

The Genre and Trends of Crime Fiction in Nigeria

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DOI: [10.36348/sijlcrj.2024.v07i03.001](https://doi.org/10.36348/sijlcrj.2024.v07i03.001)

| Received: 18.12.2023 | Accepted: 23.01.2024 | Published: 15.03.2024

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Abstract

The field of crime fiction in Nigeria remains under-explored in scholarly discourse. This lacuna is particularly notable given the absence of comprehensive academic works dedicated to this genre. Crime fiction, which delineates narratives surrounding criminals, their crimes, detection and investigation processes, and underlying motivations, has been a prolific subject in Nigerian creative literature. Despite the substantial body of Nigerian literary works delving into themes of crime, punishment, and motivation, it is intriguing that the genre has not garnered significant critical analysis. This study adopts a diachronic approach to trace the historical evolution of crime fiction in Nigeria. It further investigates various sub-genres within this literary category and examines how a multitude of socio-political dynamics have influenced the thematic focus of Nigerian crime fiction. The study posits that crime fiction is gaining relevance in contemporary Nigerian society. It reveals that a significant corpus of these narratives grapple with issues such as colonialism, militarism, corruption, government apathy towards human and national development, and other opaque political and economic elements that perpetuate Nigeria's precarious journey towards democratic stability.

Keywords: Genre, Crime, Fiction, Thrillers, Detective Fiction, Prose, Democracy.

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INTRODUCTION

The genre of crime fiction is diverse because several subgenres have emerged to classify and describe the field: Detective fiction, Golden Age Crime Fiction, Picaresque Fiction, American Hard-Boiled Crime Fiction, the Police Procedural, and the Thriller. Each of the subgenres has its own characteristics which suggest that the genre defies any simple definition and classification. Despite this irregularity, majority of critical studies of the genre over the past twenty years have employed the term 'crime fiction' to categorize this otherwise unclassifiable genre (Scaggs, 2005), and this study will be no different. This study does not seek or uncover a fundamental definition or classification of the genre, but rather it examines the development of the genre in the context of different sociopolitical events in Nigeria. The study finds the examination of crime fiction in Nigeria interesting but intends not to straitjacket the genre either within an endless catalogue of sub-genres, or within a chronological approach that fixes such sub-genres. Scholarly works on the appropriation and reformulation of the genre by writers are enormous (Ousby, 1997; Rennison & Shephard, 1997; Scaggs, 2005; Rzepka & Horsley, 2010). Hence, an attempt to demystify and classify the genre will only lead the reader to a multitude of formal and thematic dead-ends. The

study therefore, is essentially historical, tracing the diachronic development of the genre in Nigeria. The study also examines various subgenres of the genre and how numerous 'histo-political' factors have affected the thematic concerns of the genre in Nigeria.

While crime fiction has come under serious discussion in numerous critical works (Symons 1993; 1994; Ousby, 1997; Rennison & Shephard, 1997; Scaggs, 2005; Rzepka & Horsley, 2010; Worthington, 2011; Habila, 2013; Seago, 2014), it is taken to mean the literary genre that narrates criminals, crimes, their detection and investigation, and their motives. The genre is diverse and to most scholars, the diversity of the genre is not supposed to be viewed as mutually distinct, since one of the defining characteristics of crime fiction is its generic flexibility and porosity. Though not all crime novels share a common structure, it commonly follows a crime, usually a murder; then there is the investigation; and finally, the outcome or judgement, often in the shape of the criminal's arrest or death. While most scholars see the genre as purely an act of crime and punishment, others perceive it to reflect society. For instance, Karen Seago (2014) avers that the genre questions what it is to be human, raises questions about identity and sometimes reflects the culture and social values of when it was

written (Seago, 2014). Similarly, Pierre Cherruau, a French writer whose novels are set in Nigeria, draws from his background as a journalist who worked in Nigeria during the regime of the late Nigerian dictator, Gen. Sani Abacha:

I am more interested by black novels than detective novels. I read more James Ellroy than Agatha Christie. I am very interested by the way James Ellroy described America; the way he is showing the dark side of the Kennedy era, more than by the fact of knowing who is the killer at the end of the story (Abubakar, 2014).

