THE NORDIC AFRICA INSTITUTE
NORDISKA AFRIKAINSTITUTET

Fiction from Africa – adding perspectives to social science

A selection of fiction in the Nordic Africa Institute Library

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Nordic Africa Institute library has selected African fiction for its social science collection, ever since the institute and its library was founded in 1962. Novels, poetry, theatre plays and other literary works offer perspectives beyond the surface in a social science context.

Pressing social issues and contemporary realities find an outlet in fiction. Through themes like political struggles, migration/diaspora, coming of age stories, gender identity/sexuality, conflicts, forgiveness or resilience, readers learn to understand nuances and subtleties in what it is to be human.

African fiction provides deeper insights in a country's cultural fabric, and make a visitor feel less of a stranger in a new country.

"I tell my students, it's not difficult to identify with somebody like yourself, somebody next door who looks like you. What's more difficult is to identify with someone you don't see, who's very far away, who's a different color, who eats a different kind of food. When you begin to do that then literature is really performing its wonders." – **Chinua Achebe**

The African fiction collection at Nordic Africa Institute library contains more than 5000 titles from over 50 countries. https://nai.uu.se/library/resources/fiction.html

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CENTRAL AFRICA

CAMEROON
Amadou Amal, Djaïli
The impatient. (2022, originally published in French 2020) (162 p.)
Women's role, Violence against women, Marriage, Polygamy, Patriarchy, Gender equality, Cultural tradition, Cameroon, Novels

"Three women, three stories, three linked destinies . . . In North Cameroon, well-to-do young Ramla is torn from her true love and wed to a manipulative older man. Safira, her co-wife, juggles envy and empathy for this new bride with disappointment in the husband she desperately loves. Like her older sister, Ramla, Hindou is married off to a man she does not know or want, a distant cousin whose instability and violence terrifies her. From an early age, these women were raised to submit to men, or risk shame and repudiation of themselves and their families. They are advised to have munyal—patience. They are told that their fates are the will of the All-Powerful, and that it is unthinkable—or rather, impossible—to defy tradition. They are reminded of the Fulani proverb which holds, "At the end of patience, there is the sky." Yet Ramla, Safira, and Hindou are tired of waiting for a happiness that may never come. Their lives are driven by impatience and clouded by the suffering rooted in forced marriage and physical abuse, but it is this oppressive culture that binds them together. In a society that demands female obedience, how will these three impatient women free themselves?"

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC
Yabouza, Adrienne
Co-wives, co-widows. (2021, originally published in French 2015) (124 p.)
Women's role, Marriage, Polygamy, Patriarchy, Widows, Feminism, Social justice, Politics, Central African Republic, Novels

"Co-Wives, Co-Widows is the first book from the Central African Republic to be translated into English. This is the story of Ndongo Passy and Grekpoubou, the two widows of Lidou. Following their husband's sudden and unexplained death, they find themselves fighting tooth and nail for all that is important to them. A playful, bittersweet story full of dry wit and local colour, set against a backdrop of political instability, corruption and the friction between the old and the new in Bangui in the Central African Republic."

CONGO
Mabanckou, Alain
Black Moses. (2017, originally published in French 2015) (199 p.)
Orphans, Boys, Childhood, Youth, Street children, Marginality, Politics, Social justice, Pointe-Noire, Congo, Novels

"It's 1970, and in the People's Republic of Congo a Marxist-Leninist revolution is ushering in a new age. But over at the orphanage on the outskirts of Pointe-Noire where young Moses has grown up, the revolution has only strengthened the reign of terror of Dieudonné Ngoulmoumako, the orphanage's corrupt director. So Moses escapes to Pointe-Noire, where he finds a home first with a larcenous band of Congolese Merry Men and then among the Zairian prostitutes of the Trois-Cents quarter. But the authorities won't leave Moses in peace, and intervene to chase both the Merry Men and the Trois-Cents girls out of town. All this injustice pushes poor Moses over the edge. Could he really be the Robin Hood of the Congo? Or is he just losing his marbles?"

CONGO DR
Mwanza Mujila, Fiston
The villain's dance. (2024, originally published in French 2020) (279 p.)
Street children, Social problems, Politics, Kinshasa, Congo DR, Novels

"The Democratic Republic of Congo, otherwise known as Congo-Kinshasa or DR Congo, has had a series of names since its founding. The name of Zaire best corresponds to the experience of the novel's characters. The years of Mobutu's regime were filled with utopias, dreams, fantasies and other uncontrolled desires for social redemption, the quest for easy enrichment and the desecration of places of power. Among these events: Zairians' immigration to Angola during the civil war boycotting the borders inherited from colonization, as if the country did not have its own diamonds, and the occupation of public places by children from outside. The author creates the atmosphere of the time

through a roundup of characters: the diviner Tshiamuena, also known as Madonna of the Cafunfo mines, prides herself of being God with whoever is willing to listen to her. Franz Baumgartner, an apprentice writer originally from Austria and rumba lover, goes around the bars in search of material for his novel. Sanza, Le Blanc and other street children share information to the intelligence services when they are not living off begging and robbery. Djibril, taxi driver, only lives for reggae music. As soon as night falls, each character dances and plays his own role in a country mined by dictatorship"

EQUATORIAL GUINEA
Obono, Trifonia Melibea

La bastarda. (2018, originally published in Spanish 2016) (101 p.)
Orphans, Youth, Family, Traditional culture, Ethnic groups, Fang, Homosexuality, LGBTQ, Gender identity, Marginality, Equatorial Guinea, Novels

"Orphaned teen Okomo lives under the watchful eye of her grandmother and dreams of finding her estranged father. Forbidden to seek him out, she enlists the help of other outcasts: her gay uncle and a gang of “mysterious” girls. Drawn into their illicit trysts, Okomo falls in love with their leader and rebels against the rigid norms of Fang culture."

