historical formations. It is due to this generic relativity that they are lumped together as popular literature. However subtle differences do exist.

For the purposes of this paper, it appears in order to differentiate between crime novels from the detective ones. The detective prose is a sub set of the crime novel in the sense that, while in the former more prominence is given to the aspect of investigation than in the commission of crime. In the latter case, the focus is on the crime itself with greater stress on the criminal character, who is often the main character. In the detective fiction, the protagonist is the detective character, being a private sleuth or a detective from the law enforcement agencies. This paper seeks to explore the developmental milestones leading to the current state of the detective fiction in Africa. This exploration will give us a glimpse of the current state and point the future prospects of growth. The paper uses the historical –comparative approach in assessing the growth of the detective genre of the novel across the three main geographical regions of the Sub-Saharan Africa. Therefore the authors take a critical look at how the genre has been embraced and developed in West Africa, Southern Africa and East Africa. As it will be pointed out later, detective fiction has gained a lot of traction as evidenced by the increasing number of writers from various backgrounds. Naidu (2020) has rightly observed that there are also Western authors whose novels have African settings. These are Agatha Christie's 1937 *Death on the Nile*, Elspeth Huxley's three murder mysteries written in the 1930s whose setting is Kenya and Kwei Quaetey's works set in Ghana.

This research work is guided by the generic theory. According to Chandler (1997), the word genre comes from the French (originally Latin) word for kind or class. In literary theory it means a distinctive type of a text. Robert (1989) quoted by Chandler argues that the principal task of the genre theory is to divide the literary world into types and naming of those types. Thus in literature, genre theory enables us to classify literature in broad categories of prose, drama and poetry in which there are further subdivisions. In drama for instance, we have tragedy, comedy and tragi-comedy while in prose, such divisions as adventure, detective, historical, crime and romance divisions do exist. However, classifying genres of literature is not an easy process due to the fact that the dividing lines between genres are often blurry. The question of classifying literary genres indeed is problematic since some aspects of one genre could be appropriated into the structure of another. Attempts at classifying genres through formal and thematic criteria has also proven unsatisfactory because there is no formal and thematic feature that is exclusive for any genre. It is the relative prominence of a feature, formal or thematic, in some specific genres that differentiates them. Bordwell (1989) argues that classification of literary genres along thematic lines is especially problematic since any theme may appear in any genre. Thus due to an overlap in literary characteristics, certain genres of literature might be lumped together in some broad categories by some critics yet others might subdivide the same broad category into distinct components, each with distinct features. Thus one critic's genre might be another's subgenre. Arising from this fluidity in classification, Fowler (1989) notes that there are also many genres and sub genres for which we have no names.

Stam (2000), another key proponent of this theory, argues that though the theory focuses on the categorization of genres into groups of similar features, there are no clear cut boundaries. He also asks, 'Is there a finite taxonomy of genres or are they in principle infinite? Are genres timeless platonic essences or, ephemeral, time-bound entities? Are genres culture bound or transcultural?' All these are pointers at the hardships of imposing boundaries on specific genres. In spite of the above views regarding problems of generic categorizations, critics have been able to categorize written literature into branches such as drama, prose and poetry with each having further divisions. Based on thematic and formal features for instance, the prose category is made up of the following genres: crime novel, detective novel, committed novel, romance novel, adventure novel among others.

The crime genre, for instance, to some, is a broad that encompasses all prose works whose main preoccupation is commission of crime, adventures of the criminal, detection and punishment. To others these are different genres (crime novel, detective novel, adventure novel and spy novel). Thus in our analysis, some of the novels cited have varying degrees of crime and detection thus they are classifiable into either category. In this paper, key attention is given to distinctive features that define the detective genre. These are both formal and thematic features. Detective prose for instance is distinctive from other categories of the novel. For example, formally, the plot has some unique features. Auden (1962) did an analysis of the stages of the detective novel and noted the following unique characteristics of the plot: (1) Presence of peace and harmony, (2) the disturbance of the crime, (3) the following investigation which is hindered by false evidence and secondary crimes, (4) the solution of the murder, (5) the capture of the criminal, and finally (6) a state of peace is achieved again. Besides these features of plot, the detective fiction's plot is characterized by two stories within its plot. There is the story of the crime and the story of the investigation of the crime. This paper therefore examines how the distinctive salient features of the detective genre are brought to the fore in the East African detective fiction.

In this paper descriptive survey method was used. A general survey of the Eastern African detective fiction in Swahili was undertaken with a view to revealing its salient characteristic features. Primary data was collected by reading works from some detective authors of Swahili detective authors whose works were accessible to the researcher. Where access to primary data was not possible to the researcher, secondary data was used in the form of reviews, research papers, seminar papers, theses and dissertations. Thus this research was a library based research. Data was analyzed using the

tenets of the genre theory and relating these tenets with the social, political and economic backgrounds of the authors.

