

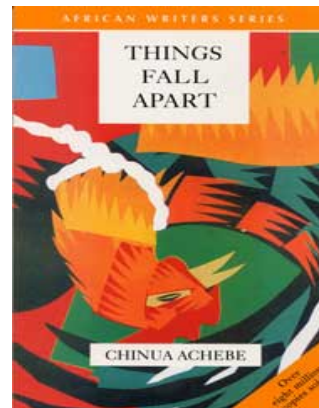
Nomad Diaries Rekindles Old Memories

By Adan Makina
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In a country like Somalia where communal structural composition is dictated by patriarchalism and a penumbra of confounding sedentary lifestyles, ferocious intertribal violence, political obscurantism, religious extremism, wife-beating and wife-inheritance, polygamous and arranged marriages, and recurring rivalry, prospective female writers often find themselves in troubling situations that plight their struggle for scholarly recognition. Undoubtedly, such inhuman and belligerent literary blockades riddled with explosively unwarranted hate towards our female partners by cynical males contribute to gender segregation. However, for many optimistic and fortunate female Somali writers in the Diaspora, female abhorrence and negative perceptions have become tales of the ancients as many have found literary succor in distant lands whose governing styles repudiate male domineering, authoritarianism, and insensate jungle laws. Shockingly, freedom of press has opened the gates for tarantula of controversial male and female writers who unabashedly and publicly denigrate African and Islamic values, renounce Islamic faith, and proclaim atheism. Hateful utterances jotted down in the lines of a book will never change concerted societal political resolve nor deter steadfast adherents from following their religious beliefs nor dissuade committed aspirants from plotting their ambitions.



Unlike writers driven by Islamophobia, ethno-nationalism and ethnocentrism, color bar, and malevolent speechifying propaganda, [Nomad diaries](#) (NomadHouse, 2009), a new book that gracefully and radiantly towers above other publications in major bookstands and internet sites, is a contemporary novel detailing incredible social, political, and economic events in clangorous pre and post-Somalia. The author, Yasmeeen Maxamuud- a Somali- is an erudite essayists and editor of the portal [WardheerNews](#). Yasmeeen spent four painstaking concrete years with one thing in mind: the final delivery of a captivatingly fine-tuned and well-rehearsed fictional narrative full of drama, euphoria, and absolute tribulation that jolts the nerves of the reader. It is a book full of ordeals depicting characters primarily overwhelmed by a potpourri of conditions that include violence and drug abuse, despondency and illegitimacy, rejection and consanguinity, pessimism and optimism, circumlocution and



loquaciousness, magnetism and vivacity in war-ravaged Somalia, in cross border jungles teeming with beasts, in the hostile and inhospitable refugee camps of Kenya, and in cosmopolitan America.

From the 1960s to the present day, African scholars belonging to the literary world- whether writers of fiction or nonfiction, journalists, poets, dramatists, essayists, children's writers, or novelists- have been in the forefront producing a plethora of literary works related to various genres: particularly on topics related to culture, gender, dictatorship, colonialism, and neocolonialism. Some novels have been written prior to any African country gaining independence. Others came rolling out of print immediately after 1957 when Ghana and Libya proclaimed independence from England and Italy respectively.

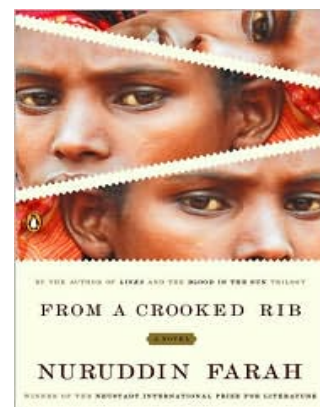
Chinua Achebe's celebrated novel, *Things Fall Apart* was first published in 1958 while his other novel *Arrow of God* came out of print in 1964. *Things Fall Apart* has been adapted into a novel and so is *The Concubine* by Nigerian writer Elechi Amadi. Peter Abrahams, the South African born (but of Ethiopian father and a colored South African mother) whose novel *Mine Boy* rekindled old sores of apartheid remains on the shelves of many libraries and bookstores worldwide despite coming out of print in 1946. His other works include the story collection *Dark Testament* (1942) and the novels *The Path of Thunder* (1948), *A Wreath for Udomo* (1956), *A Night of Their Own* (1965), the Jamaica-set *This Island Now* (1966, the only one of his novels not set in



Senegalese Writer Nafissatou Dia Diouf

Africa) and *The View from Coyaba* (1985). Somali-born Nuruddin Farah had his first novel, *From a Crooked Rib*, written in 1970 followed by

a succession of wide-ranging scholarly publications, anthology of poems, trilogies, and novels. Africa has produced some of the best writers in the world with Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, and Nuruddin Farah capturing internationally acclaimed awards. Another prominent African writer whose works deserve noting is the South African colored writer Alex La Guma who was head of the South African Colored People's Organization (SACPO). He was awarded the Lotus Prize for Literature in 1969. Besides being a novelist, Soyinka is known as a recipient of the acclaimed Nobel Prize in literature. When a pro-democracy political rally by angry demonstrators denouncing Olusegun Obasanjo's rigging of elections turned violent in



Lagos in 2004, Nobelist and literary doyen Soyinka found himself teargassed and then thrown behind bars by Nigeria’s police. Some of Africa’s novelists never trained in literature. A case in point is Elechi Amadi of Nigeria who majored in Physics and Mathematics and was at one time a member of the armed forces of his country. Guinean novelist Camara Laye trained as a motor mechanic. Yasmeen Maxamuud, the author of our current novel in review, *Nomad Diaries*, is an accountant by training. Some novelists departed the world young while others continue to live at advanced ages viewing political events of their nations from the sidelines; some remain in academia as distinguished professors for the sake of serving humanity.

