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PEN South Africa newsletter / Issue 9 2016

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SOUTH AFRICA**Write!**  
Africa,  
**Write!**Issue 9  
**19 May 2016**  
ISSN 2410-2210**Whose Literature is it Anyway? by Victor Dlamini**

*This piece was originally published on [victordlamini.com](http://victordlamini.com) and Victor has kindly allowed us to publish it as part of the **PEN SA essay series** on South African literature. If you are interested in submitting an essay, contact us on [communications@pensouthafrica.co.za](mailto:communications@pensouthafrica.co.za).*

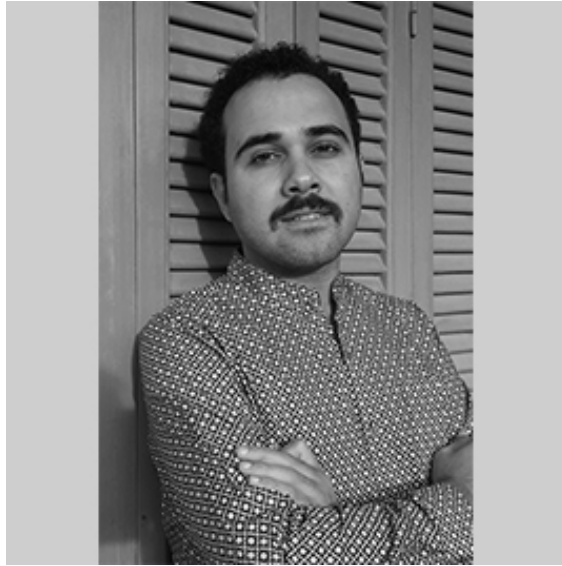
It was inevitable that the defiance, dissent, resistance and protest against Apartheid

should be reflected in South Africa's literary tradition. What is surprising is the extent to which the literature that dealt most urgently with South Africa's unbearable political oppression was dismissed as 'protest literature'. The suggestion was that this fiction did not deal sufficiently enough with the depth implicit in most things, but scratched only the surface of meaning. An entire cottage industry emerged that extolled the literary shortcomings of the literature that dared to explore in its fictional worlds both the political repression as well as the dissent.

The most troubling aspect of the school of thought that sought to belittle this literature they called 'protest literature' was that it seemed that the very act of questioning the political persecution of the day was a betrayal of some higher literary code. There was a suspicion of a commitment to the political as a kind of betrayal of the literary or even a lowering of literary standards. Poets like Mongane Wally Serote and Oswald Mbuyiseni Mtshali wrote poems that were at once deeply political even as they were allegorical. The meaning that their work yielded depended on the effort the reader was prepared to make to go beyond surface meanings.

The poems in *Sounds Of A Cowhide Drum* by Mtshali offer a powerful reminder that the most political language is often deeply coded so that those unaware of the code may read it at the surface level. But when picked up by those familiar with the code, the same line, passage, or poem yields an entirely different meaning. One of the things that I always found troubling about the dismissal of 'protest literature' was the uniformity of the reading of the texts...[read more](#)

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## 120 Writers Join PEN America's Call for Release of Egyptian Author Ahmed Naji

More than 120 bestselling authors, journalists, editors, and artists joined PEN America in calling on the Egyptian Parliament and President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi to drop charges against and free Ahmed Naji, a writer sentenced to two years in prison because a sexually explicit scene in his novel *The Use of Life* allegedly caused a reader "heart palpitations." [...read more](#)

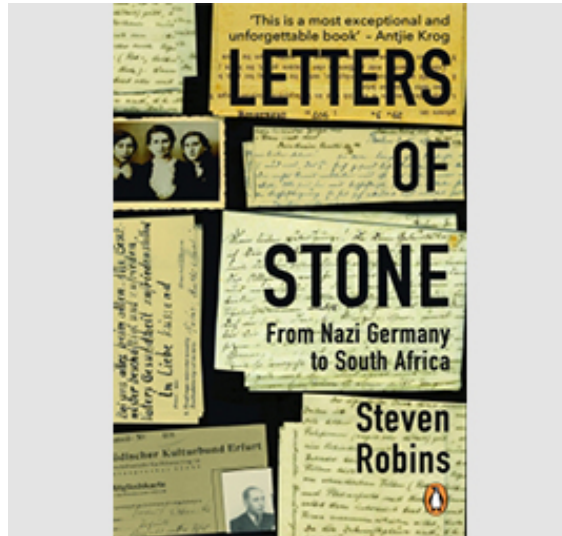
Read the letter and add your name here [...read more](#)



## Raymond Louw's Report on the 2016 PAN Meeting

The PAN meeting on March 7 began with welcoming remarks by PAN and PEN International representatives followed by the introduction of the Empty Chair symbolically marking the absence of a member who had been silenced by a government or other authority. The Empty Chair ceremony was conducted each morning of the conference. This was followed by a welcome to newly founded Centres, Mali and Mauritania, and newly reconstituted PEN Zimbabwe. Altogether 20 representatives of 17 African PEN Centres attended [...read more](#)

## NEW MEMBERS' TITLES



Recent titles from PEN SA members include [Letters of Stone](#) by PEN SA member Steven Robins...[read more](#)

## CONGRATULATIONS!

The Sunday Times Literary Award shortlists have been announced: Claire Robertson and Henrietta Rose-Innes have been shortlisted for the Barry Ronge Fiction Prize for [The Magistrate of Gower](#) and [Green Lion](#) respectively. David Attwell has been shortlisted for the Alan Paton Award for [JM Coetzee](#)

## UPCOMING EVENTS

The Naked Word Festival, Jewish Literary Festival and the Kingsmead Book Fair are all happening this weekend...[read more](#)

## CALLS FOR SUBMISSIONS

Okot P'Bitek Prize for Poetry in Translation...[read more](#)

New literary journal Type/Cast calling for submissions...[read more](#)

Glenna Luschei Prize for African Poetry...[read more](#)

Aerodrome now accepting flash fiction submissions...[read more](#)

## WELCOME!

Welcome to new Professional member Sisonke Msimang.

[and the Life of Writing...read more](#)

Kirsten Miller has won the Wilbur Smith Prize for Best Unpublished Adventure Manuscript...[read more](#)

Lauren Beukes has won a Bellagio Center Residency Award...[read more](#)

The Ingrid Jonker Poetry Prize judges commended Elisa Galgut for her collection, *The Attribute of Poetry*...[read more](#)

## AWARDS NEWS

Thabo Jijana was named the winner of the 2016 Ingrid Jonker Poetry Prize for his collection *Failing Maths and My Other Crimes*...[read more](#)

The shortlist for the 2016 Caine Prize for African writing has been announced...[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**  
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