### Discussion and Analysis

As it was noted in the introduction, just like the case with the West African detective prose, East African popular literature is a product of colonialism. This was through the colonialist education system from which early African students interacted with adventure, romance, detective and crime genres of literature. Madumullah (1988) contends that Africans also got the experience of crime and detective fiction by watching Western popular movies that featured heroic characters such as James Bond and Bruce Lee. In Kenya, genres of popular literature, in English, that became common were Romance and crime. Crime genre in Kenya is represented by John Kiriamiti who wrote crime thrillers that fascinated the readers. His works include *My Life in Crime* (1984) and *My Life With a Criminal* (1984). Others were Ayub Ndii (*A Brief Assignment*), Kitololo (*Shortcut to Hell*, 1983), Mwangi Ruheni (*The Mystery Smugglers*, 1975) among others. The plot of most of these crime novels involves gangs in bank robberies, prison breaks and criminals' escapades with the police. However, their endings have moralistic didacticism in that crime is condemned with the criminals portrayed as villains.

The crime fiction in English is elevated farther through the works of Charles Mangua, David Maillu and Meja Mwangi. Mangua's works, *Son of a Woman* (1971), *Son of Woman in Mombasa* (1984) illuminates urban life in major Kenyan towns by exposing squalor of the slum dwellings, violence and prostitution. The author points out these low brow life conditions as being responsible for the surge in criminality. However, Maillu is the most prolific writer of the crime genre that dwelt with urban problems such as alcoholism, unemployment and prostitution. Maillu did market survey to determine the market demands and tastes of the readers. He discovered that majority of the readers desired topics to do with politics, sexual relationships, religion, deaths and money (Kurts, 1998:78). Therefore these topics featured extensively in Maillu's works such as *Unfit for Human Consumption* (1973), *My Dear Bottle* (1973), *After 4:30* (1974), *Trouble* (1974) among others. Due to his preoccupations with such themes his works were criticized as low-brow and lacking in moral commitment. Wanjala, in *A Season of Harvest* (1978:135-6) for example criticizes *Son of Woman* saying, 'It portrays the depraved scenes of sex, the dilemma of the prostitute and the cancer of unemployment.' Though he offers a very harsh criticism, he fails to note that the problem of unemployment that Maillu addresses is a serious moral responsibility of an East African writer. In addition, Kurts (1998) notes that these works were also banned in Tanzania.

Criticism notwithstanding, he has continued to write, producing over 40 novels. His prolificacy is manifested in his ability to write on diverse topics cutting across literary genres. Lindfors quoted in Kurts (ibid) argues that, 'There are many Maillus at work: Maillu the moralist, Maillu the practical psychologist, Maillu the homespun philosopher, Maillu the comedian and Maillu the popular publisher.' This portrayal of Maillu is justified by most recent works where he has written on more serious societal matters. For instance, he has written children's literature and nonfiction treatises on religion and philosophy. Meja Mwangi too wrote on almost similar themes in his 3 novels: *Kill Me Quick* (1973), *Going Down River Road* (1976) and *Cockroach Dance* (1979).

Kurts notes that a majority of novels published in Kenya since 1970 might be categorized as popular and these includes adventures, romances, crime and detective stories. However in Kenya, the number of novels falling on the romance subgenre is far much higher than the crime, adventure and detective subgenres of the popular literature. The detective category is even more scanty. In East African Swahili detective fiction reached its exponential growth between 1970-1980s partly attributable to the harsh economic times of this period (Madumullah, 1988). He argues that during this time many popular publications continued to emerge as a means of earning income to the writers. The economic challenges were occasioned by the high inflation rates, high oil prices and famine. As a result many industries shut down due to shortage of raw materials. Madumulla says that due to this scenario many writers opened own publishing and marketing ventures and this led to the rapid spread

of the popular prose. Besides, the burgeoning youth population coupled with the travails of the urban dwellers heightened the demand for popular literature as recourse to entertainment. The internal structural elements of the detective prose such as the suspenseful plots makes the genre suitable for entertainment.

