

PEN South Africa newsletter / Issue 23, 2018 / Our Day of the Imprisoned Writer 2018 round-up; member news; calls for submissions; a goodbye, and more!

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PEN SA Marks the 2018 Day of the Imprisoned Writer with Event and Readings in Cape Town

PEN South Africa, in collaboration with the Institute of Creative Arts at the University of Cape Town, commemorated the 2018 Day of the Imprisoned Writer with a dynamic and thought-provoking event at UCT's Hiddingh Hall. One of the most important dates on PEN's international calendar, the Day of the Imprisoned Writer marks a date on which all PEN Centres reflect upon and hold events in support of

Events this year were held all around the world, and the featured cases attracted letters of support from David Lagercrantz, Jennifer Clement, Tom Stoppard, Arundhati Roy and Khaled Hosseini, which can be read at PEN International's site [here](#).

This year's South African event was an engaging and meaningful evening, featuring prominent writers and academics – including Yewande Omotoso, Wamuwi Mbao, Desiree Lewis, Nick Mulgrew and Rustum Kozain – who presented and read work in solidarity with their detained, jailed or murdered colleagues, **Wael Abbas, Dawit Isaak, Miroslava Breach Velducea, Shahidul Alam, and Oleg Sentsov**.

In her opening address, PEN SA President Nadia Davids noted with gladness that three of the writers for whom PEN campaigned during last year's Day of the Imprisoned Writer – namely Dareen Tatour, Ramón Esono Ebalé and Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh (popularly known by her pen name Me Nâm/*Mother Mushroom*) – had been released in the past year. This good news was tempered, unfortunately, with the news that Ugandan academic Dr Stella Nyanzi, whose case was highlighted during our 2016 event, had been re-arrested by her government (*see below*) only a few days before the event.

"We do this," Davids said, "in the hopes not only of sharing the stories of these writers and their imprisonment, but also their work. We do this to draw attention to what is unjust, unlawful and unconscionable, but also as a way of affirming a political solidarity that is internationalist, in an era of toxic nationalism, during a time in which the freedom to write and to speak and to be heard without punishment is under ever-increasing threat."

Read more about the event – including the contributions from the five local writers – [here](#).

(Image by Nick Mulgrew)



PEN SA Condemns Re-Arrest in Uganda of Dr Stella Nyanzi

On the eve of the Day of the Imprisoned Writer 2018, PEN South Africa issued a statement condemning in the strongest terms the recent re-arrest of prominent Ugandan academic, feminist and LGBTI+ campaigner, **Dr. Stella Nyanzi**, as well as the charges of "cyber harassment" and "offensive communication" laid against her. This comes after her 2017 arrest on the same charges, against which **PEN SA and our colleagues successfully campaigned**, leading to her release.

We call again now for Nyanzi's immediate release and for all the charges against her to be dropped.

Nyanzi was arrested following messages she allegedly posted on Facebook about President Yoweri Museveni's mother. Following a trial hearing on 9 November, Nyanzi was remanded in custody until the next hearing (22 November); she faces up to one year in jail if convicted.

Our colleagues at PEN International and PEN Uganda believe that the charges against Nyanzi are a violation of her right to freedom of expression, which, as a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Uganda is obliged to protect.

'Although President Museveni pretends to be a democratic leader, he has come down hard on his critics through government organs like the Uganda Police Force and the Uganda Communications Commission,' said Dr. Danson Sylvester Kahyana, President of PEN Uganda. 'The former has arrested and prosecuted critics; the latter

Museveni has the right to take exception to Dr Nyanzi's views, he does not have the right to gag people who find his rule oppressive.'

'These latest charges against Stella, and the potential penalty she faces if found guilty, are another cruel reminder of how often high-ranking political figures cynically exploit troubling legislation to shut down and punish critical voices,' said Salil Tripathi, Chair of PEN International's Writers in Prison Committee. 'The right to free speech is enshrined in Uganda's constitution and the authorities should release Stella immediately.'

