

Dictionary of **African Biography**

EMMANUEL K. AKYEAMPONG
and HENRY LOUIS GATES, JR.

Editors in Chief

VOLUME 6 : TERTU—ZWANG

PLACES OF BIRTH OR MAJOR INVOLVEMENT

PERIODS OF ACTIVITY

OCCUPATIONS AND REALMS OF RENOWN

CURRENT HEADS OF STATE OF AFRICAN NATIONS

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SABELO J. NDLOVU-GATSHENI

Toffa (c. 1830–1908), monarch of the city of Porto Novo in present-day southeastern Benin, was born sometime around 1830. He ascended to the throne in 1874. His small kingdom of Hogbonu faced threats from other Yoruba-speaking states further to the north and east, as well as the powerful kingdom of Dahomey to the west. Toffa was forced to turn to Dahomey for protection against his Yoruba rivals, even though France had briefly established a protectorate over the city from 1863 to 1868. He later regretted the treaty with Dahomey, and tried to convince the French to establish their control over his city again in 1883. Much to the chagrin of the rulers of Dahomey, the French government agreed. With German explorer Gustav Nachtigal's treaty with king Mlapa III of Lomé in 1882 making inroads not far from Porto Novo, French officials were anxious to recapture their foothold on the Beninese coast.

Toffa proved to be an unusually enterprising ruler. His selective appropriations of European technology and culture remind one of better-known rulers who sought to use European influences to strengthen their authority, such as Moshoeshe of Lesotho or Menilek II of Ethiopia. Toffa constructed a palace along European lines, encouraged his subjects to attend Western schools, and even rode in a carriage worthy of a European monarch on formal occasions. He created a new neighborhood, Gbekon, which was home to his summer palace. His kingdom issued its own coinage. Toffa also recruited Afro-Brazilian families to move to his kingdom so that they could set up businesses and educate other members of the Porto Novo community. Toffa also called for religious tolerance among Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, and *vodun* believers. Many members of the small Muslim community actually had Portuguese names, a testimony to the cross-pollination of ideas in the city. A former Catholic church was transformed into a mosque by Brazilians of African descent who had resettled in Porto Novo. Toffa created the Order of the Black Star, a special award developed along the lines of the French Legion of

Honor. Many of his advisers shared this cosmopolitan attitude. Alamavo Hazoumé, one of his chief advisers, even led an official mission on behalf of Toffa to Paris in 1895.

Toffa's alliance with France emboldened him in his negotiations with Dahomey. When Behanzin succeeded the aged Glele as king of Dahomey in 1889, Toffa sent the new ruler insulting messages. This ploy appears to have been designed to goad Dahomey to attack, thus prompting French intervention. Behanzin accused the French of supplying arms to Toffa, and had French trading houses plundered as a result. Toffa had backed Behanzin's rival to the throne prior to 1889. Eventually, the French launched a war in 1892 against Dahomey. Toffa provided the invading army with porters and logistical support. In return, the French government granted Toffa significant autonomy. At Toffa's death in 1908, his son Adjijiki took power after a long funeral ceremony, even though Hogbonu kings came from several alternating families prior to French interference. Toffa's palace later became a museum after Benin became independent in 1960, and was designated a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) heritage site by the early twenty-first century.

[See also Behanzin, Aouagbe; Glele; Menilek II; Mlapa III; and Moshoeshe I.]

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JEREMY RICH

Togane, Mohamud Siad (1947–), iconoclastic and controversial Somali free-verse poet and peace activist, was born in the Somali capital of Mogadishu on 1 July 1947. An alternate form of his name is Maxmuud Siyaad Togane. As a young boy, he first learned to memorize the Qur'an and was then sent to Mennonite schools, first at Mahaddei and then in Jowhar (1959–1969). He attended Hartnell Junior College in Salinas, California, and then obtained a BA degree in English literature from Eastern Mennonite College (now Eastern Mennonite University). After his return to Somalia, he taught at Lafole College of Education (1970–1973). However, in 1973, like many other Somali intellectuals, he went into exile and left the military regime

of Mohamed Siyad Barre behind. He settled in Canada, which gave him citizenship, and where he earned an MA in creative writing at Concordia University in Montreal (1979–1982).