Madumulla and Mlacha (1995) have identified a number of features of crime and detective fiction in Kiswahili: The presence of simple plots that are easy to follow, the use of a moralistic protagonist, unique setting, use of fairly simple language, the female character used as a sexual tool, and popular themes dominating their literary discourses. Similar traits are discernible in the Western detective fiction. This points to the direction of influence, from Western detective to Africa and other regions of the world such as East Africa. Swahili detective fiction has taken more prominence in Tanzania than in other East African countries. Gromov (2008) notes that although Kenyan writers seems to be outsmarting their Tanzanian counterparts in the writing of the committed literature, the converse is true for the detective prose. Gromov points out the Kenyan education policy as being responsible for the barrenness in Kenyan Swahili detective prose. This is because in Kenya, Kiswahili has retained a secondary position compared to English, thereby feeding the reading public with literature in English from across the genres. As a consequence of this, detective fiction in Kenya appears more in English than in Swahili. Thus in English Marjorie Oludhe wrote *Murder in Majengo* (1972), a novel with some traces of fiction though the main plot concerns murder and the urban lifestyles of the Luo tribesmen after independence. Meja Mwangi also wrote a detective novel, *Assassins On Safari* (1983) concerning the adventures of a police officer Kanja and his investigation of how Germany mercenaries are planning to assassinate an American foreign affairs minister upon his arrival in Amboseli National Park. Kanja uses his skills to thwart this plan, consequently bringing acclaim to the Kenyan investigating agencies. A more recent work on detection is Mukoma wa Ngugi's *Black Star Nairobi* mainly set in Nairobi in 2007, just days before the Kenya's presidential elections and on the eve of Barack Obama's election in the USA. In this novel, O (for Odhiambo), a former Kenyan police officer but working with Criminal Investigation Department teams up with another former police officer, Ishamael from Wisconsin to form a detective agency, Black Star. They investigate many cases including the discovery of mutilated corpses in the Ngong Forest. Once again, the police officers are portrayed as a dysfunctional and corrupt. However, Mukoma manages to reveal the Kenyan political realities especially the ethnic clashes that have characterized the Kenyan elections in 1992, 1997 and 2007.

Kenyan Swahili detective prose is only represented by the novelettes of Godfrey Levi Shimanyulla. He published three detective novels in the 1970s and early 1980s. These are *Mpelelezi Hodari na Genge la Wahalifu* (1975) [A Famous Detective and a Gang of Criminals], *Fedheha ya Fedha* (1985) [A Shamed of Money] and *Mbegu za Chuki* (1977). More productivity in terms of the number of publications and public access to the Swahili detective is evidently witnessed in Tanzania though the number seems to be declining since 2004 when Mtobwa released his last novel, *Mtambo wa Mauti* [A Death's Vessel]. There is a significant number of titles from the 1980s, 1980s and early 2000s. However, Swahili detective writers from Tanzania have left a remarkable influence on the readers across East Africa as their works are read across the borders. According to data obtained from Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) by this researcher, in Kenya some of the detective novels from Tanzanian authors have been used and examined as secondary school literature texts. In Kenya, *Simu ya Kifo*, was tested in 1974, *Mwana wa Yungi Hulewa* in 1985, *Siri ya Sifuri* in 1981, *Kisima cha Giningi* was read and tested in Keya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) between 1995-1998. In Tanzania, the detective novels of Hussein Tuwa such as *Mfadhili* and *Zawadi ya Ushindi* and Elvis Musiba's *Uchu* have been used in school at various levels. Famous Tanzanian detective authors are Mohamed Said Abdulla, Eddie Ganzel, Ben Mtobwa, Hammie Rajab, Aristablus Elvis Musiba, John Simbamwenne among others.

Madumulla and Mlacha (1995) classifies these writers into clusters according to their stylistic uniqueness: First, is Mohammed Said Abdulla's style whose basic characteristic features include the

use of logic in unraveling various mysteries. In his works, the archetypal motif is the commission of a crime, the investigation of the said crime by the police, the failure by the police thereby necessitating the involvement of a private detective who solves the problem. In most of Abdulla's works, the detective is usually accompanied by an assistant who is less knowledgeable than the detective. Secondly, there is Elvis Musiba's style where the protagonist investigates a crime but solves the problem using his physical prowess that involves fighting the criminal by the use of an array of tactics and weapons. This is evident in *Uchu* (2000) {Greed} in which Willy Gamba travels to Rwanda to investigate the Rwandan crisis as an agent of the Non-aligned Movement (NAM). He meets stiff resistance from both local and international players each advancing their own interests. He uses force and guns to extricate himself from the enemies' traps. Kassam Kassam too in *Mpango* (1982) [A Plan] uses a similar style. Similarly Ben Mtobwa falls in this cluster of writers. Most of his detective thrillers feature the heroic detective, Joram Kiango, who apart from using logic also uses force in dealing with crime. However, unlike the infallible detective Msa created by Abdulla, Mtobwa's detective Joram Kiango makes several mistakes that puts him in some dilemmas.

A critical etymology of the use of force and modern weapons such as guns in Swahili detective indicates that it has roots in the classical period (1920s-1930s) when the American hard-boiled<sup>4</sup> detective fiction started to emerge. Other influences of Western in detective prose on the Swahili detective works can be seen through characterization especially, the characters' use of slang, their dressing styles, smoking and drinking habits, the detective moving around with many beautiful ladies as love and relationships form subplots which often offers some comic relief to the readers. Therefore some of these are elements of Western detective have become normalized by the East African writers. It is against this backdrop that various critics have regarded Mohamed Said Abdulla as a kind of Zanzibarite Sherlock Holmes (Khamis, 2012; Kurts, 1994; Garnier, 2019).