RWANDA
Umubyeyi Mairesse, Beata

All your children, scattered. (2022, originally published in French 2019) (183 p.)
Civil war, Genocide, Migration, Family, Generations, Childhood, Ethnicity, Ethnic groups, Tutsi, Rwanda, Novels

"Beata Umubyeyi Mairesse's debut novel follows three generations torn apart by the genocide against the Tutsis, as they try to reconnect with one another, rebuild broken relationships, and find their place in today's world. Blanche returns to Rwanda after building a life in Bordeaux with her husband and young son, Stokely. Reuniting with her mother Immaculata, old wounds are reopened for both mother and daughter while Stokely, caught between two countries, tries to understand where he comes from and where he belongs."

Mukasonga, Scholastique

Kibogo. (2022, originally published in French 2020) (152 p.)
Traditional culture, Christianity, Folk literature, Oral tradition, Tales, Rwanda, Novels

"Kibogo's story is reserved for the evening's end, when women sit around a fire drinking honeyed brew, when just a few are able to stave off sleep. With heads nodding, drifting into the mist of a dream, one faithful storyteller will weave the old legends of the hillside, stories which church missionaries have done everything in their power to expunge. Kibogo's tale is at once an origin myth, a celestial marvel, and a source of hope. And for the white priests who spritz holy water on shriveled trees, it's considered forbidden, satanic, a witchdoctor's hoax. Everyone energetically debates Kibogo's twisted story, but deep down secretly wonders: Can Kibogo really summon the rain?"

EAST AFRICA

KENYA
Ngugi wa Thiong'o
A grain of wheat. (1967) (280 p.)
Independence, Colonialism, Peasantry, Political history, National liberation movements, Mau Mau, Kenya, Novels

"It is 1963 and Kenya is on the verge of Uhuru - Independence Day. The mighty British government has been toppled, and in the lull between the fighting and the new world, colonized and colonizer alike reflect on what they have gained and lost. In the village of Thabai, the men and women who live there have been transformed irrevocably by the uprising. Kihika, legendary rebel leader, was fatally betrayed to the whiteman. Gikonyo's marriage to the beautiful Mumbi was destroyed when he was imprisoned, while her life has been shattered in other ways. And Mugo, brave survivor of the camps and now a village hero, harbours a terrible secret. As events unfold, compromises are forced, friendships are betrayed and loves are tested."

Bajaber, Khadija Abdalla
The house of rust. (2021) (258 p.)
Family, Childhood, Children, Fathers, Mombasa, Kenya, Speculative fiction, Novels

"The House of Rust is an enchanting novel about a Hadhrami girl in Mombasa. When her fisherman father goes missing, Aisha takes to the sea on a magical boat made of a skeleton to rescue him. She is guided by a talking scholar’s cat (and soon crows, goats, and other animals all have their say, too). On this journey Aisha meets three terrifying sea monsters. After she survives a final confrontation with Baba wa Papa, the father of all sharks, she rescues her own father, and hopes that life will return to normal. But at home, things only grow stranger. Khadija Abdalla Bajaber’s debut is a fabulist coming-of-age tale told through the lens of the Swahili and diasporic Hadhrami culture in Mombasa, Kenya. Richly descriptive and written with an imaginative hand and sharp eye for unusual detail, The House of Rust is a memorable novel by a thrilling new voice"

KENYA/TANZANIA
No edges : Swahili stories. (2023) (140 p.)
Daily life, Swahili-speaking peoples, Short stories, Speculative fiction

"The first collection of contemporary Swahili fiction of its kind introduces eight East African authors searching-through noise, humor, tradition, and mystery-for a future that is theirs to make"--

UGANDA
Makumbi, Jennifer Nansubuga
Let's tell this story properly. (2019) (289 p.)
Migration, Immigrants, Ugandans, Diaspora, United Kingdom, Short stories

“How far does one have to travel to find home elsewhere? The stories in Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi's collection attempt to measure that distance. Centered around the lives of Ugandans in Britain, Let's Tell This Story Properly features characters both hyper-visible and unseen--they take on jobs at airport security, care for the elderly, and work in hospitals, while remaining excluded from white, British life. As they try to find their place, they drift from a home that feels further and further away. In an ambitious collection by the critically acclaimed author of Kintu, Let's Tell This Story Properly explores what happens to those who leave.”

