

Introduction to Crime Fiction

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review

- ▶ review review: the mystery of the unsolved social problem
- ▶ review review: periodization
- ▶ social problems in *Petals*
 - ▶ men, women
 - ▶ families
 - ▶ the environment
 - ▶ the economy
 - ▶ the mind

the MESSAGE

This was what I was trying to show in *Petals of Blood*: that imperialism can never develop our country or develop us, Kenyans. In doing so, I was only trying to be faithful to what Kenyan workers and peasants have always realised as shown by their historical struggles since 1895.... Hopefully out of *Petals of Blood* we might gather petals of revolutionary love. (“Petals of Love,” 97, 98)

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My mother and all the peasant characters there represented were never going to be in a position to read the novels, and so what was the point of writing in English? I knew about whom I wrote: but for whom did I write?

“A Novel in Politics: The Launching of *Petals of Blood*,” in *Writers in Politics: A Re-engagement with Issues of Literature and Society* (Oxford: James Currey, 1997), 84, [JSTOR](#).

more on language

Abdulla asked her if it was true that some Arabs could change themselves into women or cats she only laughed and asked him: but what kind of Mswahili are you to believe such things? (39)

“My real is not Abdulla. It is Murira. But I baptized myself Abdulla. Now everybody calls me Abdulla.”

“You mean, you thought Abdulla was a Christian name?” Wanja asked. (73)

“Karega . . .” she said aloud. “What a funny name!”

“Ritwa ni mbukio,” Karega quoted the proverb. “Somebody a long time ago asked the question: What’s in a name? And he answered that a rose would still be a rose even by another name.”

Talking as if from a book, again thought Munira. Wanja countered:

“Oh, then it would not be a rose. It would be that other name, don’t you think? A rose is a rose.” (73)

Consider, then, the meaning of these narrators and narratees' names: Munira is a stump; Karega connotes a rebel, but a rebel in Gikuyu society is also one confined to the margins of his community; and Wanja is the outsider.

Simon Gikandi, *Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o*, 155.

Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose.

Gertrude Stein, "Sacred Emily," in *Geography and Plays* (Boston: Four Seas, 1922), 187, [HathiTrust](#).

Ritwa ni mbokio [sic]. The name is a useless thing.

"Gikuyu proverbs: 1000 in total," *African Manners*, July 7, 2012, [africanmanners.wordpress.com](#).
Someday I will find a better source.

1895	British E. Africa Protectorate est.
1920	Kenya Colony est.
1938	James Ngugi b. Limuru , near Nairobi
1952	Kenya Land Freedom Army fights War of Independence (Mau Mau Rebellion); Ngugi's mother tortured and his village destroyed
1963	Kenyan independence; Jomo Kenyatta becomes president Ngugi's BA, Makerere University College, Kampala, Uganda
1964	Ngugi, <i>Weep Not, Child</i> (London: Heinemann)
1967	teaches English literature, University College, Nairobi
1970	adopts Gĩkũyũ-style name Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o
1977	<i>Petals of Blood</i> (partly drafted in USSR) <i>Ngaahika Ndeenda</i> (Gĩkũyũ play) leads to Ngũgĩ's imprisonment for a year
1978	Daniel arap Moi becomes president, declares state of emergency, arrests dissidents

finding ourselves...in time

- ▶ When does the novel take place? (trick question)

Twelve years later, on a Sunday (50)

But this is the 1960s, not the 1860s, Munira reflected, a little disappointed.
(13)

[Wanja:] This was also the years preceding independence when there was a lot of talk of how different life would be he . . . Aah, you see how I talk as if all this was ages ago. yet only a few years . . . Yes, a few years.” (46)

[Munira:] Siriana: you should have been there in our time, before and uring the period of the big, costly European dance of death and even after (32–33)

“I am sorry about what happened . . .” (60)

It reminded him of similar scenes of rocking, lullaby-singing children on his father's pyrethrum fields before the Mau Mau violence. (30)

Munira [was] really shocked when in 1953 or so he heard that Mariamu's son had been caught carrying weapons for Mau Mau and was subsequently hanged. (18)

“In 1954 or '55, anyway the year that we were moved into the villages and others into 'lines.'” (76)

how far back should we go?

The movement away had started after the second Big War...No...before that...No, it was worse after Mau Mau War...No, it was the railway...all right, all right...even this had always been so since European colonists came into their midst, these ghosts from another world. (23; ellipses in original)

Baumann and Coy, Forestals, and also Primchand Raichand and Coy, in their nineteen-twenties fearsome rivalry for the control of wattle bark trade and of tanning extract, had set rival offices and factories here. It was these foreign and local giants of capital, together with the Mombasa-Kisumu-Kampala charcoal and wood-eating railway engines which had depleted forests near and far. (103)

We can imagine the fatal meeting between the native and the alien. (106)

what is history?

In my mind I now put this wretched corner beside our cities: skyscrapers versus mud walls and grass thatch; tarmac highways, international airports and gambling casinos versus cattle-paths and gossip before sunset. Our erstwhile masters had left us a very unevenly cultivated land: the centre was swollen with fruit and water sucked from the rest, while the outer parts were progressively weaker and scaggier as one moved away from the centre. There is a story of dwarf-like Gumbas who lived long, long before the Manjiri generation, before the iron age in Kenya, and whose heads were over-huge and so sat precariously on the rest of the body. Whenever a Gumba fell, so goes the legend, he could not lift himself without aid from outside. (58)

[Nyakinyua:] “What should we call them? The new Uhere and Mutung’u generation: for was it not the same skin diseases and plagues that once in earlier times weakened our people in face of the Mzungu invasion?” (9)

She sang in a low voice in praise of Ndemi and his wives, long long ago. (38)

what is now?

The year that followed Wanja's departure from Ilmorog was momentous for the whole country. It was the year that started with a mysterious political murder in open daylight without the assassins ever being caught. He was a national, of Asian origins it is true, but one famous in the whole country for his earlier involvement in the struggle for independence and after, for his consistent opposition to any form of post-independence alliance with imperialism. He was an implacable foe of wealth gotten from the poor and whether in or outside Parliament, he would call for an agrarian revolution.

(94)

To tea at Gatundu! (105)

finding ourselves...in genre

MZIGO, CHUI, KIMERIA MURDERED. (6)

Crime for him was a kind of jigsaw puzzle, and he believed that there was a law to it—a law of crime—a law of criminal behaviour—and he believed that if you looked hard enough you could see this law operating in even the smallest gestures. (52)

- ▶ How does the novel's perspective compare to Inspector Godfrey's?

next

- ▶ Go on, through 188 .