The third and last categorization of the Swahili detective prose according to Madumulla and Mlacha (ibid) deals with Mbunda Msokile's style. The defining trait of Msokile's works is the fusion of the social political realities of his time with structural aesthetics so as to offer entertainment as well. In his novels, though social didacticism is given prominence, entertainment is also core. Instead of using force to deal with criminals, legal channels such as the police, courts and the prison are used. This is the trend adopted by Kenya's Geoffrey Levi in his three novels where the police pursue the criminals and on arrest, they parade them before the courts and thereafter to the prison. Similar scenario obtains with John Simbamwenne's *Kwa Sababu ya Pesa* (1972) [Because of Money], *Mwisho wa Mapenzi* (1972) [The End of Relationship], *Ukitoa siri Utachinjwa* (1986) [You will be Killed if you Reveal the Truth] and *Sikutaki Umefilisika* (1988) [I Don't Like You, you are Bankrupt].

In addition to these three broad classes, a critical review of the Swahili detective prose reveals yet other possible groupings. There is another cluster of writers whose focal point is the international and cross border relations. In this category, the writers deals with international espionage and often involves specialized spy bodies such as FBI, KGB, CIA, THE MOSSAD and The Scotland Yard<sup>5</sup> or their appointed local partners. In transnational cases, the criminal is often another state or a section of the senior government officials working in cahoots with foreign elements. In this subgenre of the Swahili detective fiction, foreign spies infiltrate a country's security system assisted by some disgruntled elements within the rank and file of the ruling elites. The intention is often to topple the government or influence its policy directions. Some of Mtobwa's works such as *Tutarudi na Roho Zetu* (1984) [Shall we Return Safely?] and Musiba's *Uchu* (2000) [Greed] may be viewed in this light. This characteristic feature is also an offshoot of the classical period in which the hard-boiled and Whodunit subgenres emerged in America and Europe respectively. The Western writers seemed to have been inspired by the events of this time (end of world war one and the beginning of world war two) when spying was common, emanating from suspicions between countries security and the need for national security. International espionage, which seems to have inspired post-independence East African writers, re-intensified during the cold war epochs. This was because, as the Western and the Easter blocks competed to spread capitalism and socialism ideologies respectively, spying was intensified. This was an ideal time for foreign spies to secretly collect information on enemies. Thus

Mtobwa's *Tutarudi na Roho Zetu*, addresses espionage between South Africa and its neighbors occasioned by the racist apartheid policies on one hand, and South Africa and the Frontline countries<sup>6</sup> on the other hand.

Similarly, in Hammie Rajab's *Roho Mkononi* (1984), [Fear], the detective, Ray Sibanda reveals a secret plan by South Africa to instigate overthrowal of governments in some Southern Africa countries such as Mozambique, Botswana and Angola. In his later novels such as *Kamlete Akibisha Mlipue* (1986), [Bring Him, If he Resists, Shoot Him], Ray is sent to track some international terrorists. He visits Nairobi, Libya and later is rejoined by other detectives from Uganda in his spying escapades. Kassam Kassam's *Mpango* (1982) [A Plan] also focuses on international level of detection between Namibia and South Africa. In this novel, the colonial administration in Namibia in collaboration with the racist government in South Africa, tries to sabotage the political activities of the African party, SWAPO, so as to delay the attainment of independence.

Our research of the Swahili detective prose also reveals another sub categorization of the detective prose writers in Kiswahili. There is the revenge variety of the detective prose where the victim of the crime or his/her relative or a friend pursues the criminal in his investigations and on finding the criminal or a cabal of criminals, he administers justice there and then. In Eddie Ganzel's *Kitanzi* (1984) [The Hook], Frenki and Rama open a business venture jointly and after breaking even, the venture becomes highly profitable. Rama flies to Mwanza and is escorted by Frenki and his family. On their way back, they are attacked and some of Rama's family members are killed but Frenki escapes. The police investigate the matter and on arresting some criminals, Frenki is called to identify them at the parade but he rejects offering instead to take revenge. He searches for the killers and kills some members of the gang them one by one but one of the criminals reveals that it was Rama who had hired them so that he would remain the sole proprietor of the enterprise. The motif of revenge is also prominent in some of Abdulla's works. In *Kisima cha Giningi* (1968) [The Giningi's Well], Ali Makame felt that his brother should have bequeathed his property to him instead of leaving it to the wife, Mwana wa Giningi. So Ali Makame revenges by killing Mwana wa Giningi. In *Mzimu wa Watu wa Kale* (1958) [The Ancestors' Dwellings], Bwana Ali Bomani is killed by the Arab from Muscat, since apparently Ali had eloped with his wife while he, the Arab and Ali were in Congo for trade. Faraj Katalambulla's novel, *Simu ya Kifo* (1965) [Death's Call] carries a similar theme that rules its plot. As it is realized towards the end of the novel, the motive behind the many murders in the novel is revenge. It is realized that Agnes is the killer of all the members of Mzee Jacob's family I revenge because Mzee Jacob too had killed Agnes' mother and dispossessed them of their property. This style of the revenge motif is also common in the works of some American writers such as Hadley Chase.