ZANZIBAR
Gurnah, Abdulrazak
Afterlives. (2020) (275 p.)
Family, Childhood, Colonialism, Political history, Colonial history, War, Germany, Tanzania, Novels

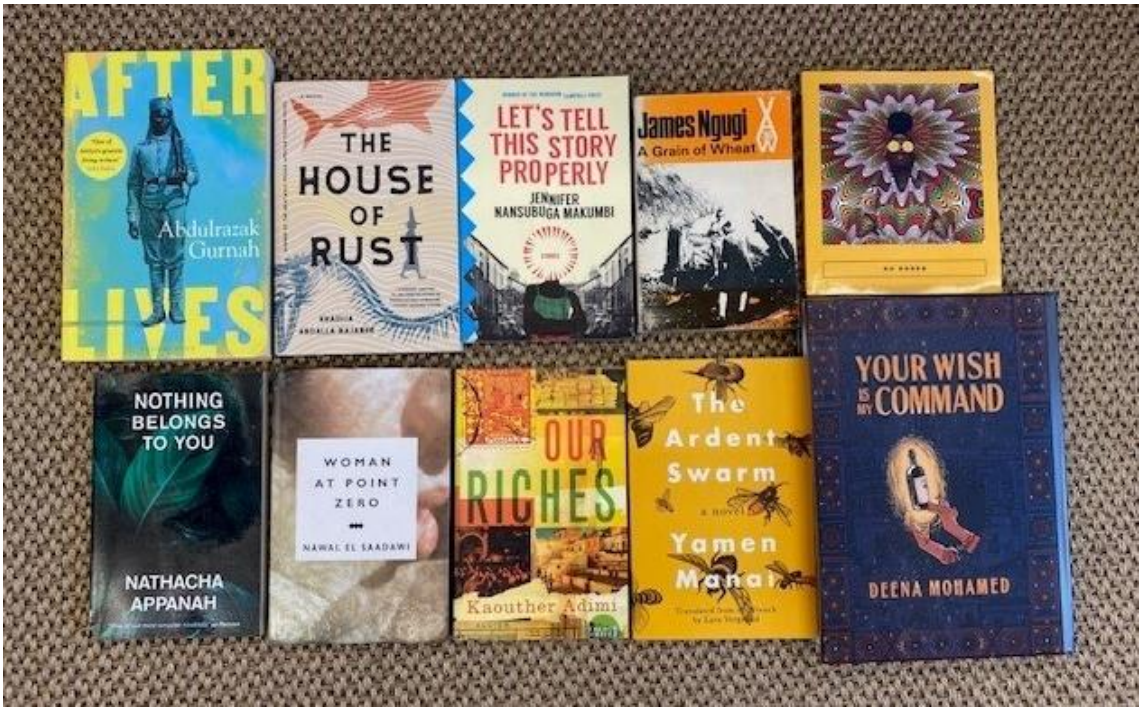
"Restless, ambitious Ilyas was stolen from his parents by the Schutzruppe askari, the German colonial troops; after years away, he returns to his village to find his parents gone, and his sister Afiya given away. Hamza was not stolen, but was sold; he has come of age in the army, at the right hand of an officer whose control has ensured his protection but marked him for life. Hamza does not have words for how the war ended for him. Returning to the town of his childhood, all he wants is work, however

humble, and security – and the beautiful Afiya. The century is young. The Germans and the British and the French and the Belgians and whoever else have drawn their maps and signed their treaties and divided up Africa. As they seek complete dominion they are forced to extinguish revolt after revolt by the colonised. The conflict in Europe opens another arena in east Africa where a brutal war devastates the landscape. As these interlinked friends and survivors come and go, live and work and fall in love, the shadow of a new war lengthens and darkens, ready to snatch them up and carry them away."

INDIAN OCEAN ISLANDS

MAURITIUS
Appanah, Nathacha
Nothing belongs to you (2023, orig. published in French 2021) (143 p.)
Women's role, Marriage, Widows, Family, Childhood, Novels

"It's not only grief and loneliness that have tormented Tara since her husband's death. In her, something rises and crests like a wave. As she sits in squalor in a house that once knew love, she hears the deafening cry of a past she thought was stifled and the resurgence of the person she had been before. A girl with another name, who loved to laugh and dance, who believed in the innocence of childhood until she was overtaken by her country's demons. With her characteristic lyricism and precision, Nathacha Appanah offers us total immersion into a world of lost futures and hidden pasts, in which the implacable hand of fate can only be resisted at a price"



NORTH AFRICA

ALGERIA
Adimi, Kaouther
Our riches. (2020, originally published in French 2017) (148 p.)
Bookselling, Publishing, Colonial history, Political development, France, Algeria, Novels

"Our Riches celebrates quixotic devotion and the love of books in the person of Edmond Charlot, who at the age of twenty founded Les Vraies Richesses (Our True Wealth), the famous Algerian bookstore/publishing house/lending library. He more than fulfilled its motto 'by the young, for the young', discovering the twenty-four-year-old Albert Camus in 1937. His entire archive was twice destroyed by the French colonial forces, but despite financial difficulties (he was hopelessly generous) and the vicissitudes of wars and revolutions, Charlot (often compared to the legendary bookseller Sylvia Beach) carried forward Les Vraies Richesses as a cultural hub of Algiers. Our Riches interweaves Charlot's story with that of another twenty-year-old, Ryad (dispatched in 2017 to empty the old shop and repaint it). Ryad's no booklover, but old Abdallah, the bookshop's self-appointed, nearly illiterate guardian, opens the young man's mind. Cutting brilliantly from Charlot to Ryad, from the 1930s to current times, from WWII to the bloody 1961 Free Algeria demonstrations in Paris, Adimi delicately packs a monumental history of intense political drama into her swift and poignant novel. But most of all, it's a hymn to the book and to the love of books."