West Africa has produced many inspiring and talented writers with Nigeria dominating the scene. Depending on a nation’s inclination toward colonial rule, most works by West Africans have either been written in French or English. A prominent novel written in French recounting the youthful voyage of novelist Camara Laye is *L’Enfant noir* (1953; *Dark Child*). With the advancement of contemporary printing techniques, modern novelists have conscientiously taken to writing in local languages so as to educate their underserved mass reeling under autocratic leaderships.

Growing up in Africa when the level of secondary education was in par with either the British or American systems of education-in an era when kindergartners sang “*twinkle, twinkle little star*” and when high school students voraciously devoured novels consisting of hundreds of pages within a matter of days-regardless of whether they were written by



Writer Amina Sow Fall of Senegal studied literature at the

Charles Dickens-the English novelist of the Victorian-era or by Mark Twain or by an African, the most fortunate in Africa’s post colonial educational establishments have been those who benefited from a curriculum untouched by the blood-stained hands of post-independence African dictators. Surprisingly, post-colonial African academics have been the first to off-set the current trend known as “brain drain” where the most educated left the continent in large numbers in search of greener pastures. The most enticing destination for African academics was in the western hemisphere. Since most African dictators did not entertain criticism of their new

administrations, writers and novelists who felt dismay at how their governments operated produced poems, plays, and critical publications denouncing specific leaders. In retaliation, authorities embarked on confiscation of literature, banning of plays, closure of theaters, and conviction of

suspects without representation of attorney. Those writers fortunate enough to escape the terrifying dragnets chose self-exile. Ugandan novelist and former university lecturer Okot P’Bitek may be remembered for his hair-raising novels written in the truest African taste. *Song of Lawino* (1966), originally written in Acholi was later rendered into English. It is about a tediously long and uninterrupted



Ugandan Writer Okot P’Bitek

speech by a wife lamenting her husband's adoption of western ideals and manners. In response to his wife's dramatic monologue, Okot P'Bitek wrote *Song of Ocol* (1970) in support of his wife's predictions.

Ugandan-born Taban Lo Liyong is a southern Sudanese who has written several books and poems. With Henry Owuor-Anyumba and Professor Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Taban Lo Liyong fought for the elevation of African oral traditions as well as prose and poetry from African-American and Caribbean society. A poet, fiction writer, and literary critic, Taban Lo Liyong was born Mokotiyang Rekenet, meaning "born at night". Some of his collections include *The Uninformed Man* and *Ballads of underdevelopment*. Most collections of African writers can be obtained by kindle from Amazon.



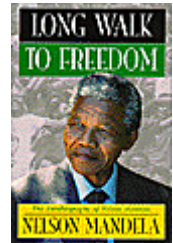
Taban Lo Liyong

With shortage of African-owned printing presses, nations that emerged out of colonialism relied heavily on curriculums and printing presses of their colonial masters for educational instructions. Assumingly, in English-speaking Africa, from kindergarten to college, school equipment schemes had their textbooks printed by either McMillan, Heinemann or by Oxford University Press. These publishers remained pioneers in the provision of books, multimedia, and classroom materials until the emergence of African -owned printing presses.

Several post-colonial African leaders like Jomo Kenyatta and Jaramogi Oginga Odinga of Kenya wrote books during their lifetimes. Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, father to the current prime minister of Kenya, Raila Odinga, may be remembered for his book *Not Yet Uhuru* (Heinemann, 1967), a 340-page autobiography of Oginga Odinga and published by Heinemann. Jomo



Kenyatta, Kenya's first post-colonial president, wrote the anthropological book *Facing Mount Kenya* (Vintage Books, 1962) with introduction by Bronislaw Malinowski-his mentor at the London School of Economics. *A Long Walk to Freedom* (Little, Brown & Co., 1995) by Nelson Mandela is an autobiography relating the life and times of one of the world's longest serving political prisoner. Mandela spent seventeen years of his twenty-seven years behind bars in the notorious Robben Island Prison in South Africa. A recipient of the Nobel Prize, Mandela became South Africa's first post-apartheid president and served just one-term (1994-1999).



Undoubtedly, Scholar, African traditionalist, poet, and Senegal's first president, Léopold Sédar Senghor will remain for sometime Africa's most prolific writer and president. Some of his celebrated works written in French include:

- *Prière aux masques* (Circa 1935 - Published in collected works during the 1940s).
- *Chants d'ombre* (1945)
- *Hosties noires* (1948)
- *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache* (1948)
- *Éthiopiennes* (1956)
- *Nocturnes* (1961)
- *Nation et voie africaine du socialisme* (1961)
- *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin et la politique africaine* (1962)
- *Lettres de d'hivernage* (1973)
- *Élégies majeures* (1979)
- *La poésie de l'action : conversation avec Mohamed Aziza* (1980)
- *Ce que je crois* (1988)

There are many African female writers like some you may have never heard of like Nafissatou Dia Diouf, Aminata Sow Fall , and Fatoumata Kane who is a Senegalese and Malian by birth and Burkinabè by marriage and passionately fond of literature and computer technology. Surely, Nomad Diaries has rekindled old memories. Without it, recollecting the line-up of books published by Heinemann and others and written by literary behemoths like Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Taban Lo Liyong, Elechi Amadi, Nuruddin Farah, Alex La Guma, Peter Abrahams, Nelson Mandela, Jomo Kenyatta, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Steve Biko, Ama Ata Aidoo, Nadine Gordimer, Buchi Emecheta, Okot p'Bitek and others, would have been impossible.



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Kane

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