However the same motif can as well be traced to some oral literature genres such as oral narratives. This too points to the fact that oral-written interface is narrowed even further in the detective genre. Etymologically, various scholars have proved that oral literature is the precursor of written literature (Park, 2004; Mbatiah, 1999; Mbughuni, 1987). Apart from revenge, Eddie Ganzel's works also dig deeper into the psychology of the criminals in ways that reveal that the criminals too are affected by the actions of disorder which they cause in the society. In *Ndoto ya Mwenda Wazimu* (1972) [A Mad Man's Dream], and *Jogoo la Shamba* (1978) [A Rural Cock] reveal the psychological states of the suspects emanating from their actions.

There are other Swahili detective works that may not be easily classifiable into these clusters due to the presence of multiple features that from other sub categories. For Instance Nicco Ye Mbajo's *Manamba* (1983) [The Driver's Assistant] examines crime at macro level by focusing on the crimes against groups of the population such as the farmers. *Manamba* therefore addresses the problem of exploitation of the farmers and workers by large multinationals owned by foreigners.

As we have indicated earlier, the classical period witnessed many changes and innovations to the writing of the detective fiction. One of the key elements that appeared was the introduction of the female detective. Knight (2003) contends that this development first appeared after the end of second

world war. This trend was started by Agatha Christie when she created a female sleuth, Jessica Fletcher. The Swahili detective fiction achieved this status in the 1980s as seen in Jamaa Mkabarah's *Kipofu* (1985) [The Blind] in which the detective, Mainda Jamaa, a very beautiful lady, is seen as a symbol of gender equality. Her presence and role can be viewed as symbolic of the gender equality advocacy of the 1980s. Perhaps the scarcity of female detectives in the Swahili detective fiction is due to the expectations of the masculine order of many African societies, where women are seen as the weaker sex unable to pursue hardened criminals. It is noteworthy that in Europe, female detective writers emerged around 1920s and 1930s but continued the established patriarchal order by using the male detective. This is to be seen in the works of Dorothy Sayers and Anna Green Katharina among others. Even Agatha Christie's female detective, Jessica Fletcher, appeared later. Her early works had Hercule Poirot assisted by Captain Hastings.

### Basic Features of the Swahili Detective Prose

Below are the basic features of the Swahili detective prose:

i) One of the main features that distinguish Swahili detective fiction from the Western detective fiction is the presence of traditional beliefs and practices in their plots. The commission of crimes especially murder is intertwined with witchcraft so as to mislead law-enforcers. Once murder is committed, suspects and other indicators point to witchcraft as the cause of the crime. Mohammed Said Abdulla is replete with cases where when criminals kill the victim, the suspects intently or inadvertently misdirect the police to the witches. Kezilahabi (1980) says that Witchcraft in Africa is indicative of the class struggle in the sense that the rich seeks the services of the witch so as to be explained how to protect his wealth and himself against the envy of the poor man while the poor man uses witchcraft to be explained how to extricate himself from his current poor situation. Abdulla's works such as *Mzimu wa Watu wa Kale* (1958) [The Ancestors Grove] and *Kisima Cha Giningi* (1968) [The Well of Giningi] the belief in witchcraft as an instigator of crime is strong though by the end of the plots the author clarifies that witchcraft is used as a scapegoat used by criminals to commit crimes. He reveals that crimes are committed due to social economic reasons such as inheritance and revenge. In *Kisima Cha Giningi*, a witch, Fundi Mangungu misleads a robbery victim that her jewellery and other valued treasures were stolen by her husband, Vuai. This offers some short-lived reprieve to the victim, Mwana wa Giningi and delays the arrest of the real culprit but ultimately it does not shield the criminals from facing justice.

ii) Illumination of the post-colonial and international relations especially between the Western, Eastern and African countries is a major feature for the detective novels written in the 1980s and 1990s. This has been necessitated by the commission of international crimes and the divisions brought by cold war relations between the Western and Eastern blocks of the world. In Swahili detective prose, we find the question of international relations in Mtobwa's works such as *Tutarudi Na Roho Zetu?* [Shall We Return Safely?] and in Musiba's *Uchu* [Desire]. In the former, the author digs into the relationship between Tanzania and the Southern Africa countries. The fearless protagonist detective, Joram Kiango, pursues criminals in South Africa, Tanzania and other neighboring countries. Joram Kiango travels across various cities in his investigative escapades such as Nairobi, London and Johannesburg. He is in pursuit of enemies bent on overthrowing the government of Tanzania. In *Uchu*, the detective, Willy Gamba, investigates various international players in the Rwandan genocide crisis and discovers a web of other international players to the crisis. Therefore social commitment is a key feature of the Kiswahili detective fiction.

