



## The Orchard of Lost Souls

*Nadifa Mohamed*

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## **The Orchard of Lost Souls** Nadifa Mohamed

It is 1988 and Hargeisa waits. Whispers of revolution travel on the dry winds but still the dictatorship remains secure. Soon, and through the eyes of three women, we will see Somalia fall.

Nine-year-old Deqo has left the vast refugee camp she was born in, lured to the city by the promise of her first pair of shoes.

Kawsar, a solitary widow, is trapped in her little house with its garden clawed from the desert, confined to her bed after a savage beating in the local police station.

Filsan, a young female soldier, has moved from Mogadishu to suppress the rebellion growing in the north.

And as the country is unravelled by a civil war that will shock the world, the fates of the three women are twisted irrevocably together.

Intimate, frank, brimming with beauty and fierce love, *The Orchard of Lost Souls* is an unforgettable account of ordinary lives lived in extraordinary times.

## **The Orchard of Lost Souls Details**

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Author : Nadifa Mohamed

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## From Reader Review The Orchard of Lost Souls for online ebook

### **Thepocobookreader says**

Nadifa Mohamed's second novel, The Orchard of Lost Souls seemed promising from the start. To be honest, opening with a quote from Sojourner Truth's Aint I a Woman? was always going to bode well with me. Thrust right into the midst of action (or in medias res for my fellow nerdy types) as the revolution takes hold and Somalia begins its descent into civil war, the novel chronicles the lives of three Somali women, Kawsar, Filsan and Deqo. Inextricably linked by pain and loss, Mohamed's choice to focus on the everyday lives of these women, with conflict as the backdrop feels a refreshing and much needed alternative to the usual (and tired) war/ terrorist/ pirate centred rhetoric we are usually presented with. Instead Mohamed has created an inherently female book that gives voice to the personal histories of Somali women through a narrative that is not polemical, but tender and nuanced. In a place bereft of men, Mohamed treats her female characters with a sensitivity and sense of reverence that shows how much her writing has matured since her debut. Her language is adorned with Somalian culture and cadence and the passages about the violence feel painful, laden with memories of what once was and how quickly it unravelled. Because Somalia's story is a sad one. A beautiful coastal land seized by European colonisers, ruined by civil war, 'failed state' status and warring tribal and religious factions, yet in this history of power struggles between men, one thing has remained consistent; and that is the unbending endurance of Somali women. And for me, that is what makes this novel so vital. As many future (and current) generations of Somalians from across the diaspora grow up away from their homeland, stories like Mohamed's play an important role in forging a connection and awareness of the often overlooked lives of women such as these. Whilst the symmetry of Mohamed's tale is perhaps a little too tidy trope of fiction writing, it is the strength, dignity and resilience of her characters that will make you crumble in what is a crucial and insightful book.

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### **Kkraemer says**

Anyone who argues that government should be abolished should read this book. It chronicles the descent of Somalia when a working government disappeared, a chaotic hell of competition for power, inhuman brutality, and despair.

Three women endure this period: one, a woman of means and education, is an elder whose friends and neighbors disappear throughout the book. The second is a younger woman of means and education who has joined the Army to ensure that what the Somali people needed -- liberation from the British colonialists -- continues to grow and thrive. The third is a child who was born in a refugee camp, an orphan who knows neither parent. Through their eyes and minds, you see a world without government, a sort of Lord of the Flies world where competing interests and fears translate into death, destruction, starvation, and a terror not imaginable for those of us whose concerns include what to eat and what not to eat each day.

Mohamed's prose is lyrical, perhaps too lyrical, in that it draws the pictures of these women's lives and thinking so clearly that, at the end of the novel, they will live inside the reader for a very long time. There are quite a few Somalis here in the U.S. (Mohamed is one of them), and I will never look at them again without thinking that, perhaps, they have endured unspeakable horror...and that I should do everything in my power to make our interaction as positive and helpful as I can.

This is a powerful book, a beautiful book. I finished it yesterday, and today, I'm wondering how these three women are doing...

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### **Emma Deplores Goodreads Censorship says**

This book has a fascinating setting: Somalia in the 1980s. The country had a nominally Communist military dictatorship, under attack by rebel forces, and with civilians caught in the middle; this was before Somalia descended into the chaos of today, but we see those later troubles foreshadowed by the events of this book.