As a result, the social and cultural perspective of the story must be radical to questions some aspect of society such as law and justice (Symons 1993: 193). In essence, what is central to crime fiction is the disruption and threatening of the social order and its full or partial restitution.

Despite the popularity of crime fiction around the world, it is relatively new to Nigerian literary circle. It is interesting to note that writers have both unconsciously and consciously wrote about crimes in Nigeria, but the field still lacks both creative and literary attentions. The reason for this lack of attention is perplexing and scholars and novelists have shared their disbeliefs. Habila in an interview believes there is neglect on crime fiction because, "Nigeria's colonial education system only prepared our university-trained writers to aspire to write like Shakespeare and Dickens – they write only for the elite (Edoro, 2013). Similarly, Agbonmire Ifeh in the review of *The BOFAK Illusion*, a Nigerian detective fiction claims that a lot of Nigerian writers are only striving to write literary fiction to be the next Chimamanda Adichie, Wole Soyinka or Chinua Achebe. The result is that genres like crime, espionage, romance, sci-fi, fantasy and the rest which really are the money spinners are neglected (Agbonmire, 2015). The study therefore offers insight into the genre and culture of crime fiction in Nigeria as well as its histo-political development.

Early Crime Fictions in Nigeria

Early crime fictions in Nigeria started with postcolonial crime thrillers. They are not stories about bloody murder, hit and run, kidnapping, blackmail and assassinations, but are stories that reflects "the syncretization of the horrific aspect of the African tradition and the marriage of the pleasant features in a unified blend with Western sensibilities," Ayodabo (88). In Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* (1960) for instance, Achebe portrays bribery and corruption as one of these terrible effects by using the rough, lawless, and disorganized urban setting of Lagos to contrast the serene, lawful, organized rural village of Umuofia. The novel tells the story of Obi Okonkwo, who leaves his village, Umuofia for a British education, and a job in the Nigerian colonial civil service in Lagos but struggles to adapt to a Western lifestyle and ends up taking a bribe.

The novel opens with the trial of Obi Okonkwo on a charge of accepting a bribe. It then jumps back in time to a point when members of the Umuofia Progressive Union (UPU) send him to England and works its way forward to describe how Obi ends up on trial. After Obi's return from England, he gets a job in Lagos, but soon runs into financial trouble after aborting his girlfriend's pregnancy. Obi sinks deeper into financial trouble, in part due to poor planning on his end, in part due to the need to repay his loan to the UPU and to pay for his siblings' educations, and in part due to the cost of the illegal abortion. Hence, he starts taking bribe, but soon discovers that the bribe is part of a sting operation. Obi's resort to bribery and inevitable downfall embodies the fact that European values are distorted and worse than African values. Therefore, Obi's crime is a reflection of western's pollution of Africans' system of justice, truth and decency. Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* has always been considered a postcolonial text, but its presentation of crimes and the process of investigating them also enhance its significance as a crime and detective thriller.

In contrast to colonial justice system, writers have also written about African value system. For instance Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* (1966) is set in a pure rural setting before the advent of colonialism and the novel interestingly portrays the values of Africans' spiritual and natural state with their laws. In the novel, both Madume and Ekwueme experience natural death because they violate the laws of the gods in a community that believes that the gods have superior power. African communities have always maintained certain social orders and when they are disrupted by certain members of the community, the whole community is cursed. Obi, Madume and Ekwueme decided to threaten the social order of their communities and were immediately punished. This, in a nutshell, is the idea behind crime fiction as there cannot be healing and restoration to normalcy without justice. These books have the action, the criminal elements, and the inflection of thriller novels. The characters, their actions, the locales they are dropped into and even the noir elements of the stories all add up.

The Pacesetters Series and the Genre of Crime Fictions

Nothing could be farther from the truth that the Pacesetters Series were relevant to the development of crime and thriller fictions in Nigeria. The Pacesetters Series were a collection of about 130 novels written by African authors (mostly Nigerian, but there were also Ghanaian, Kenyan and South African writers) for an African audience (Aloko, 2012). They were very popular in the 1980s and produced a lot of breathtaking novels until the series disappeared in the 1990s as a result of structural adjustment programs that affected many publishing industries in Nigeria. Before its unfortunate demise, it produced interesting thriller novels that are believed to have set the stage for contemporary Nigerian

crime fictions. There were other novels with different themes such as love, regret, mysticism etc., but the most popular and best read were the thrillers (Kan, 2011). They were like earlier children's literary traditions in Nigeria that also explored issues like the children going on a mission to solve crimes (Ayodabo, 2014). However, the Pacesetters built on foreign tradition. Though most of the novels were set against a western template, but with Nigerian characters in a Nigerian locale, scholars believe it was a welcome change from reading about Nick Carter and James Bond who used weapons like Wilhelmina and who wore tuxedos (Kan, 2011).