Togane taught and guest-lectured at many North American universities and colleges, including Rutgers University and Eastern Mennonite University in the US, and Concordia, McGill, and York Universities, as well as the University of Toronto, in Canada. As a peace activist, Togane cofounded Montreal Somali House, to assist Somali refugees and immigrants, and the Somali Peace Coalition, called Ergo. He participated in a number of Somali peace and reconciliation and educational development initiatives, including a mission to Mogadishu in 1991–1992 to appeal for peace to two major Somali political leaders and warlords: Mohamed Farah Aidid and Ali Mahdi.

In 1986, Togane published his first book of poems, *The Bottle and the Bushman: Poems of the Prodigal Son*, a heartrending, sarcastic critique (and self-critique) of the three ambiguous gifts North American “civilization” had bestowed on him: Christianity, racism, and alcohol. Thus, his “Drunken Sisyphus” staggers from bar to bar “murdering cowardly ambition and nagging memory” (p. 10), while he laments in another poem that “God is stone/ an obsession I am trying to dissolve in drink” (p. 11). In his “Letter to Harlem,” Togane cautions his African American brothers not to let the white man deceive them into under- or overestimating Africans like him: “But I don’t believe him. I believe you superior/ you stronger/ you have to be/ to live with him/ to survive him & his lies” (p. 36).

This early collection already shows glimpses of what would become a major theme of Togane’s later poetry: his acerbic commentary on Somali social and political realities. Thus “Zara” is an outspoken and passionate denunciation of the female genital cutting customarily inflicted on Somali girls, while other poems are reflections, humorous and scathing at the same time, on the humiliations of life under a dictator.

Togane has also published in a range of newspapers, journals, and prestigious anthologies such as *Bridges: Literature across Cultures* (1994), in which his work was featured next to that of James Joyce, Anton Chekhov, Maya Angelou, and Bharati Mukherjee. In 2003, his poetry graced the city buses of Montreal, where he now lives, as part of the Poetry in Motion program.

However, among Somalis and those interested in Somalia, he is best known for the more than one

hundred free-verse poems that can be accessed on his Web site (www.togane.org), as well as on other Somali Web sites. Here Togane publishes his brilliant, caustic, controversial, wickedly funny, and associative free-verse commentaries upon those problematic aspects of Somali politics and mindsets that are at the core of the Somali civil war. Whatever cultural prejudices and deep-rooted, pseudohistorical hate-narratives Somali individuals and groups have developed about each other, Togane brings them out of the closet and holds up a mirror that reflects Somalis’ ugly clan-thinking.

Part of the shock value of Togane’s poetry is that he articulates widely held thoughts that are unspeakable in shared Somali public space, and does not refrain from vulgar language to drive his critique home. At the same time, his free association verse is also intensely intertextual and thus—in its references to world literature, religion, philosophy, and popular culture—also highly intellectual (even, sometimes, footnoted). An example is “Afwayne’s Swan Song” of 26 February 2006—Afwayne or “Big Mouth” being Barre’s nickname—in which Togane analyzes the dictator’s legacy while citing Sartre, Dante, and Rudyard Kipling, and making comparative reference to Hitler, Mussolini, and Papa Doc:

Right now
The politics we Somalis practice
Hither in the Diaspora
&
Thither back in what was once our homeland
Are
The politics of Afwaynisssimo
Without Afwayne
Which is what the French call
Le politics de pire
The worst sort of politics
The politics of
“The lesser breed without the law”
The politics of
Kaffirs
Who are
“Half devil
Half child”

Togane’s critics would insist that he himself does not always stay above the warring parties and hate speech he sets out to expose and that he sometimes, at least discursively, joins the fray. Others find that this aspect makes Togane’s poetry even more compelling and truthful, as he refuses to pretend that he has remained untouched and unsullied by the ways

that clan-based group thinking and civil war violence have mutually constituted each other.