The Orchard of Lost Souls follows three main characters: Deqo, an orphan girl raised in a refugee camp, now living on the streets of Hargeisa; Kawsar, a traditional widow, bedridden and grieving for her daughter; and Filsan, a soldier struggling to distinguish herself. The pace is quick and their stories interesting: it isn't a light read, but it is a fast one. There is a good sense of place, and you'll learn some things about Somalia without feeling that you're being taught a history lesson.

Unfortunately, the protagonists themselves are generic and lacking in complexity, defined almost entirely by their circumstances. Deqo is a standard child character, and when she steps out of that mold, it tends to be unconvincing; for instance, when entering an abandoned, luxurious home for the first time, this 9-year-old's first act is to.... wash the dishes? Kawsar is passive, speaking up only at the worst possible moments. Filsan was the character who initially interested me most, as a woman in the military of a traditional patriarchal society, but we don't see much more of her situation than her annoyance at guys checking her out. And Filsan herself turns out to be a typical insecure and emotional female protagonist, and a bad soldier; her inevitable realizations about the regime are rushed and muddled by an awkward romantic subplot.

For me, then, this book proved mediocre, though it kept my attention while reading; the atrocities the characters witness (particularly one scene in a hospital near the end) are far more memorable than the characters themselves. Fans of popular fiction will likely find much here to appreciate, however. If you like this, you will probably also enjoy Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, and vice versa.

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### **David says**

A haunting, beautiful, and (ultimately) uplifting story of love, betrayal, and hope, as seen in the lives of three women during the civil war that tore Somalia apart during the late 1980s.

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### **Heather says**

This is a wonderful book that tells the story of three women during the Somalian Civil War. Strongly recommend.

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### **Karen Ashmore says**

My friend Anisa is originally from Somalia so I have wanted to learn more about its history and the civil

war. I learned about it through the eyes of three women. Stories of loss and bloodshed are hard but widened my perspective. Nadifa Mohamed is a talented writer.

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### **Theresa Leone Davidson says**

"The tanks, the planes, helicopters, armoured vehicles and cannons have been put to bed and the few songbirds that haven't fled begin to trill, calling out disoriented, despondent songs to one another for comfort. They will have to be the poets recording what happened here, indignation puffing their chests and opening their throats wide, the sorrowful notes catching in the trees and falling, if life returns, like dust over heads that would rather forget." This passage is indicative of how the book is written, beautifully and powerfully. Another: "Both she and Guryo Samo have reached the end of their time; the soldiers will return the street to the desert, unplug the stars, shoot the dogs, and extinguish the sun in a well." Wow. Mohamed is such a gifted writer, and as this is the first I have read of hers, I look forward to reading more. *The Orchard of Lost Souls* is the story of three women, Kawsar, an older widow, Filsan, a thirty year old who is a soldier in the Somali army, and Deqo, a child who is an orphan, who has only recently fled from the refugee camp in which she lives. The story is set in northwest Somalia, in the town of Hargeisa, as the country slides towards civil war in the late 1980s. The characters drive the story: Kawsar, who was brutally beaten in jail and can no longer walk, Deqo, who must survive in any way she can because she is completely alone, and horrible Filsan, who has neither compassion nor empathy for anyone with whom she comes into contact. I loved the story, even the almost impossible-to-read passages about the horrors of war, and the weirdly hopeful ending only made the story that much better. **HIGHLY, HIGHLY** recommend!

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### **Jayne Bauling says**

Somalia 1988, a country torn apart, and three women, already burdened by the tragedies, questions and pressures of their past lives, must now respond to life- and sanity-threatening new circumstances. There are some shocking scenes, as when one women savagely beats another, but it is also a moving book. Deqo is the youngest of the three, only nine years old, an orphan from a huge refugee camp. A pragmatist and a survivor, she is as special a character as Jama in the author's wonderful debut *Black Mamba Boy*, so much so that you wish the whole book was devoted to her story, but she shares it with fifty-something Kawsar and with Filsan, a soldier from Mogadishu, posted north.

This is not always easy to read, but definitely worthwhile

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### **Alison says**

Just phenomenal. Beautifully written story about three Somalian women whose lives intersect in the days before the 1987 revolution.