EGYPT
El Saadawi, Nawal
Woman at point zero. (1983, originally published in Arabic 1977) (142 p.)
Women's rights, Violence against women, Childhood, Prostitution, Feminism, Prisoners, Patriarchy, Egypt, Novels

"Nawal El Saadawi's highly acclaimed feminist novel, Woman at Point Zero, follows the life of Firdaus, an Egyptian peasant girl, from her childhood of incomprehensible cruelty and neglect to her end in a grimy Cairo prison cell. From her earliest memories, Firdaus suffered at the hands of men--first her abusive father, then her violent, much older husband, to finally her deceitful boyfriend-turned-pimp. After a lifetime of abuse, she at last takes drastic action against the males ruling her life. Still as beautiful and cutting as it was when it was first published, this new edition will continue to resonate powerfully with readers for years to come."

Mohamed, Deena
Your wish is my command / (2022, originally published in Arabic 2015) (518 p.)
Gender equality, Women's rights, Religion, Mental illness, Widows, Cairo, Egypt, Comics, Cartoons, Speculative fiction

"Your Wish is My Command is the story of three people who are navigating a world where wishes are literally for sale. Mired as they are in bureaucracy and the familiar prejudices of our world, the wishes that are more expensive are more likely to work as intended. Three wishes sold at an unassuming kiosk in Cairo link Aziza, Nour and Shokry, changing their perspectives as well as their lives. Aziza learned early that life can be hard, but when she loses her husband and manages to procure a wish, she finds herself fighting unreasonable regulations and inequality for the right to have – and make – that wish. Nour is a privileged college student who secretly struggles with depression and must decide whether or not to use their wish to try to 'fix' this depression. And, finally, Shokry must grapple with his religious convictions as he decides how to help a friend who doesn't want to use their wish."

TUNISIA
Manai, Yamen
The ardent swarm. (2021, originally published in French 2017) (M)
Revolution, Arab Spring, Political development, Fundamentalism, Apiculture, Novels

"Sidi lives a hermetic life as a bee whisperer, tending to his beloved "girls" on the outskirts of the desolate North African village of Nawa. He wakes one morning to find that something has attacked one of his beehives, brutally killing every inhabitant. Heartbroken, he soon learns that a mysterious swarm of vicious hornets committed the mass murder—but where did they come from, and how can he stop them? If he is going to unravel this mystery and save his bees from annihilation, Sidi must venture out into the village and then brave the big city and beyond in search of answers. Along the

way, he discovers a country and a people turned upside down by their new post–Arab Spring reality as Islamic fundamentalists seek to influence votes any way they can on the eve of the country's first democratic elections. To succeed in his quest, and find a glimmer of hope to protect all that he holds dear, Sidi will have to look further than he ever imagined."

NORTHEAST AFRICA

DJIBOUTI
Waberi, Abdourahman A.
Why do you dance when you walk? (2022, originally published in French 2019) (128 p.)
Migration, Childhood, Family, Disability, Diaspora, Political development, Independence, France, Djibouti, Novels

"One morning in Paris on the way to kindergarten, a little girl asks her father 'Papa, why do you dance when you walk?' The question is innocent and serious. Why does her father limp, why can't he ride a bicycle or a scooter? Her father feels compelled to answer, to bring back the memories of his childhood in Djibouti and tell her what happened to his leg. It was a place of sunlight and dust and sickness, a sickness that made him different, unique. They called him a skinflint and a runt, but he was the smartest kid in his school. Waberi remembers the shifting desert of Djibouti, the Red Sea, the shanty roofs of the houses in his neighborhood, an immense loneliness and some unforgettable characters: Papa-la-Tige who sold baubles to tourists, his tough, silent mother Zahra who trembled, and his grandmother nicknamed Cochise. He tells of the moment when his life changed forever and the ensuing struggle that made him a man, a man who knows the value of poetry, silence and freedom, a man who is still dancing."

ERITREA
Jabir, Haji
Black foam / (2023, originally published in Arabic 2018) (224 p.)
Migration, Emigration, Immigration, Jews, Israel, Ethiopians, Identity, Novels

"Dawoud is on the run from his murky past, aiming to discover where he belongs. He tries to assimilate into different groups along his journey through North Africa and Israel, changing his clothes, his religious affiliations, and even his name to fit in, but the safety and peace he seeks remain elusive. It seems prejudice is everywhere, holding him back, when all he really wants is to create a simple life he can call his own. A chameleon, Dawoud--or David, Adal, or Dawit, depending on where and when you meet him--is not lost in this whirl of identities. In fact, he is defined by it"--

ETHIOPIA
Addis Ababa noir / edited by Maaza Mengiste (2020) (243 p.)
Towns, Urban population, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Crime, Short stories

