

PEN South Africa newsletter / Issue 22 2017

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**“Humanity is both wanting and bereft
without the full and free expression
of women’s creativity and knowledge”**

The Women's Manifesto and New Appointments at PEN SA

In this issue we are very pleased to share the Women's Manifesto ([Read the Manifesto in full here](#)) as well as news of three new appointments at PEN SA. There is an interview between Davids and Margie Orford about the genesis of the Manifesto, including an update on the Manifesto from PEN International President Jennifer Clement, and Rachel Zadok's piece on our Women's Manifesto event at Open Book which featured Davids, Gabeba Baderoon, Sindiswa Busuku-Mathese and Buhle Ngaba. Below, PEN SA President Nadia Davids introduces the new

appointments and interviews with the new Board Members can be found further down.

A new group of women have taken up leadership positions at PEN South Africa. In June 2017 Nadia Davids was elected President and in the last five months, three exciting and dynamic appointments have been made:

Yewande Omotoso has been elected as Executive Vice-President. “Everyone who comes into contact with Yewande (and her work) immediately grasps her brilliance, her acuity, her compassion, her quick read of difficult subjects and the graceful but firm way she navigates complex terrain. Her work as a writer of fiction and non-fiction across a range of formats has been wonderfully received locally and internationally and her extensive experience mentoring and training other writers across the continent is similarly valued. In addition, Yewande is based in Johannesburg, which will allow PEN SA to have a stronger profile in that city and will facilitate a crucial trans-national dialogue”.

Sisonke Msimang is a new Board Member. “Sisonke is a treasured and celebrated writer, memoirist and political commentator both locally and internationally and we are thrilled to welcome her to the Board. Her latest work, *Always Another Country: A Memoir of Exile and Home*, has cemented her position as a writer who understands, deeply and intimately, the complexities and challenges of South Africa's past, present and future. In addition, she has a strong background in working with and for civil society organisations and her unique combination of experience and incisive insight is something we know we can draw on going forward”.

Nokukhanya Mncwabe is our new Center Co-ordinator. “We conducted a long and intensive search for the Center Co-ordinator because it is such a multi-layered, multi-skilled job that requires a complex combination of high organisation, focused activism and the ability to be at once responsive, imaginative and detail oriented. Khanya came highly recommended with a wealth of NGO experience and professional activism. She is a wonderfully poised writer too, is studying towards her LLB and has deep love of literature. Just days into her new post, she demonstrated a

firm grasp on all the different components of the position and the complexity the work that PEN SA does.”

Davids is also pleased to introduce the Women's Manifesto. "The Women's Manifesto was passed joyously and unanimously at the 2017 PEN Congress in Lviv Ukraine. It is a work of politics and poetry, a document that sketches in broad but inclusive strokes what it means to be a woman in the world and how deeply, corrosively and violently gender discrimination impacts on a woman's right to speak, move, be and, ultimately, to write. It is an urgent call for equality, an insistence on systemic change, and a request that we consider not only what is done to women through violence, but also what is lost through it."

Margie Orford Discusses the Women's Manifesto with Nadia Davids

"The Women's Manifesto grew out of the conviction – one that is widely shared across the global network of PEN – that gender equality is not only essential for free expression to be a reality but that the vitality and beauty of literature is diminished if women's stories are not told. Women are silenced not only by laws but by custom, religion and culture too. The ties that bind women's tongues are often so intimate that they are difficult to see. The Women's Manifesto is a way to address that complexity" - Margie Orford...[read more](#)



Open Book 2017: “When I picked up a pen, I became dangerous”

By Rachel Zadok

On Wednesday, 6 September 2017, PEN South Africa presented one of two events that kicked off the Open Book Festival in Cape Town. In her first public event as president of PEN South Africa, Nadia Davids, a South African writer and theatre-maker, facilitated the panel titled “Women’s Manifesto” [...read more](#)

(Image courtesy of [Open Book and City Varsity / Nicole Nik Jacobs](#))



Q&A with New PEN SA Executive Vice-President Yewande Omotoso

Yewande Omotoso: “The real demon is the voice that says “you can’t”, “you shouldn’t”, “you don’t know how”, “no one will listen” and on and on and whatever versions other people have. Writing then is always a triumph over hopelessness and cynicism no matter how sober the subject matter. For this reason alone – persevere.” [...read more](#)

(Image courtesy of [Yewande Omotoso](#))



Q&A with Newly Co-opted PEN SA Board Member Sisonke Msimang

"Writers have never mattered more – not just journalists but playwrights and novelists and poets. The best work often emerges out of times like this and so in some ways I think of myself as being hopeful but vigilant. So for my fellow writers – for those who express themselves with the pen, I am buoyed by the fact that we live in a time of hope and sobriety. They make strange but passionate bedfellows." [...read more](#)

(Image courtesy of [Victor Dlamini via The JRB](#))



Q&A with New PEN SA Centre Coordinator Nokukhanya Mncwabe

"I am encouraged by the courage and resilience of South African writers – to me this is a sign of confidence in our rule of law. I have also been encouraged to see the proliferation of writing of all genres that has been released in recent months – so much so that many titles often fly under the radar because of the noise of our political discourse." [...read more](#)

(Image courtesy of [Ruschka Jaffah](#))

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 let us know if your email changes so we can update our mailing list.

Please email your contributions
to communications@pensouthafrica.co.za



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