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### **Alessandra says**

O pomar das Almas Perdidas conta a história de três mulheres - uma órfã refugiada de dez anos, Deqo; uma

jovem soldado do regime de Oodwenye (nome fictício que a autora usa para Siad Barre, ditador somali), Filsan; e uma mulher de meia-idade, Kawsar - às vésperas da eclosão da guerra civil entre Oodwenye e a FLN (nome fictício usado para descrever o Movimento Nacional Somali) em 1987/1988. Com uma prosa sensível, mostra a dificuldade de ser mulher em tempos de guerra sem, ao mesmo tempo, tratá-las com condescendência. Deqo é astuta como as crianças que nunca puderam ter infância; Kawsar, uma matriarca com a vida marcada por perdas; Filsan, uma jovem soldado inteligente que acredita na causa ao mesmo tempo que luta para fazer ser reconhecido seu valor em um mundo machista, no qual a sombra do pai a persegue.

A estrutura do livro é construída de forma interessante, em três partes: o prólogo, em que elas se encontram pela primeira vez, os três longos capítulos dedicados a história de cada uma dessas mulheres após esse encontro e, por fim, o epílogo. A história se passa em Hargeisa, à época a segunda maior cidade da Somália e hoje a capital da Somalilândia. Nadifa Mohamed tem a capacidade de humanizar personagens que à primeira vista parecem odiosas, como Filsan, e fazer-nos sentir toda a dor sentida por Kawsar. Faz pensar em quantas Deqos não existem ao redor do mundo, garotas incríveis que nunca puderam ter oportunidades.

Indiretamente, traz uma reflexão acerca do colonialismo europeu e a destruição de culturas milenares em nome de um suposto progresso e da adesão ao "mundo civilizado" (europeu), além do jogo político estratégico do qual o continente africano foi vítima durante a Guerra Fria, que acabou por esgarçar o tecido social da Somália. Ao dar voz às mulheres, Nadifa Mohamed consegue humanizar essas histórias ao leitor, nos fazendo sentir na pele a dor da imposição colonial e seus efeitos nefastos - algo muito explorado também por Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (a construção narrativa lembra, por vezes, Americanah e Hibisco Roxo). Uma escritora para se acompanhar, uma mulher para ser lida.

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### Tasmin says

Bildgewaltig, brutal und trotzdem voller Hoffnung. Das Buch zieht einen mitten hinein in eine unbegreifliche Realität, die jeder anders erlebt und doch alle verändert.  
Stellenweise hatte es seine Längen, aber ansonsten eine Empfehlung.

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### Caroline Gurgel says

Além do fato de ser um dos países mais pobres e mais corruptos do mundo, não sabia muito sobre a **Somália**, e tampouco me recordo de ter lido algum outro livro ambientado na África. Foi justamente a vontade de sair do lugar-comum que me fez querer ler **O Pomar das Almas Perdidas**. Que leitura incrível!

O livro se passa no fim dos anos 80, em **Hargeisa**, na Somália, quando o país, que vive sob uma ditadura militar, está prestes a mergulhar em uma guerra civil. Longe de pretender ser uma ficção histórica, **O Pomar das Almas Perdidas** tem seu foco na vida de três mulheres bem diferentes e de distintas gerações: **Deqo**, uma órfã de 9 anos oriunda dos campos de refugiados; **Kawsar**, uma viúva que ainda chora a morte da filha; e **Filsan**, uma jovem soldado que se esforça para ser alguém em um meio extremamente machista.

Essa leitura é como um soco no estômago. A cada parágrafo o coração acelera e a apreensão aumenta com o medo do que vai e do que pode acontecer. A aflição é ainda maior, a dor ainda mais profunda, quando nos damos conta de que isso é e foi a realidade de muitas mulheres. São histórias que doem na alma e faz a gente manter os pés bem firmes e fundos ao chão.

**Nadifa Mohamed**, que nasceu na Somália, mas foi educada e vive na Inglaterra, tem uma escrita apaixonante, um pouco lírica, em uma narrativa muito bem estruturada, indo do presente às memórias das personagens com destreza. É bem estranho dizer que foi uma leitura gostosa, já que seu texto nos mostra o quanto cruel o mundo pode ser, mas foi essa sensação que tive, apesar de tudo.