"Addis Ababa (simply "Addis" to locals), considered by some to be the original home of humankind, is a sprawling melting pot of cultures where rich and poor live side by side in relative harmony-until they don't. Maaza Mengiste's award-winning fiction and nonfiction have consistently reflected the lives of Ethiopia's everyday people, against the backdrop of migration, war, and exile. Here, in this masterfully edited collection showcasing the country's finest literary talent, Mengiste brings this same razor-sharp sensibility to her city of birth, pulling back the curtain on despair and depravity, offering an intimate glimpse into the raw, beating heart of Addis Ababa. Addis Ababa Noir feature brand-new stories by: Maaza Mengiste, Adam Reta, Mahtem Shiferraw, Linda Yohannes, Sulaiman Addonia, Meron Hadero, Mikael Awake, Lelissa Girma, Rebecca Fisseha, Solomon Hailemariam, Girma Fantaye, Teferi Nigussie Tafa, Hannah Giorgis, and Bewketu Seyoum"

Hadero, Meron
A down home meal for these difficult times. (2022) (212 p.)
Migration, Immigrants, Refugees, Diaspora, United States, Short stories

“Set across the U.S. and abroad, Meron Hadero stories feature immigrants, refugees, and those on the brink of dispossession, all struggling to begin again, all fighting to belong. Moving through diverse geographies and styles, this captivating collection follows characters on the journey toward home, which they dream of, create and redefine, lose and find and make their own. Beyond migration, these stories examine themes of race, gender, class, friendship and betrayal, the despair of loss and the enduring resilience of hope.”

SOMALIA
Farah, Nuruddin
Maps. (1986) (259 p.)
Orphans, Childhood, Youth, History, Civil war, Somalis, Identity, Political history, Somalia, Novels

”Winner of the Neustadt International Prize for Literature, Nuruddin Farah is one of Africa's most respected contemporary writers. Maps is the first novel in his acclaimed Blood in the Sun trilogy, set in his native land. Askar lost his father in the bloody war between Ethiopia and Somalia, and his mother died giving birth to him. Taken in by Misra, a kindhearted woman, he grows up in a small village. But as an adolescent, a true child of his times, he begins to feel suffocated there and goes to live with his cosmopolitan aunt and uncle in the capital. In dangerous and turbulent Mogadiscio, Somalis are struggling to recreate a national identity that has been destroyed by the upheavals of modernity and the betrayals of civil war. Askar throws himself into radical political activity in the midst of the turmoil. As allegations of murder and treason are leveled at Misra, Askar's personal sense identity and Somalia's political boundaries will be challenged with a ferocity he could have never imagined.”

SUDAN
Aboulela, Leila
Elsewhere, home / (2018) (256 p.)
Women, Migration, Immigrants, Identity, Diaspora, Sudanese, United Kingdom, Short stories

"A young woman’s encounter with a former classmate elicits painful reminders of her former life in Khartoum. A wealthy Sudanese student in Aberdeen begins an unlikely friendship with a Scottish man. A woman experiences an evolving relationship to her favourite writer, whose portrait of their shared culture both reflects and conflicts with her own sense of identity. Shuttling between the dusty, sun-baked streets of Khartoum and the university halls and cramped apartments of Aberdeen and London, Elsewhere, Home explores, with subtlety and restraint, the profound feelings of yearning, loss and alienation that come with leaving one’s homeland in pursuit of a different life.”

SOUTHERN AFRICA

ANGOLA
Agualusa, José Eduardo
The society of reluctant dreamers. (2019, first published in Portuguese 2017) (271 p.)
Political development, Youth, Protest movements, Art, Dictatorship, Angola, Speculative fiction, Novels

"Swimming in the clear blue waters of the Rainbow Hotel, Daniel Benchimol finds a waterproof camera, belonging to Moira, a Mozambican artist, famous for a series of photos depicting her own dreams - a woman he, Daniel, dreams about repeatedly. The two meet, and Daniel becomes involved in a mysterious project with a Brazilian neuroscientist, who's working with Moira on a machine to film and photograph people's dreams. This is just one of many dreamlike encounters, as characters appear in each others' dreams and the dreams of people around them. Meanwhile, Daniel's daughter Karinguiri, one of Angola's young dreamers, is arrested along with six friends for staging a protest during a presidential press conference in Luanda. The group go on hunger strike, attracting worldwide press attention, showing the power of young people when they raise their voices against the regime. The Society of Involuntary Dreamers is a story of art versus dictatorship, the place of dreams in our waking lives and how they blur with reality, set against the political backdrop of Angola's tumultuous past and present."

BOTSWANA
Moeng, Gothataone
Call and response. (2023) (289 p.)
Family, Youth, Women's role, Gender relations, Daily life, Traditional culture, Modernity, Village, Towns, Botswana, Short stories

"Full of heart and humour, Gothataone Moeng's first collection, set between the rural village of Serowe and the thrumming capital city of Gaborone, captures a chorus of voices from a country in flux. Meet a young woman who has worn the same mourning clothes for almost a year, and a teenage girl who shies away from the room where her once vibrant aunt lies dying. Elsewhere, watch as a younger sister hides her romantic exploits from her family while her older brother openly flaunts his infidelities, and a traveller returns home laden with confusion and shame. Moeng, part of a new generation of writers coming out of Africa whose work is exploding onto the literary scene, offers us an insight into communities, experiences and landscapes through these cinematic stories peopled with unforgettable female protagonists."