Notable among the novels is Valentine Alily's *Mark of The Cobra* (1980). It featured a young Nigerian secret service agent, Commander Jack Ebony a.k.a. Jack Abani, battling bad guys in a sports car with a sultry female sidekick. There were other crime thrillers such as Thorpe Victor's *The Instrument* (1980), Garba Tukur's *The Black Temple* (1981), Okpi Kalu's *Coup* (1982) and *Crossfire* (1982). Then were also legal thrillers like Chuma Nwokolo's *The Extortionist* (1983) and *Dangerous Inheritance* (1988). These authors created characters that were secret agents or police officers and gave them life. Readers came to love and follow their antics through these books. Toni Kan confirms that "as children we talked about Jack Abani and Inspector Malu as if they were people we knew or at best, movie stars whose movies we had watched and loved. And it is easy to see why – we had no Nollywood then" (Kan, 2011). The stories were popular not because they were thrillers, but because they communicate more than novels produced under the African Writers Series. Kan said:

...even though I enjoyed a few of them [African Writers Series] especially Ayi Kwei Armah's *Fragments* and *Why Are We So Blest?* as well as Achebe's *A Man of the People*. I did not relate to the stories and characters the way I did with novels in the Pacesetters series. The former was stiff and academic and overly literary while the latter were fun, fast-paced, cosmopolitan and contemporary. I fell in love immediately (Kan, 2011).

The series recorded great success until a curious thing happened in the 90s. The Pacesetters Series died suddenly as a result of Gen. Ibrahim Babangida's structural adjustment programs. It went off the shelf and African Writers Series could not replace the thrillers of The Pacesetters. A lot of The Pacesetters Series lovers have called for it to be resuscitated and made popular again, but it remains an expectation that may never be realized. Though a lot of writers wrote for the series, very few of them (Chuma Nwokolo and Helen Ovbiagele) still write, therefore no literary classics emerged from the series. Some critics believe this a pointer to the lack of literary merit in the novels published in the series and the reason why it remains difficult to bring back the tradition (Kan, 2011). However, there is a common credence that crime and thriller tradition in Nigerian literature did not

die with the series. It merely shifted base, become more elevated and acquired extra heft (Kan, 2011; Egoro, 2013; Ogungbemi, 2018). They are of the opinion that what differentiated the novels that came after the demise of The Pacesetters Series is the elevated language and expanded subject matter that weave crime stories with contemporary and topical issues.

Contemporary Nigerian Crime Thrillers

It is obvious that crime fiction did not die with the Pacesetters, but it took too long for contemporary writers to dispel doubts in readers' mind. Despite the alarming rate of crimes in Africa, it is bewildering why African writers are not really interested in the genre. Habila points out that:

We have as much raw material to create a market for crime fiction as any other nation, say Sweden, which is seen as the number one producer of crime stories. The joke is that these peaceful Nordic societies don't even have the same volume of crime as we do. Perhaps the reason is, in Africa, we are scared to talk about it, to question it, to challenge it, like other nations do. Our leaders want us to believe that Africans are a peaceful, forgiving people, that God will give us justice someday if we don't get justice here on earth (Egoro, 2013).

Pierre Cherruau similarly comments on the accessibility of market for crime fiction in Nigeria:

In Nigeria, you don't have to use so much of your imagination to write fiction. You just have to open your eyes, to open your ears and also to read the newspapers. It's strange to notice that so many detective novels or black novels take place in northern Europe. In Norway, Finland, Sweden and Island where there are more violent death in books than in real life. In these novels, the detectives are often depressed, like in the novels of the Swedish writer Henning Mankell. Maybe, their detectives are bored because they have nothing to do (Abubakar, 2015).