O Pomar das Almas Perdidas me trouxe de volta muitas reflexões, como o porquê de uns nascerem na Somália, sem grandes expectativas de vida, e outros na Suécia, com inúmeras e boas oportunidades. Mistérios da vida, eu sei, mas...

O livro é sensível, delicado, nos comove através da inocência de uma criança, da dor de uma mãe, do sofrimento uma senhora amargurada que não quer atrapalhar, da solidão de uma mulher que tentou, sem sucesso, ser o que os outros esperavam que ela fosse. Que mundo selvagem!

Leitura maravilhosa, enriquecedora e, apesar de triste, singela, com uma bonita mensagem de esperança. Entrou para minha lista de favoritos e recomendo de todo coração.



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### **kelly says**

Man, this woman can write. I had never heard of Nadifa Mohamed until I wandered into the library one afternoon and casually picked up this book.

The setting of this book is one that I have to admit that I knew very little about, Somalia in the late 1980s. The country was pretty much under a Communist dictatorship until they were attacked by rebel forces with innocent civilians caught in the middle. All of these events foreshadow the widespread famine and the "Black Hawk Down" disaster that most Americans are familiar with, and I enjoyed the fact that even though the book was fiction, it was somewhat of a history lesson as well without being boring or coming off too preachy.

The book is told through Deqo, a young orphan, Kawsar, a well off woman who is treated brutally by the police, and Filsan, a female officer within the ranks of the Somalian armed forces. The book started off a bit slow and difficult to follow at first, but once the voices of three main characters became more distinct I could not put this book down. This book has a quick pace and the stories are fascinating, and Mohamed does an excellent job with making you actually feel like you're right there in the middle of the village of Hargeisa with her. Of course I don't want to give the book away, but it was certainly a worthy read for me.

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### **Sally says**

"Religion, tradition, civilization has been swept away", 5 August 2016

This review is from: The Orchard of Lost Souls (Kindle Edition)

Set in war-torn Somalia, in 1988, this novel follows the lives of three very different women, as the revolution escalates about them in Hargeisa. I knew nothing about the politics of this country, but the situation is brought vividly to life: a totally corrupt president. As a staged festival takes place:

"The Guddi (Neighbourhood Watch) come last, waving branches and carrying images of Lenin, Kim Il-Sung and Mao, the communists who once provided inspiration to the dictatorship but whose pictures have faded, carted out just once a year like church relics. The regime now seeks out friends of any description, be they Arab, American or Albanian." But as the opposing NFM tries to take on the dictatorship, the brutality escalates...

We follow middle-class widow Kawsar, grieving for her only daughter. When she sees a child being attacked, she wades in to save her, and finds herself in jail and beaten to the extent she can no longer walk... The child in question, orphan Dequo, is on her own in a hostile and dangerous world...

The most interesting and well-written of the three, if certainly the least sympathetic is Filsan, a female soldier striving to make it in a man's world. As the novel progresses we learn of her tough background and something of why she has become the person she has...

It all ties up neatly and my first thought was to doubt that such a conclusion could be possible - wouldn't hatred and anger for the past preclude it? And yet, I am thinking this in a neat, well-ordered world - in the middle of war and all the attendant horrors, things are doubtless very different.

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### **Mel says**

The Orchard of Lost Souls starts with the 18th anniversary that brought the current military dictator in Somalia to power. We are introduced to Kawsar, a widow in her 50's. She seems well off. Deqo, a young orphan who was abandoned at a refugee camp. And, Filsan. Filsan is a young female soldier whose father was also in the military. But now, disgraced. She is very dedicated. But her gender, and fathers shame keeps her from attaining any sort of higher position in her career. The three parts of the book are told from each characters point of view. The characters interconnect. I liked Deqo's character the most. I kept hoping nothing would happen to her. Kawsar is scarred by her daughters death. This was after multiple still births. Her husband (who was chief of police. But refused to be corrupted) also died. Leaving her alone. She was hardened, but still soft when needed. Filsan was a character that was unlikeable. But, kind of redeemed herself at the end. Kawsar tells most of her story from her bed. After Filsan fractures her hip. She beat her for trying to save Deqo from a beating. We are told their stories in the present and in flashback as war looms near. Very engrossing.

