

PEN South Africa newsletter / Issue 19 2016

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Issue 19  
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Dear Friends

We write to you as our university campuses burn. There are running battles between students demanding a free, decolonialised education on the one hand and private campus security and riot cops on the other. Teaching and learning have been suspended at many universities and have been, to all intents and purposes, menaced with total closure. This academic year will be lost to the students at these institutions and the prospects for the many thousands of hopeful school pupils preparing for their matriculation exams are dire, to say the least.

The implications for South Africa as a country are awful too. Our universities are vital to the cultural, creative and economic life of our country. Viscerally, they affect society directly, in health services, engineering and civics, just to name a few. The demand for a free education is a complex one that demands tectonic shifts in the imagining of South Africa. The **demands are varied and shifting** which makes it difficult for beleaguered university managers to negotiate. Academic and former Wits lecturer Khaya Sithole spoke to *The Daily Vox* about what **is happening with the student movement at Wits right now**.

These incendiary protests are evidence that the neo-liberal project of the last twenty

years has failed. The protests on campus are the most visible and vocal of protests about service delivery that have been flaring up for years now. Although the universities have borne the brunt of the fury and destruction, the responsibility for this crisis and its solution lies with the state, with the African National Congress as the ruling party and with the Minister for Higher Education, Blade Nzimande and with President Jacob Zuma. Both these men have failed in their responsibility to address the crisis in education or to hear the protests by angry citizens who have not benefited from the last two decades. South Africa and its citizens are paying a heavy price – and currently it looks as if it might be a price that bankrupts us morally, creatively and economically.

PEN South Africa called before for a de-escalation of hostilities and negotiations after the burning of the library at the UKZN. We call again for all parties to step back from the brink, which has been so eloquently discussed by Sisonke Msimang in her piece "**Shutdown - On the Death of Compromise in South Africa**", to effectively declare a ceasefire and to undertake the long and complex discussions about changing the foundation of higher education. Compromise will be needed on the part of everyone but there are ways other than this dangerous and highly masculinised standoff that threatens all of us. We also have to discourage the posturing of demagogues and failed attention-seekers, who thrive under the glare of publicity. This is a call to all writers, to all our members to contribute to this conversation, to hold the discursive space open and to be part of the urgent re-imagining of both the present and the future. The destruction of institutions like Wits and UCT will serve no one. Institutions are fragile entities and it would be a disaster to negotiate for free education only to find that no education is possible because the universities – which are the sum of the people in them, not the bricks and mortar – no longer exist.

**Margie Orford**  
**President, PEN South Africa**

**Mandla Langa**  
**Executive Vice-President, PEN South Africa**

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PEN South Africa hosted a dialogue in Johannesburg on media and the representation of the Fallist movement. As an organisation advocating for Freedom of Expression, we set the stage for a frank and considered conversation on a pertinent subject. The free expression of views and opinions in a safe space reflected what South Africans are thinking and feeling at this critical time. A video of the event will be available soon, with more dialogues to follow as we continue to provide a platform for the open exchange of ideas and knowledge.

**Oratile Mashazi**

**Advocacy and Projects Manager, PEN SA**

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## **Margie Orford Reports on the 82nd International PEN Congress**

The International PEN Congress took place in late September. It was hosted by Galician PEN in the beautiful old city of Ourense in northern Spain. It was a pleasure to attend the first Congress chaired by Jennifer Clement, PEN International's first woman president. Gender equity was at the top of the agenda and there were some sobering presentations about the state of women and free expression in Honduras, in Syria, amongst Kurdish speaking communities in Iraq and Turkey. Much attention was of course focused on Turkey and the horrendous repression and silencing of writers and journalists. It was depressing to note the global turn towards repression of free speech. The rise of far right in Europe and in the United States has had a chilling effect...[read more](#)

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### **Open Book 2016: Poetry and Press Freedom**

The PEN South Africa Young Writers to Watch event was held at the 2016 Open Book Festival. It was the culmination of the PEN SA Student Writing Prize and featured Koleka Putuma and Puleng Lange-Stewart, who came first and third respectively. They were joined by one of the judges, writer and publisher Nick Mulgrew, and by writer Karina Szczurek, who chaired the event. [Read about the event and watch a video of the performances and discussion.](#)

This year's Open Book was a jam-packed five day festival with talks on decolonisation and press freedom standing out as particular highlights...[read more](#)



### **"We Beg Your Pardon South Africa" by Mandla Langa**

PEN SA Executive Vice-President Mandla Langa shared his poem "We Beg Your Pardon South Africa" on Twitter yesterday, writing that "Nostalgic souls have asked me to post one of my earliest poems which they feel has resonance with aspects of our slide into madness". He has kindly allowed us to share the poem on our website...[read more](#)

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### **CALLS FOR SUBMISSIONS**

2017 Writer/Storyteller-in-Residence at University of Manitoba...[read more](#)

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## UPCOMING EVENTS

Take a look at the book events and launches coming up this month...[read more](#)

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## NEW MEMBERS' TITLES



Recent titles from PEN SA members include [Who Killed Piet Barol?](#) by Richard Mason, [Pushing Boulders](#) by Athol Williams and [Agents of the State](#) by Mike Nicol...[read more](#)

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Granta Magazine is currently accepting poetry submissions...[read more](#)

2016 Minara Aziz Hassim Literary Awards...[read more](#)

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## CONGRATULATIONS!

Athol Williams has won the Sol Plaatje EU Poetry Award and Anthology for the second year in a row...[read more](#)

Zapiro has been awarded the Swedish 2016 EWK-Prize...[read more](#)

PEN SA members Athol Williams, Arja Salafranca, Leon de Kock and Karin Schimke, as well as PEN Afrikaans Manager Danie Marais and PEN SA Student Writing Prize judge Panashe Chigumadzi, have been shortlisted for the 2016 South African Literary Awards...[read more](#)

Abigail George's poem 'When light poured into me at the swimming pool' has been shortlisted for the Ink Sweat & Tears 'Pick of the Month' for September 2016...[read more](#)

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**HAPPY BIRTHDAY!**

Wishing PEN SA Vice-President  
Raymond Louw a very happy 90th  
birthday!

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**WELCOME!**

Welcome to new Professional member  
Lauren Jacobs.

**2016 NOBEL PRIZE IN  
LITERATURE**

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o was [favoured to win](#)  
this year's Nobel Prize in Literature but it  
was announced this morning that the  
prize has been awarded to Bob  
Dylan...[read more](#)

**Send us your news**

Had a book published recently? Attended or participated in a festival? Won an award? Achieved a personal milestone of note? We welcome any news of your activities for future issues of the PEN SA newsletter.

**Please email your contributions**  
to [communications@pensouthafrica.co.za](mailto:communications@pensouthafrica.co.za)



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*sent directly to the relevant organisers. PEN SA attempts to establish that the information received is genuine before passing this on to our members, but we cannot be held responsible should that not be the case.*

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