However, a group of contemporary writers led by Helon Habila have recently followed the step of The Pacesetters Series by introducing the Cordite Books to encourage those who have dreamed of reading or writing African crime and spy fiction. Habila hopes to resuscitate and imprint the authority of Nigerian crime fiction among world's crime fiction circle. He state;

I am puzzled as to why we haven't had a repeat of the phenomenally successful Pacesetters series. This was when the whole country was reading, following each publication, then suddenly it stopped. I still believe there is a huge vacuum for that kind of fiction, the popular, the immediate, the visceral. It has been done before, our aim in Cordite is to do it again, a sort of modern version of it. Only our aim is wider, more ambitious (Egoro, 2013).

The vacuum is gradually being filled by many recently published novels and their interests have simply been political. In Nigeria, the years of both military and civilian politics have been associated by their critics with the encouragement of a commodity culture, with the promotions of selfishness, greed, corruption and a get rich quick mentality. Politics in Nigeria has been an eyesore with clear statement that politicians are only there to make profit out of it, maintain their stake by replacing themselves with loyalists; henceforth their crime coming into master play. Therefore, Nigerian crime writers are criticizing the economic and political crimes, the atmosphere of self-interest and the wholehearted commitment to self-enrichment of those in power. They are beginning to question the high level of crimes in the country and the obvious involvement of politicians in the escapades. Habila avers that;

By starting an African crime imprint we are trying to open up the discussion, to bring it down from the Ivory Tower to the streets, where real people live, where most new trends and ideas begin. We want to ask questions like: what is the state of crime, and justice, and punishment, in Africa today? What is happening in our prisons since the end of colonialism, are they still places of punishment or correction? Why do the rich get away with stealing billions while the poor are hanged for minor crimes? Why do our leaders feel no shame in stealing? Why do our police defend only the rich and not the poor? What is the moral dimension of all these? (Edoro, 2013)

Their first target in the ongoing criticism of the country's polity is the military regime. An imaginative evaluation of the regime is a way of looking at the recent political problems aggravated by the military's incursion into the Nigerian political landscape. Under many charades, the military got involved in Nigerian politics, but quickly became one of the most unpopular moments in the country's history because a lot of people suffered the brunt of the regime. A host of them were lawyers, activist, writers and journalist and they remained dogged in the struggle against military misrule. However, the price for their determination was also not palatable: writers and lawyers were arrested and imprisoned, media houses were shut down with magazines and newspapers confiscated while journalists were harassed, detained, and murdered.

As a result, earlier contemporary writings in Nigeria reveals the determination of the third-generation Nigerian writers to confront the sociopolitical problems considered responsible for the failure of the country to live up to its widely acknowledged potential. For instance, contemporary writers such as Helon Habila, Richard Ali, and Okey Ndibe imaginatively assess these problems aggravated by the military using crime thrillers. While it has often been argued that what sets the crime thriller apart from the detective story is its focus

on the crime, rather than its investigation, David Glover argues that, rather, 'the thriller was and still is to a large extent marked by the way in which it persistently seeks to raise the stakes of the narrative, heightening or exaggerating the experience of events by transforming them into a rising curve of danger, violence or shock' (Glover 2003:137). The experiences, crimes and dangers presented in the novels are not really exaggerated, but obviously become too grisly to the extent that protests and investigations into the crimes are almost irrelevant. Thus, the writers' idea of crime thrillers is more of describing the society than investigating it. Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* (2006) and Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain* (2000) follow this idea as they narrate the horrific crimes of military leaders' years of untold hardship, killing, violence, brutality and imprisonment that led the country many years back in development and Infrastructure.

In *Waiting for an Angel*, Habila traces the life of a young man Lomba from the north of Nigeria to the university life in Lagos. Soon after, Lomba's journey to misery starts after Bola, his roommate's family is crushed by a military truck and the military suppression of the student demonstrations. The events that follow are deadly and chronic: Lomba drops out of school while Bola, still mad with grief, becomes traumatic, challenges the soldiers and is dragged away by secret police to be beaten (*Waiting*, 74). Also, when the university students demonstrate, the soldiers come to campus to rape the female students and ransack rooms, in the process destroying Lomba's poetry and journals. These traumatic activities are synecdoche of the nation under military rule. The destruction of Lomba's writing and the violence against the students demonstrates the regime's intolerance for literary criticism of the regime while the raping of the female students symbolizes the military regime's rape of the nation.