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### **Beverly says**

This was a 3.5 book for me.

My thoughts:

- Overall I thought that this was a brutally honest and intimate story where the elegance of the writing provides the necessary dignity to characters where survival is measured in daily terms. Nine year old Deqo joins a dance group on the promise of a pair of cheap sandals but after missing some steps at a national celebration she finds out violence, kindness, and greed may often look the same. Kawsar, a solitary widow

has lost all that is important to her yet she finds the thread of hope when all she wants is the end. Filsan is an ambitious soldier who only wants the praise from her disgraced father and comes to terms what the price of getting noticed by her male superiors. Good character development and being vested had me turning the pages despite the events that brings them together at the end feels a little forced.

- Enjoyed how the author evoked the landscape and intertwined the history of Hargesisa into the storyline. It provides an understanding of the area beyond the newspaper accounts.
- After finishing this book – and reading the ruthless regard the “government” had for its people and thinking that more oppressive would lead to more control and power gives a better understanding how Somalia is what it is today.
- While these stories need to be told – the unfortunate part is that these stories are being too common and if you change the names and places – this story could have been about many other places.
- A couple of poignant scenes for me:
  - o How the whole town had to “dress up”, and stand in the stadium for hours under the blazing sun so that visiting dignities and journalist can see how well the regime is liked.
  - o The stifling obedience required by the oppressive regime being more important than getting water and food to the people.
- A couple of quotes I liked:
  - o “It is the kind of place where human skeletons might sink into the soil undisturbed and unmourned.”
  - o “Everyone is angry – even the sky is grey and motionless; there doesn’t seem to be space for anything but silence and obedience.”
  - o “In her orchard the trees had been born from deaths; they marked and grew from the remains of the children that passed through her. She never picked the fruit that fell from them, believing it a kind of cannibalism, but out of those soft, unshaped figures had grown tall, strong, tough-barked trees that blossomed and called birds to their branches and clambered out over the orchard walls to the world beyond.”

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### **Diane Brown says**

A book by Somalian author Nadifa Mohamed set in Somalia in the 1980s. The lives of three generations of women from different social standings are interwoven and relate the events of this period of civil war - An orphan girl who escapes from a refugee camp, a soldier trying to find her space/voice in a new regime and an older woman who reflects back on her life and ponders the cost of civil war.

Whilst there is much devastation and death on the streets, these three women hold on to hope which inevitably leads them to each other

Enjoyable reading

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### **Erica says**

Oh yay! I just got the email telling me I won this in the First Reads giveaway! I was beginning to think they didn't love me anymore but I was wrong. Now I am excited!

3-12: Yay, it's here! It's here! Actually, it got here last week but I wasn't home. I am home now and it is here so I am reading! Hooray!

Review:

I was completely surprised by this book; I didn't expect to enjoy it quite this much. I expected it to be depressing and maybe even a little preachy. While it is definitely burdensome for the emotions, I was never actually down-and-out sad while reading it. Actually, the opposite often happened. Also, I never felt lectured in any way so I was both pleased with and entertained by this tale.

First, I liked the structure of this story; I liked it quite well. It took the shape I was so hoping for - the shape of a wrapped candy. Three separate lives come together for an instant (where the cellophane on the candy wrapper is twisted) then all spring away from each other and go their own ways in the same small area full of civil unrest leading into war (like where the cellophane is wrapped around the candy, a particularly yucky candy in this case) and then they all come together again. Just that shape made me ridiculously happy and I don't even know why. I guess because it was satisfying to see how their first interaction shaped their second interaction. Also, I'm so used to the funnel story where everyone is separate, then thrown together, then they are all in line for the rest of the story that this was a pleasant and refreshing tale-weaving.

Anyhow. I also enjoyed the language and style used in this book. It's not so foreign that it becomes incomprehensible to anyone who hasn't traveled to the Republic of Somaliland but there's enough not-America going on that you know you're not in America. Right, that sounds completely stupid; were I better at words, that would have sounded awesome. Just...you know this story takes place in Somalia.

Granted, my knowledge of Somalia is horribly limited. I read *Desert Flower: The Extraordinary Journey of a Desert Nomad* and I saw internet headlines about pirates and I know there's a Tom Hanks movie about said pirates that's being used as a commercial for some app or another. And that's it. That is my entire bucket of knowledge about Somalia which is pretty sad. I am woefully undereducated when it comes to anything to do with Africa.