iii) Focus on urban life is another thematic area of focus in the works whose setting is the life of town and city folks. Problems of urbanization such as drug abuse, crimes committed by gangs and the squalor of the slums are addressed through works with these setting. Though East Africa is not a highly urbanized region, there is some tendency to have town settings in some of the works especially those of Mtobwa na Musiba. In Mtobwa's works such as *Tutarudi na Roho Zetu*, major actions take place in cities such as Dodoma, Dar es Salaam, Arusha, Nairobi and even cities outside Africa. When the detective Joram Kiango and his girlfriend, Nuru, visits Britain they visit cities such as Kingstone,

Bromley and Croyon. In *Uchu*, the detective, Willy Gamba moves from various cities in Tanzania, goes to Kigali in pursuit of criminals.

iv) The structure of the plot is propped up and sustained with an intensive use of suspense in almost of all detective prose works. This is especially so in the works produced as a series such as Mohammed Said Abdulla's novels and Ben Mtobwa's series featuring the indomitable detective Joram Kiango. Therefore suspense is a generic feature that contributes to the popularity of the genre. At the base of popularity and likability of the genre, is the formal aspect of suspense and thematic component of subjects such as love, pursuit of criminals by the police, investigations and adventures of the detective and criminal. Khamis (2012) identifies the strengths of suspense as a technical device that 'can compensate some of the literary features that are left out in the structure of detective fiction – features like psychological motivation, marked style, ornate idiomatic rendering, elaborate description of settings and intellectual satisfaction. In fact, suspense is the main device to effectively capture the reader as the story unfolds in space and time'. Therefore suspense is a feature of the plot that makes the reading more thrilling.

v) Another key feature in the growth and development of the Swahili detective prose concerns the publication and transmission mode. In the formative stages, the genre would reach the masses as short stories that were transmitted through popular magazines and newspapers. This is partly because some of the early Swahili detective writers were also editors and/or journalists working with various magazines or newspapers. They use the newspapers to advertise their novels in addition to partaking serializations thereby making them more popular with the readers. For instance, Faraj Katalambulla was an editor with Tanzania Films, a popular magazine, Hammie Rajab too was an editor with Busara Newspaper. Kassam Kassam was a publisher of detective stories and an editor with Cheka Newspaper. Ben Mtobwa too was an editor with Mwana Habari newspaper which produced many children's stories.

vi) Failure of the police to maintain law and order especially in apprehending criminals and bringing them to justice is also a common trend. In several cases discussed in this paper, the police are complicit in the commission of crime and where they conduct investigations, they give unconvincing reasons for suspecting alleged criminals. They are in many instances outwitted by private detectives. Danyte (2016) notes that in the interwar period, the detective is almost never a member of the police force. This trend has been continued ever since with the detective often being a private one. Besides, the golden age also perfected the art of portraying the police as inefficient and corrupt. Thus the failure of the police is an inherent trait from the golden age but continues to be used. Milda (ibid) argues, 'The police are treated as unimaginative men who come to simple and hasty conclusions about who the murderer is. The Golden Age detectives show themselves to be superior to the official forces that are supposed to deal with crime.' Jahn (2012) argues that some Swahili detective novels have questioned the character of police officers with regard to their involvement in corruption and subversion of justice. In his analysis of *Simanzi* (1995) by Abdul Ntandu, he notes that the novel presents a case of how corruption between police officers and the judge can frustrate access to justice. In another novel, *Bora Ujue* (1996) by Amos Izengo, the police forge evidence so as to implicate Jilunga in the murder of his girlfriend, Kundi. The disillusionment of the people concerning state apparatuses is vividly captured by Jahn (ibid) when he says:

Not surprisingly the plots of these crime novels do not focus on the detection of the crimes concerned, but on the detection of the mechanisms of corruption within the police and judiciary. Suspense results from the reader knowing who the culprit is but fearing that an innocent will be punished instead, as corrupt police and judges turn criminal acts into a source of money. (pg.182)

It might be argued that the corruption that Jahn talks about here is representative of the East African reality, as similar corrupt schemes can be found within the institutions of the police and the judiciary. Jahn (ibid) notes that the novels focusing on the police involvement in corruption and



subversion of justice reflects the social changes that affected the Tanzanian society after the end of the socialist ujamaa.