The title 'waiting for an angel' eventually and bitterly becomes ironic and a euphemism for 'waiting for death' as death becomes an exclusive tool for the military rulers to wipe out any form of protest which becomes evidence in the deaths of many characters. Bola's family, the community members killed at the demonstration, Ken Saro-Wiwa and the eight Ogoni activists, Dele Giwa, Kudirat Abiola, Lomba's friend who challenges the soldiers on the border of death are directly and indirectly killed by the military. As a matter of fact, Bola's family tragic accident is symbolic because their deaths are not intentional assassination by the military, but the crash implicates the military on the level of infrastructural neglect.

Like Habila's novel, Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain* also fictionalizes Nigeria under the leadership of the vicious, psychotic military ruler, General Sanni Abacha whose preoccupation with brutality and repression leads inevitably to the killing of intellectuals, journalists and other watchdogs of the society. It presents military

repression of the citizenry albeit the accounts of characters of Ogugua, Iyese and Adero as they interject into one another to indict the military in its torture and violence. The narratives are more woven around Ogugua, the major character and the novel aligns with Ogugua's need to talk about the rape, killing, torture and dehumanization of the citizenry under the command of General Isa Pallat Bello. The essence is to portray the military as an institution which distils and perpetrates violent crimes on its people in Third World countries. Ogugua's lover, Iyese's repeated rape by General Isa Pallat Bello and the drowning of a prostitute in the beach are two events that reverberates the oppression and subjugation of Ogugua by the military. *Arrows of Rain*, which Christopher Okonkwo closely links to Habila's novel, relates the rape victim and the prostitute even more closely. Okonkwo notes that the rape of women in the texts "translates the woman's body as a text upon which the army's prostitution and power-driven, violent penetrations of the national body are inscribed" (Okonkwo, 2005:9). Hence, the women are exploited as part of the story that defines the oppressor's crimes on the nation, while their battered bodies are illustrations of military power.

Priestman claims that one of the central aspects of a crime thriller is its emphases on present danger rather than reflecting on, or investigating, past action (Priestman 1998: 43). To create this danger in the present, Priestman opines that the protagonist of the crime thriller must be threatened, or believe him- or herself to be threatened, by powerful external forces of some form or another (Priestman 1998: 43). Military hardship is the powerful external force that threatens the characters of Lomba in *Waiting for an Angel* and Ogugua in *Arrows of Rain*. Both protagonists are journalists battered by a dehumanizing force and their split personalities are employed by the writers to symbolize the psychological cost of the pressure critics are subjected to during the various military regimes in post-independent Nigeria (Akingbe, 2013:164). The events that lead to the oppression of Lomba are situated on the power of the regime. First, he stops school because his roommate's family is crushed by a military truck, the school has been closed and he ended up as a journalist. Secondly, he cannot marry Alice, his girlfriend because she has promised to marry a military man who is paying for her mother's medical bills. Lastly, as a reporter, Lomba is arrested for "demonstration against the military legal government" (*Waiting*, 14) and kept in a prison whose wall "loomed huge and merciless, like a mountain" (*Waiting*, 21). Inside the prison, Lomba secretly writes to keep himself sane, and when he is discovered, he is beaten and put into solitary confinement. Lomba chronicles these events in the prison and in Lomba's imagination they are living in stories, not of their own creation, but of a reality defined by the military. Lomba is eventually dealt a psychological blow as the military's violation against his writing is brought to fore. Lomba narrates "I felt the

imprint of the boots on my mind; I felt the rifling, tearing hands ripping through my very soul. All I could think of as I stood there, with the torn, mud-caked papers in my hands and around me, was: I have been writing these stories and poems for as long as I can remember now, these are my secret thoughts and dreams" (*Waiting*, 78). This is not merely a physical violation but a loss of dignity that creates a deep wound upon the psyche (McCain, 2007).

Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain* also addresses the ordeal of a journalist trying to uncover crimes of a regime. Ogugua's narrative in *Arrows of Rain* echoes not only the ambivalence of a post-colonial Nigeria and the politics of remembering, but also the process of narrating and organizing memories, and of evaluating the role of military in national development (Akingbe, 2013:159). Ogugua's memory is a motif of interrogating Nigeria's chequered history in its struggle against military decapitation of its social and political values. However, Ogugua's inability to recall and analyze certain parts of his memory reveals the extent to which the military repression of the citizenry could fragment and damage the psyche of an individual. Ogugua finally hangs himself towards the end of the novel to avoid being sentenced to life imprisonment by General Bello. Ogugua's decision to take his own life both represent his escape from being traumatized by the nemesis of narrating the past and also the inevitability of his defeat in the hands of military. It is evidenced in the analyses that the novels are crime thrillers rather than detective fictions and their ability to succinctly scrutinize a regime plagued with organized violence and the dehumanization of its critics make them fantastic crime stories.

Though post military era in Nigeria is a relief from untold hardship, but many people believe the debacle of the regime actually led the country many years backward in development and Infrastructure. Akingbe opines that the "political problems aggravated by the military's incursion into the Nigerian political landscape" orchestrates "a shift of theme and concern away from the impact of colonisation and the historical past toward an examination of current sociopolitical problems of abuse of power by the ruling elite, corruption and pronounced social inequity" (Akingbe, 2013). Post military era has either see civilian government toe their predecessors' path or do worse. Consequently, a lot of sociopolitical problems persist and one that does arouse the interest of contemporary writers is the issue of the degradation of the Niger Delta environment and the government's lack of development of the region. Simon *et al.*, claim that effort to call government attention to the problems of the region started from the military regime as the legendary Ken Saro-Wiwa's fight for the Ogoni people was against the devastation of the neglect of the region (Simon *et al.*, 2014). Apter submits that "in the global media, the struggle came to represent the rapacious appetite of oil capitalism and the ruthless abandon of military

dictatorship, as oil-spills, burn-off and blowouts destroyed the creeks and farms of the Ogoni people with no compensation provided in return” (Apter, 1998:122).

The aftermath of the neglect that stem from military era through civilian regime ranges from environmental degradation, pollution, loss of traditional occupations, to the rise in social vices such as gun-running, kidnapping, militancy, oil theft as well as health hazards to mention a few.

Nigerian Writers have imaginatively reflected the condition of the region and while some have addressed the neglect of the government, others have focused on the crimes resulting from such neglect. Helon Habila’s *Oil in Water* (2010) focuses on crime in the novel, but places it within the purview of environmental degradation, pollution, poverty, lack of social amenities as well as insensitivity of the Federal government and multinational in the Niger Delta region. It reflects the post-independent Nigerian state that “bedeviled by significant leadership-induced poverty, corruption, religious charlatanism, wars, unstable political system, dictatorial governance, inadequate basic amenities, as well as a myriad of other problems” (Ayodabo, 2014:32). The novel follows two journalists, a younger Rufus and a more experienced Zaq, through the creeks of the delta to unravel the kidnap of Mrs. Isabel Floode, the wife of a British Petroleum engineer. As they struggle up the river in a canoe, guided by an old man and a young boy, the reporters encounter nightmarish scenes of devastation:

Dead birds draped over tree branches, their outstretched wings black and slick with oil; dead fishes bobbed white-bellied between tree roots’. By the flickering light of oil flare, they find some villages abandoned, their fields and water contaminate; others scrape a miserable existence on the frontline of a civil war between the army and anti-government guerrillas (*Oil on Water*, 9).

Their search for truth soon links them to chains of militant groups who mostly operate as criminals, kidnapping and raising money from oil companies and collecting ransom from kidnapped hostages. These activities have caused hardship and psychological trauma to residents, communities and oil workers in the region and Habila links the prevalence of these activities to unemployment, poverty, disillusionment, and corruption among others. This reflects the enduring and traumatic consequences that the Niger Delta region has experienced over the years due to ongoing oil-related crimes. (Ayodabo, 2016). Consequently, these transgressions have evolved into a prolonged conflict of ideologies between the government and the marginalized communities (Ogungbemi, & Okunsanya, 2016; Ogungbemi, 2018; Ayodabo & Amaefula, 2021). In the novel, Mrs. Floode’s graduate driver, Salomen, connives with Jamabo, a police officer and Bassey, his neighbor,