MOZAMBIQUE
Couto, Mia
Sea loves me: selected stories / (2021) (399 p.)
Colonialism, Gender relations, Environment, Race relations, Tales, Mozambique, Speculative fiction, Short stories

"Known internationally for his novels, Mia Couto, winner of the Neustadt Prize for Literature, first became famous for his short stories. Sea Loves Me includes sixty-four of his best, thirty-six of which appear in English for the first time. Covering the entire arc of Couto's career, this collection displays the Mozambican author's inventiveness, sensitivity, and social range with greater richness than any previous collection, including early stories that reflect the harshness of life under Portuguese colonialism; magical tales of rural Africa; and contemporary fables of the slipperiness of race and gender, environmental disaster and the clash between the countryside and the city. The title novella, long acclaimed as one of Couto's best works but never before made available in English, caps this collection with the lyrical story of a search for a lost father that leads to unexpected love."

SOUTH AFRICA
Galgut, Damon
The promise. (2021) (293 p.)
Family, Afrikaners, Farmers, Race relations, Apartheid, Political development, South Africa, Novels

"The Promise charts the crash and burn of a white South African family, living on a farm outside Pretoria. The Swarts are gathering for Ma's funeral. The younger generation, Anton and Amor, detest everything the family stand for -- not least the failed promise to the Black woman who has worked for them her whole life. After years of service, Salome was promised her own house, her own land... yet somehow, as each decade passes, that promise remains unfulfilled. The narrator's eye shifts and blinks: moving fluidly between characters, flying into their dreams; deliciously lethal in its observation. And as the country moves from old deep divisions to its new so-called fairer society, the lost promise of more than just one family hovers behind the novel's title. In this story of a diminished family, sharp and tender emotional truths hit home. Confident, deft and quietly powerful, The Promise is literary fiction at its finest."

Makhene, Magogodi oaMphela
Innards. (2023) (208 p.)
Apartheid, Post-apartheid, Race relations, Daily life, Soweto, South Africa, Short stories

"This incendiary debut of linked stories narrates the everyday lives of Soweto residents, from the early years of apartheid to its dissolution and beyond. Set in Soweto, the urban heartbeat of South Africa, Innards tells the intimate stories of everyday black folks processing the savagery of apartheid with grit, wit, and their own distinctive bewildering humor. Rich with the thrilling textures of township language and life, it braids the voices and perspectives of an indelible cast of characters into a breathtaking collection flush with forgiveness, rage, ugliness, and beauty. Meet a fake PhD and ex-freedom fighter who remains unbothered by his own duplicity, a girl who goes mute after stumbling upon a burning body, twin siblings nursing a scorching feud, and a woman unraveling under the weight of a brutal encounter with the police. At the heart of these stories about deceit and ambition, appalling violence, familial turmoil, and love is South Africa’s history of slavery, colonization, and apartheid. Like many Americans today, Innards’ characters must navigate the shadows of the recent past alongside the uncertain opportunities of the promised land.”

Tlali, Miriam
Between two worlds. (1975) (192 p.)
Apartheid, Race relations, Women’s rights, Women workers, Working conditions, Anti-apartheid movements, Soweto, South Africa, Novels

"Banned when it was first published in South Africa, this novel, formerly entitled Muriel at Metropolitan, is one of the most distinctive works to have come out of apartheid South Africa. This edition restores to its rightful place the original title of the work, Between two worlds - a title considered unacceptable during the apartheid era, and replaced by Muriel at Metropolitan. This, Miriam Tlali's first novel, is remarkable for its combination of gentle humour and wealth of detail about life on the fringes of white society. It is a work of both literary and historical significance."

ZIMBABWE
Ndlovu, Siphiwe Gloria
The theory of flight. (2018) (319 p.)
Family, Political history, Colonialism, Independence, Speculative fiction, Novels

"As Imogen Zula Nyoni, aka Genie, lies in a coma at Mater Dei Hospital after having suffered through a long illness, her family and friends struggle to come to terms with her impending death. This is the story of Genie, who has gifts that transcend time and space. It is also the story of her forebears - Baines Tikiti, who, because of his wanderlust, changed his name and ended up walking into the Indian Ocean; his son, Livingstone Stanley Tikiti, who, during the war, took as his nom de guerre Golide Gumede and who became obsessed with flight; and Golide's wife, Elizabeth Nyoni, a country-and-western singer self-styled after Dolly Parton, blonde wig and all. With the lightest of touches, and with an overlay of magical-realist beauty, this novel sketches, through the lives of a few families and the fate of a single patch of ground, decades of national history (a country in Southern Africa that is never named) - from colonial occupation through the freedom struggle, to the devastation wrought by the sojas, the HIV virus, and The Man Himself. At turns mysterious and magical, but always honest, The Theory of Flight explores the many ways we lose those we love before they die."

WEST AFRICA

BURKINA FASO
Ilboudo, Monique
So distant from my life. (2022, originally published in French 2018) (119 p.)
Migraton, Migrants, Emigration, Repatriation, Return migration, Homosexuality, Novels

"Jeanphi, a young man from the fictional West African city Ouabany, has one obsession that will determine the fate of his life – migration. He scrapes together money to take the illegal route across the Sahara, making it as far as Morocco before being repatriated. Increasingly desperate, Jeanphi meets an elegant French widower who for his part is despairing at the insurmountable bureaucratic hurdles for his charitable endeavour in Jeanphi's country. A window opens to opportunity – but it will also bring tragedy. Burkinabé author Monique Ilboudo's novel offers a compelling and complex portrait of migration, one of the defining global concerns of the twenty-first century, and a sharp critique of both the NGO-isation of African countries and the currents of shame that divide communities and families."