The range of Togane's critique extends to many other forms of hate and bigotry, including the mutual prejudices held by Muslims and Christians. Togane's intellectual range, truth telling, and linguistic dexterity have made him one of the best-known and most skillful Somali-born poets.

[See also Aidid, Mohammed Farah; Angelou, Maya; and Siyad Barre, Mohamed.]

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LIDWIEN KAPTEIJNS

Toko, Simão Gonçalves (1918-1984), Angolan religious leader, was born on 24 February 1918 in the Sadi-Kiloango, *sanzala* of Ntaia, Maquela do Zombo (Uíge). His parents, Ndombele Luvumbu Ditopo (or Toko) and Ndundu Nsimba Toko, were village farmers of Bakongo ethnicity. He was called Mayamona, meaning "he who has seen" in Kikongo, and later baptized with the given name of Simão Gonçalves Toko. At the age of eight, Toko joined the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) mission of Kibokolo. A gifted student, he was sent in 1933 to the Liceu Salvador Correia secondary school in Luanda.

In 1936, he returned to Uíge to work as a teacher in the Kibokolo and Bembe missions. But after a misunderstanding with the Kibokolo BMS leaders regarding his pay as teacher, he decided to leave and go to Leopoldville (present-day Kinshasa, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo). Over the next few years, he combined his duties with the Baptist church with his own work among Angolan Bakongo expatriates in Leopoldville (known as *Zombos*), organizing a mutual aid society (Nkutu a Nsimbani) and creating a choir, the Coro de Kibokolo.

On 6 June 1946, Toko was invited, along with two other "native Christians" (Reverend Gaspar de Almeida and Jessé Chiúla Chipenda), to join the International Protestant Missionary Conference, which took place in Leopoldville. There, he publicly requested that the Holy Ghost come down upon Africa and save the continent from darkness. This

seemed to have led Toko to initiate a religious movement outside the BMS missions, teaching the Bible to his countrymen in Kikongo and organizing prayer meetings and choir sessions.

On 25 July 1949, Toko and his followers organized a nightly prayer session in the rue de Mayenge, in the *Quartier Indigène* of Leopoldville. In the session, Toko and his followers suddenly felt a wind, and some of the singers began to shake and speak strange languages. This experience ultimately led Toko to officially separate from the BMS in 10 September 1949. That same month, he married Rosa Maria Toko, with whom he would spend the rest of his life and have two children, Ilda Rosa and Esperança Joana.

After the July event, Belgian authorities arrested Toko and hundreds of his followers. Delivered to the Portuguese authorities, to be known later as the Polícia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado (PIDE; International and State Defense Police), in the frontier outpost of Nóqui, they were divided into several groups and sent to *colonatos* (labor camps) throughout the territory. Toko himself was sent to *colonatos* in Bembe (Vale do Loge), Caconda, Jau, Cassinga, and finally the southern outpost of Ponta Albina, in Porto Alexandre, bordering the Namib desert, where he was put to work as an assistant lighthouse-keeper. This strategy, according to the PIDE archives, was intended to control and dismantle the movement. Nevertheless, the Tokoists started proselytizing in and around the camps, and as a result the movement transformed from a Bakongo ethnic movement to a multiethnic, Angola-wide movement, moving away from the original ideological and geographical proximity to other Bakongo prophet-based movements such as Kimbanguism or Mpadism.

When the first military campaigns for Angolan independence started in 1961, Toko was therefore far away from the conflicts that took place in the regions bordering the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Portuguese authorities decided to bring Toko to northern Angola in order to try to convince the locals that had fled to the frontier with RD Congo to return home. This task proved somewhat unsuccessful, and the PIDE decided to remove him again from the country and send him to the Azores islands in 1963. During this exile, Toko exchanged thousands of letters with his followers.

The participation of Toko and his followers in the independence war was, to some extent, ambiguous, and the object of much discussion and multiple interpretations. On the one hand, as an active