to hatch the kidnap plan to raise money to better their lots. Jamabo draws an analogy between kidnapping and ransom as he declares that “it is like plucking money off a money tree” (*Oil on Water*, 199) and “the money came from our oil, so we are getting back what was ours in the first place” (*Oil on Water*, 200). This is an indictment of the police force in colliding with the masses to defraud the nation. There are other instances of kidnappings in the novel: the case of a 70 years old woman and a 3 years old girl, Monday’s kidnapping of an albino and a foreign family whose company paid the sum of “three million ransom for” (*Oil on Water*, 202). These are clear evidence that the militant activities have snowballed into full – blown armed conflicts, sometimes coloured with criminality, where “even septuagenarian and toddlers are not spared in the mad rush for ransom” (Inyang, 2009). Habila’s concern as he recalls these activities is the alarming rate of crimes in the region while the government looks on. Instead, the government uses military force to clamp down on the activities of the militants which usually expose innocent citizens to danger. Habila recalls a similar scenario on an island where Mrs. Floode is being kept:

...the soldiers came early the next morning. First they came in a boat, and there were only five of them. They were on routine patrol; they hadn’t known the militants were here, and they ran into an ambush. It was massacre... the militant had machine guns and grenades... The water turned red. Blood. It was blood. But in the confusion the rebels slipped away and left the villagers to face the soldiers (*Oil on Water*, 154).

Though Rufus secures Mrs. Floode during the island combat, another militant group got wind of their movement and kidnapped her the second time. Rufus is released to go, but is given an envelope containing Mrs. Floode’s hair as a stern warning for her husband to pay her ransom of ten million in two days. Rufus’s inability to rescue Mrs. Floode is an indication of the limits of journalism and also a game where the desire for good to win over evil is not enough. In essence, the novel is an incisive exploration of the death of truth in a country of varied corruptions addicted to oil.

Contemporary Nigerian Detective Fiction

Detective fiction is a genre of crime fiction that deals with crime, its detection, revelation of the criminals and their motives. Karen Seago asserts that the main hero is usually a detective, acting upon the rules of logic, often accompanied by a friend, a companion, who helps to reveal the culprit. Detective fictions is anew in Nigeria and are recently undergoing revivification with contemporary writers and publishing houses that are beginning to see the relevance of the genre in the society. Azafi Omoluabi of the Cordite Books avers:

Cordite is meant to bring an African sensibility to the crime and spy fiction genre made famous by such writers as Ian Fleming, Arthur Conan

Doyle, Le Carre, Agatha Christie, James Hadley Chase and Chesterton. Readers want their own local heroes, their own James Bonds and Sherlock Holmes, and why not, since espionage and crime happen in Africa just as anywhere else? (Edoro, 2013)

This effort has seen the publication of Tanimu Sule Lagi's *The BOFAK Illusion* (2012) and Emmanuel Iduma's *Farad* (2012). Apart from novels published under Cordite Book, few books about detective fiction now exist; Eghosa Imasuen's *To Saint Patrick* (2008), Adimchinma Ibe's *Treachery in the Yard* (2010), Tunde Leye's *Golden Sand* (2012), Deji Sowande's *The Queen's Fiction* (2013), Elizabeth Adeolu's *Chasing Facades* (2014), Henri Yire's *Operation A-Men* (2013), Casey Imafidon's *Ajgunle* (2014) etc. These novels are detective fictions, but what characterized them is also their reflection of contemporary Nigeria topical issues such as religious violence, corruption, terrorism, robbery, political assassination, internet fraud, murder (Ayodabo, 2014). For instance, Adimchinma Ibe's *Treachery in the Yard*, a stunning police procedural debut from one of Nigeria's young up-and-coming talents, introduces an electrifying new setting to the world of international crime fiction. The novel focuses on politics in Nigeria; a terrain where politicians' desperation for power comes with hydra-headed burdens such as assassination, thuggery, and corruption. In the novel, a bomb goes off in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, at the residence of a gubernatorial candidate Pius Okpara and Tamunoemi Peterside, a detective set out to investigate the bombing. Things take twist when the main suspect is a fixer who works for Dr. Puene, Okpara's political opponent. Ibe's satirical undertone of the Nigeria polity goes from mere criticism of thuggery and assassination to act of bombing. In a society where law enforcement agencies close their eyes to such crimes, the writer summons a blatant courage by presenting a detective character to questions such as misnomers. Detective Peterside receives several warnings to drop the case and when the dogged detective persists, bodies pile up as witnesses, and even Peterside's own friends and colleagues become targets. The novel also touches on the universal problem of distrust among police in Nigeria and its effect on procedure of investigation which often appears nominal. For most times, Peterside admits he doesn't have patience for procedure and just does what he needs to do. The spare story also matches the leanness of Nigerian police assets, where computers are rare and officers still rely on paper and common sense.