So books like this help!

Ok, I'm really no more knowledgeable about Somalia now, though it was interesting to read about the civil unrest of the 80's now that I'm an adult. This all happened when I was a kid and Somalia was a scary place like Russia but for different reasons. Now I know why it was so terrible, whereas I didn't when it was all actually happening.

I learned the why through the eyes of Deqo, Kawsar, and Filsan.

I loved these characters. I loved Deqo for the same reason I love Scout (*To Kill a Mockingbird*) and Byrd (*The Witch of Belladonna Bay*) - these are kids I would want, girls who have moxy, children who see the world the way they see it, not as adults tell them to see it. Deqo is free-spirited but kind, gentle but savvy. She's a fighter but only when necessary and she still sees wonder in the world even though the world is a terrifying place that is falling down around her.

I hated Filsan but I understood why she was such a little monster. It made her ending all the more satisfying. The path to get there was also the most horrific because she had so much to figure out and needed a lot of kicks to her teeth.

And Kawsar. I liked her and rolled my eyes at her. Privileged but not a bad person, mostly haunted by memories. She'd given up but somehow continued on. I respected her toughness.

It's a sad story yet it's also uplifting. There are tons of beautiful moments, sentences that ooze description and

depiction. Here's the first one I marked (and my ARC, here, is all marked up):

*The myriad buildings that Deqo is slowly learning the names and purposes of appear in the edges of her vision as she steps into the pitted road. The library for keeping books to learn from, the museum for interesting objects from the past, the schools in which children are corralled and tamed, the hotel for wayfarers with money in their pockets - the existence of all these places brings pleasure, despite her belief that as a refugee she is not welcome inside.*

See? The writing is not difficult to understand but that passage made me *feel* this young orphan's longing to belong while also explaining everyday things from the perspective of an outsider.

This review is so incoherent but I can't sit on it anymore; I need to have something up here because I said I would. This is the muddled result.

Abridged version: I liked this book a lot. It has strong, interesting characters, it describes a time I remember but know little about, it's a good story, and I am glad I got to read it.

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### **JudithAnn says**

The writing is very, very good. No wonder this author is one of Granta's "Best Young Novelist 2013". The book is written in the present tense, which makes the story very direct and the war situations very acute. There isn't a lot of actual fighting in the book. Most of the book is about three very different women's experiences during this difficult time.

The book begins very strong, and drew me in straight away, with the three women briefly meeting in a stadium where there is a national celebration. Nawsar, a woman of 50+ years old, an old woman in Somalia, goes there against her will, and helps Deqo, a little girl, when she is arrested by Filsan and her team. Thereafter, the three women go their own way, but do meet again later in the book.

The story is not a nice one. Bad things happen to the people of the small town where the three women live. But the way family, neighbours and strangers look out for each other is heart warming, and at the same time realistic. However much they like to help each other, in the end, they do anything to save their own skin, even if it's to the detriment of another person. But can you blame them?

Through the lives of three women, I learned about the war in Somalia (in the 1980s) and more general, about women in a country at war. I had no interest in the topic beforehand, but I read a most beautifully written book.

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### **Muna says**

I enjoyed this book more than "Black Mamba boy". I found it difficult to catch up with the many characters introduced in the opening chapter but once I got into the first character's story everything flowed together nicely. Its 1988 in Hargeisa, on the surface we have a Somalia in which tribal strife has been replaced with Somali's treating each other as "comrades", a sense of unity under the father of Somalia who has taken power under what was a military coup. This book manages to peel back the layers on this false utopia to show what happens as Somalia deteriorates in the aftermath of the losses experienced in the Ogaden war. It further demonstrates what lengths a dictator is willing to go to in order to hold on to his power and how ordinary

humans can be transformed in times of chaos. During the day there are songs praising the country and its leader but at night the curfews get earlier and earlier, elders are beaten, students are dragged in the streets, innocent people are jailed, a girl sets herself on fire. This book follows the lives of an orphaned refugee girl, a young women in the Somali National Army and a woman who has lost both her husband and child as their country slowly spirals out of control.

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