CÔTE D'IVOIRE
GauZ'
Standing heavy. (2022, originally published in French 2014) (167 p.)
Migration, Migrants, Emigration, Immigration, Ivoirians, Diaspora, France, Novels

"The 1960s – Ferdinand arrives in Paris from Côte d'Ivoire, ready to take on the world and become a big somebody. The 1990s – It is the Golden Age of immigration, and Ossiri and Kassoum navigate a Paris on the brink of momentous change.The 2010s – In a Sephora on the Champs-Élysées, the all-seeing eyes of a security guard observes the habits of those who come to worship at this church to consumerism. Amidst the political bickering of the inhabitants of the Residence for Students from Côte d'Ivoire and the ever-changing landscape of French immigration policy, Ferdinand, Ossiri and Kassoum, two generations of Ivoirians, attempt to make their way as undocumented workers, taking shifts as security at a flour mill. Sharply satirical, political and poignant, Standing Heavy is a searingly witty deconstruction of colonial legacies and capitalist consumption, an unprecedented and unforgettable account of everything that passes under a security guard's gaze."

GHANA
Gyasi, Yaa
Homegoing. (2016) (305 p.)
Migration, Slavery, Family, Generations, History, United States, Ghana, Novels

"Two half sisters, Effia and Esi, unknown to each other, are born into two different tribal villages in 18th century Ghana. Effia will be married off to an English colonial, and will live in comfort in the sprawling, palatial rooms of Cape Coast Castle, raising half-caste children who will be sent abroad to be educated in England before returning to the Gold Coast to serve as administrators of the Empire. Her sister, Esi, will be imprisoned beneath Effia in the Castle's women's dungeon, and then shipped off on a boat bound for America, where she will be sold into slavery. Stretching from the tribal wars of Ghana to slavery and Civil War in America, from the coal mines in the north to the Great Migration to the streets of 20th century Harlem, Yaa Gyasi's has written a modern masterpiece, a novel that moves through histories and geographies and--with outstanding economy and force--captures the troubled spirit of our own nation"

Quartey, Kwei
Last seen in Lapaz. (2023) (360 p.)
Human trafficking, Women, Crime, Novels

"When a whirlwind romance leads to a brutal murder and the disappearance of a young Nigerian woman, PI Emma Djan resorts to dangerous undercover work to track her down in Accra. Just as things at work are slowing down for PI Emma Djan, an old friend of her boss's asks for help locating his missing daughter. According to her father, Ngozi had a bright future ahead of her when she became secretive and withdrawn. Suddenly, all she wanted to do was be with her handsome new beau, Femi, instead of attending law school in the fall. So when she disappears from her parents' house in Nigeria the middle of a summer night, they immediately suspect Femi was behind it and have

reason to believe the pair has fled to Accra. During Emma's first week on the case, Femi is found murdered at his opulent residence in Accra. There are no signs of Ngozi at the scene, and fearing the worst, Emma digs further, discovering that Femi was part of a network of sex traffickers across West Africa. Emma must figure out which of Femi's many enemies killed him, but more urgently, she must find Ngozi before she, too, is murdered in cold blood."

MAURITANIA
Beyrouk
Pariahs. (2023, originally published in French 2021) (149 p.)
Family, Childhood, Marriage Fathers, Prisons, Prisoners, Letters, Mauritania, Novels

"Writing letters to his deceased wife from the confines of a prison cell, a father reflects romantically on their life together and the free-spirited nomadic life that they enjoyed in their youth; while his son, left to fend for himself in an increasingly hostile and modernized urban environment falls into petty crime and gang life in the hardscrabble slum districts of Mauritania's capital city."

NIGERIA
Achebe, Chinua
Things fall apart. (1958) (148 p.)
Race relations, Ethnic groups, Igbo, Traditional culture, Missionaries, History, Colonialism, Novels

"Okonkwo is the greatest wrestler and warrior alive, and his fame spreads throughout West Africa like a bush-fire in the harmattan. But when he accidentally kills a clansman, things begin to fall apart. Then Okonkwo returns from exile to find missionaries and colonial governors have arrived in the village. With his world thrown radically off-balance he can only huttle towards tragedy. A classic in every sense, Chinua Achebe's stark, cooly ironic novel reshaped both African and world literature. First published in 1958, it has sold over ten million copies in forty-five languages, and remains an arresting parable of a proud but powerless man witnessing the ruin of his people."

Ibeh, Chukwuebuka
Blessings. (2024) (249 p.)
Family, Youth, Adolescents, Homosexuality, LGBTQ, Nigeria, Novels

"When Obiefuna's father witnesses an intimate moment between his teenage son and the family's apprentice, newly arrived from the nearby village, he banishes Obiefuna to a strict Christian boarding school. Surrounded by unknown faces that soon become friends, lovers and enemies, Obiefuna finds and hides who he truly is, while his mother Uzoamaka grapples to hold on to her favourite son, her truest friend. When he leaves school as a young man, Nigeria criminalizes same-sex relationships – and Obiefuna's life, or the life he wants to live, becomes even harder to envision – out of reach in a way that is more dangerous and tangible than before."