Some of the Swahili detective works have fast-paced plots containing more action than detection, violence and with climatic endings. Sometimes the protagonists are involved in serious physical showdowns especially between the detective and the anti-detective. This is what we see in Musiba's *Uchu*, where the detective Willy Gamba engages the criminals he meets in Kigali who are sent by the beneficiaries of the Rwandan conflict to stop him from discovering the true causes of the strife. Some of Mtobwa's works too portray similar physical showdowns between the detective and the criminals. This is reminiscent of the hardboiled detective subgenre where violence and fast paced action are the main hallmarks.

vii) There is a remarkable Western influence in the structure of the Swahili detective prose. Western elements are to be found in characterization and narration styles. It is due to this influence that some critics have pointed the Swahili detective prose as some replica of Western popular movies (Madumullah, 1988; Kezilahabi, 1975; Lindfors, 1994). However, it is more on the characterization that this influence is more visible. For example, Mohamed Said Abdulla's detective, Msa is in many ways similar to Sherlock Holmes of Conan Doyle's works. Just like Holmea, Msa smokes a pipe, has phenomenal reasoning abilities, keen observation and willingness to partake any assignment. Both detectives are also paired with assistants who are less knowledgeable. While Sherlock Holmes is accompanied by his friend and roommate, Dr. Watson, Msa is accompanied by his friend Najum. Gromov in 'Generic Innovations in Recent Swahili Crime Fiction' confirms this Western influence in Swahili detective prose. He says, 'In terms of personal traits Joram Kiango seems to resemble most of all the unforgettable Philip Marlowe, created by the genius of Raymond Chandler'. On characterization still there is a tendency to use the same characters in subsequent books. This trend enables the writers to create novels that can be read as a series. Thus in Abdulla's novels Msa cuts across, in Mtobwa's fifteen novels, the detective Joram Kiango appears in ten novels. These are *Lazima ufe Joram* [You must die, Joram] (1983), *Dimbwi la damu* [Pool of blood] (1984), *Tutarudi na roho zetu* [We will return with our souls] (1984, published in English translation as *Zero Hour*), *Najisikia kuua tena* [I feel like killing again] (1985), *Joram Kiango Mikononi mwa Nunda* [Joram Kiango in the hands of an ogre] (1986), *Salamu toka kuzimu* [Greetings from the after-world] (1987), *Malaiika wa Shetani* [Devil's angel] (1988), *Nyuma ya mapazia* [Behind the curtains] (1996), *Roho ya paka* [Soul of a cat] (1996), and *Mtambo wa mauti* [Device of death] (2004). Musiba also has a series of seven novels featuring the detective Willy Gamba. These include *Kikosi cha kisasi* [Detachment of revenge] (1979), *Kikomo* [Limit] (1980), *Njama* [Plot] (1981), *Hofu* [Fear] (1986), *Mkataa Pema* [Who rejects a good place] (1996) and *Uchu* [Desire] (2000).

#### **Factors For the Growth of the Swahili Detective Prose**

Swahili detective prose was pioneered by Mohammed Said Abdulla (Ohly, 1981; Mbatiah, 2016; Kimura, 1992) when he wrote *Mzimu wa Watu wa Kale* (1958) [The Ancenstors' Grove] and *Kisima Cha Giningi* (1968) [The Well of the Giningi]. Thus it can be said that Swahili detective prose was born in the 1960s, especially so because Katalambulla's *Simu ya Kifo* also appeared in 1965. Abdulla wrote two more detective novels in the 1970s; *Duniani Kuna Watu* (1973) and *Siri ya Sifuri* (1974) before the peak was achieved in 1980s and 1990s. Gromov (2008:5) rightly argues that, 'From the 1980s till the year 2000 the number of titles falling into the popular category comprises almost half of the total Swahili fiction titles published in these years'. So what could be responsible for this exponential growth?. Therefore in this section, we discuss some of the factors responsible for this growth:

Firstly, the emergence of popular literature was preceded by certain social and economic changes in East Africa. Madumullah (1988) mentions that in the 1980s, East Africa was faced with a myriad of economic bottlenecks such as decline in industrial production occasioned by high inflation, unstable oil prices due to the oil crisis of the 1973, high cost of machinery, drought and the political dispute between Uganda and Tanzania over Idi Amini's attempt at annexation of Kagera province. These

economic hardships shaped the manner of production and consumption of popular literature in that writers produced them in big quantities way of extricating themselves from poverty. Consequently, there mushroomed many small publishing enterprises owned by authors themselves who also did their own marketing.

Secondly, there were demographic developments characterized by rapid population in among the East African nations after independence up to 1980s. As Kimura (1992) mentions, this population growth sparked a demand for a variety of entertainment products including publications on popular literature including detective fiction. The rise of population, especially the youth, offered a ready market with the authors seizing the opportunity to produce more works. In this way, detective prose gained remarkable popularity.