It has been discovered that detective fictions in Nigeria do not always follow the tradition of adopting a police officer or private inspector as the main character. This is because Nigeria is perceived as a society where lawyers, journalists, and critics are the real detectives while police officers and private inspectors always almost have nothing to do. In some of the novels, the protagonists are mostly amateurs who are lawyers,

journalists, or curious citizens who have other business connections that bring them into regular contact with crime. By presenting the stories through their eyes, chances are high that criminals will be caught because they are more willing to put their lives on the line. The importance of creating an idea of civilian detective is based on the feeling that they are as intelligent as the police detective. Such a feeling makes them extraordinary and leads them out of their grey ordinary lives (Jalová, 2007). This idea has been adopted and popularized by journalist and writers in Nigeria to criticize the government as a bane of the Nigerian society. For instance, Tanimu Sule Lagi is a lawyer and former news reporter whose detective novel *The BOFAK Illusion* uses journalistic element to contend with hydra-headed social concerns. The novel tells the story of Tinland, a once peaceful and serene state, which has been engulfed in a series of violent uprisings, tagged religious crises. Following a tip-off, Zack Liman, a journalist goes to investigate the cause of the uprising. This leads to an interview with Tangu Mila, the Special Adviser to the Governor on Security Matters. While interviewing Mila, Zack Liman stumbles onto the scoop of his career that the uprisings are actually government-sponsored programs designed to cause confusion and achieve sinister goals. Mila, suspecting a slip, orders Liman's assassination – leading to some sort of domino effect. Billy Dada, a friend and colleague of the murdered Zack Liman, is bent on investigating the cause of the death and the Tinland uprisings. With the help of Ayuba Giok, an amateur sleuth and a hotel receptionist, Kim Shykes, a former Sao Tomean police officer and Fidelis Oyims, the Police commissioner, Billy eventually discovers that the death of Liman is linked to drugs trafficking and political crime. In fact, it is Ayuba Giok's mind for conspiracy, nose for trouble and Billy's doggedness that help unravel the crimes.

Consequently, they effectively become part of the team that ultimately succeeds in apprehending Tangu Mila, and in this way stressing the power of collective agency. The novel ends with a gripping, heart-racing and suspense filled thriller, but not really encouraging. Jion Belleck, a Libyan-trained assassin is able to extract Gloria Dan, the drug merchant from Nigeria while Liman's murder remains unsolved. Though detective story usually ends with confession of the criminal, it is not followed by the act of punishment or trial very often (Jalová, 2007). In addition, Laura Marcus states that detective fiction contains "complex double narrative in which an absent story, that of a crime, is gradually reconstructed in the second story [the investigation]" (Marcus, 1992: 245). Finally, the writer explores the despicable play of power often involved among politicians in Nigeria and goes as far as weaving the crime stories reaching from the sin city of Tinland, to Aso Rock and Sao Tome. Also is the issue whether the crisis in Tinland is actually an ethno-religious crises or a government-sponsored program designed to cause confusion and achieve sinister goals.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the development of crime fiction from postcolonial Nigeria era to contemporary period. The study analyzed prominent novels and new Nigerian crime writers. It equally revealed that there are various subgenres of crime fictions in Nigeria; police procedural, detective fiction and crime thrillers. The study also examined different sociopolitical factors responsible for the development of the genre, most importantly those that are responsible for the increase of crimes in the society. It draws on factors such as colonialism, militarism, corruption, leadership problems; the insensitivity of the government to human and national development and many other nebulous political and economic factors that continue to veer the country towards democratic collapse.

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