John, Elnathan
On Ajayi Crowther Street / ill. by Alaba Onajin. (2019) (223 p.)
Family, Religion, Daily life, Youth, Sexuality, LGBTQ, Lagos, Nigeria, Comics, Cartoons, Novels

"On the noisy Ajayi Crowther Street in Lagos, neighbours gather to gossip, discuss noise complaints, and faithfully head to church each Sunday. But beneath the surface lies a hidden world of clandestine love affairs, spiritual quackery and hypocrisy that threatens to destroy the community from within. On Ajayi Crowther Street peels back the curtains on the lives of pastor Akpoborie and his family, to reveal a tumultuous world full of desires, secrets and lies. His only son, Godstime, is struggling to hide his sexuality whilst his daughter Keturah must hide the truth of her pregnancy to preserve her and her family's image. But it is the Reverend himself who hides the darkest secret of them all."

Okorafor, Nnedi
Noor. (2021) (214 p.)
Disability, Technology, Science fiction, Speculative fiction, Novels

"Anwuli Okwudili prefers to be called AO. To her, these initials have always stood for Artificial Organism. AO has never really felt…natural, and that's putting it lightly. Her parents spent most of the days before she was born praying for her peaceful passing because even in-utero she was "wrong". But she lived. Then came the car accident years later that disabled her even further. Yet instead of viewing her strange body the way the world views it, as freakish, unnatural, even the work of the devil, AO embraces all that she is: A woman with a ton of major and necessary body augmentations. And

then one day she goes to her local market and everything goes wrong? Once on the run, she meets a Fulani herdsman named DNA and the race against time across the deserts of Northern Nigeria begins. In a world where all things are streamed, everyone is watching the “reckoning of the murderess and the terrorist” and the “saga of the wicked woman and mad man” unfold. This fast-paced, relentless journey of tribe, destiny, body, and the wonderland of technology revels in the fact that the future sometimes isn’t so predictable. Expect the unaccepted."

SENEGAL
Diop, David

At night all blood is black. (2020, originally published in French 2018) (145 p.)
History, Colonialism, World War (1914-1918), Military personnel, Violence, France, Senegal, Novels

“Alfa and Mademba are two of the many Senegalese soldiers fighting in the Great War. Together they climb dutifully out of their trenches to attack France’s German enemies whenever the whistle blows, until Mademba is wounded, and dies in a shell hole with his belly torn open.Without his more-than-brother, Alfa is alone and lost amidst the savagery of the conflict. He devotes himself to the war, to violence and death, but soon begins to frighten even his own comrades in arms. How far will Alfa go to make amends to his dead friend? At Night All Blood is Black is a hypnotic, heartbreaking rendering of a mind hurtling towards madness.”

SIERRA LEONE
Beah, Ishmael

Little family. (2020) (262 p.)
Youth, Adolescents, Family, Street children, Homeless, Marginality, Novels

"Hidden away from a harsh outside world, five young people have improvised a home in an abandoned airplane, a relic of their country’s tumultuous past. Elimane, the bookworm, is as street-smart as he is wise. Clever Khoudiemata maneuvers to keep the younger kids—athletic, pragmatic Ndevui, thoughtful Kpindi, and especially their newest member, Namsa—safe and fed. When Elimane makes himself of service to the shadowy William Handkerchief, it seems as if the little family may be able to keep the world at bay and their household intact. But when Khoudi comes under the spell of the “beautiful people”—the fortunate sons and daughters of the elite—the desire to resume an interrupted coming of age and follow her own destiny proves impossible to resist."

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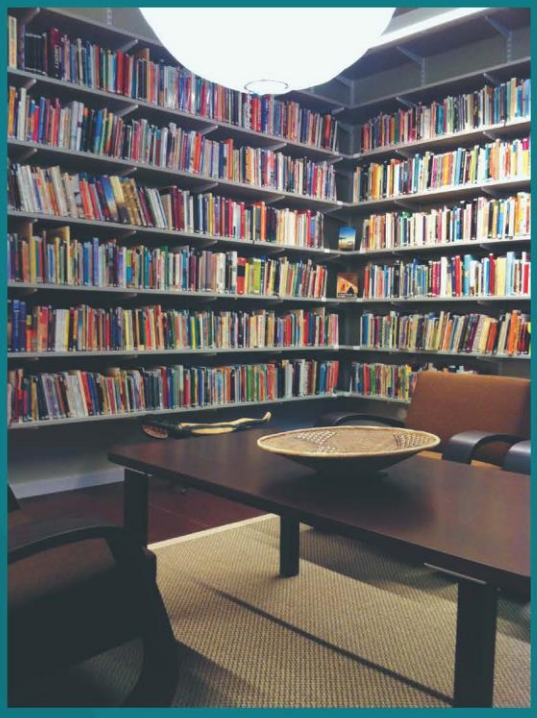
About the institute

The Nordic Africa Institute (NAI) conducts independent, policyrelevant research, provides analysis and informs decisionmaking, with the aim of advancing research-based knowledge of contemporary Africa. The institute is jointly financed by the governments of Finland, Iceland and Sweden.



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Visitors address: Villavägen 6, Uppsala
Address: The Nordic Africa Institute, Box 1703,
SE–751 47 Uppsala, Sweden

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