Thirdly, the education system through the ministries of education in East Africa, played a leading role in establishing a reading culture among the population. The colonial introduced Western literature including crime and detective novel through the school system. Therefore Africans who went to the colonial and mission schools encountered detective works by such authors as Arthur Conan Doyle, James Hadley Chase, Harold Robbins. Translated works on literature of commitment were also introduced to facilitate mass access to an hitherto illiterate population. Thus works translated from English into Kiswahili gained traction among the Swahili speaking sections of the East African population. Kimura (1992) agrees with this view noting that Tanzanians who read the Western detective classics were so influenced that they started producing almost similar works structurally. The structural similarities included the plot patterns, the traits of the detective and methods of investigation such as logic, use of various tools, weapons and electronic gadgetry. Indeed Mbatiah (2016) argues that Mohammed Said Abdulla's Swahili detective writing skills were honed through the education system which he through. His first novel is a product of the annual Swahili essay writing competition organized by the colonial administrators through the Inter-territorial Language Committee in the 1930s. It is also through this school system that many Kenyan students first encountered some Western classics, later translated into Kiswahili, such as *Treasure Island* [Kisiwa Chenye Hazina], *Alice in a Wonderland* [Elisi Katika Nchi ya Ajabu], and *King Solomon's Mines* [Mashimo ya Mfalme Suleiman].

After independence, the education system continued to play a pivotal role in spreading and popularizing Swahili detective prose. Some Swahili prose works have been selected as examinable texts in Kenyan and Tanzanian secondary schools. For instance, *Kisima cha Giningi* was studied and examined in 1976 and between 1995-1998, *Simu ya Kifo* in 1974, *Mwana wa Yungi Hulewa* in 1985 and *Siri ya Sifuri* in 1981. In Tanzania, *Mfadhili* and *Zawadi ya Ushindi* by Hussein Tuwa and Musiba's *Uchu* have also been studied and examined at high school levels.

Fourthly, the Inter-territorial Language Committee in the 1930s whose main objective was research and standardization of Swahili lexicography was instrumental in influencing the emergence and development of literature, detective fiction included. Mbatiah (2016) rightly confirms that this committee produced various dictionaries and journals were established. The committee too organized Swahili writing competitions in which many manuscripts were received from upcoming authors. Mbatiah reiterates that it this through this practice that Abdulla's *Mzimu wa Watu wa Kale* was published first time in 1948. The Institute of Swahili later also established a publishing house, East Africa Literature Bureau, EALB. This bureau facilitated the publication of many works including Abdulla's *Mzimu wa Watu wa Kale* (1958), [The Ancestors Grove] and Katalambulla's *Simu ya Kifo* (1965) [The Call of Death].

Lastly, the spread in popularity of the Swahili detective fiction can be attributed to the access of Western authors such as Agatha Christie, Ian Fleming, James Hadley Chase, Robert Rodlum among others. From the influence of these Western writers, African authors got inspiration to write using similar styles. Besides, watching Western detective novels added more impetus to the pace of the authorship and production of the detective prose. Madumullah (1988) adds that reading of the

Western novels and watching of the Western and Asian popular movies based on detection, love and crime made the East African Swahili writers to produce similar works.

### Conclusion

This paper has traced some of the developmental milestones in the growth of the Swahili detective prose. It is noted that in East Africa, where other Swahili literary genres are booming, the Swahili detective genre is mainly visible in Tanzania. This is in terms of the number of writers, volumes of novels produced and critical works. This can partially be attributed to the differences in language policy among the East African countries. While the Western detective fiction has grown too rapidly and mushroomed into other subgenres such as the police procedurals and spy novels, the Swahili detective novel has not diverged into distinct subgenres of spy novel and the police procedurals. However, there are some signs that police procedural might emerge as seen in *Simanzi* (1995) by Abdul Ntandu, produced by Ndanda Mission Press. The other significant change that marked a significant aspect of growth in Western detective fiction, involves the use of the female detective figure. This is a development that has not been so well embraced in Swahili fiction. A part from Sangija's *Bado Mmoja* (1973) [One More], where the author uses a female detective, the growth in this aspect of characterization is below par. Still, the absence of such a development is indicative of the social reality in East Africa where gender equality is hampered by some cultural and patriarchal perspectives. It has been shown that most of the Swahili detective writers have used their works to address realistic social political matters affecting their countries such as the post-independence political relations between Tanzania and her neighbours. Writers such as Mtobwa and Musiba have concerned themselves with this theme in many of their works. Gromov (2008:1) observes that, 'Mtobwa showed one of the loftiest achievements of realistic social novel in Swahili, which puts him on the same level with the topmost Swahili realistic novelists'.

Unlike the South African and Western detective fiction, Kiswahili detective fiction has not been hugely adapted into movies and television adaptations. May be this is another growth frontier that needs to be explored so as to bring the Swahili detective fiction at par with the Western detective and the South African detective like the No.1 Ladies Detective Agency by McCall Smith. However, as an effort to reach more diverse cultural backgrounds, some Swahili detective novels have been translated into many languages and serialized across several newspapers and magazines. Some of those translated into English are Mtobwa's *Pesa Zako Zinanuka* (1986), published in English translation as *Give Me Money*, and *Dar es Salaam Usiku* (1990), published in English translation as *Dar es Salaam by Night*, *Tutarudi na Roho Zetu* (1984) published in English translation as *Zero Hour*.

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