Nyanzi, a fierce, public critic of President Museveni, is noted for her use of colourful, sometimes shocking language. One criticism of Dr Nyanzi's speech is that **it is rude**, obscene, or otherwise problematic. It is vital to note, however, that in her criticism of Museveni and the Ugandan government, Dr Nyanzi embraces the tradition of "**radical rudeness**", a sort of social critique by Ugandans that flourished under colonial rule beginning in the late 1940s. The current charges against her are based on messages she allegedly posted on Facebook on the 16 and 19 September 2018, which the prosecution says implied that President Museveni's mother's womb was "cursed" and that it should have "burnt up on the unborn foetus [President Museveni]."

According to **news reports**, Nyanzi was arrested at Makerere University on 2 November and driven to the Special Investigations Division headquarters at Kireka. From there, she was transferred to Kira Division Police headquarters and detained. According to the same reports, Nyanzi's lawyer says that his client did not know the charges against her until she appeared in court.

Nyanzi is charged under section 24 and 25 of the Computer Misuse Act, 2011. Section 25 states: "Any person who wilfully and repeatedly uses electronic communication to disturb or attempts to disturb the peace, quiet or right of privacy of any person with no purpose of legitimate communication whether or not a conversation ensues commits a misdemeanour and is liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding twenty-four currency points (480,000) or imprisonment not exceeding one year or both."

Violations of free expression in Uganda are rampant. Reporters Without Borders' 2018 **Press Freedom Index** downgraded the country once again this year, ranking it 117 out of 180 countries (having previously ranked it 112 and 102). Nyanzi told PEN International in a **2017 interview**:

"For those of us whose articulations criticise the government and its actors, those of us who question the status quo, those of us who expose the numerous everyday

threats, arrests, beatings, detention, raids, confiscation of materials, bans of our works, are increasing vices that the government metes out against us.”

We, along with our colleagues at PEN International and Ugandan PEN, call on the Ugandan authorities to

- Immediately and unconditionally release Dr. Stella Nyanzi;
- Drop all charges against her;
- Comply with their obligations to protect freedom of expression under the Ugandan Constitution and international law.

MEMBERS' NEWS

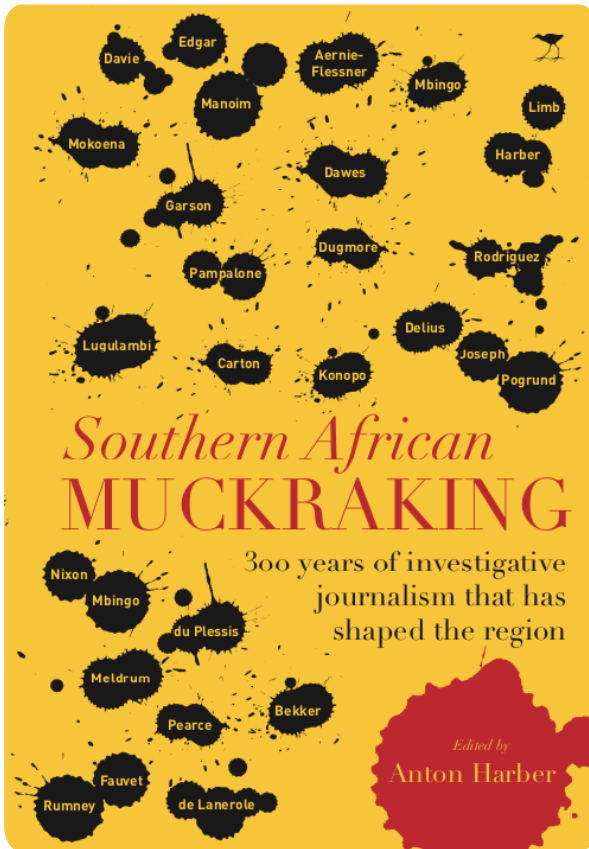
A hearty congratulations to PEN SA member Raymond Suttner, **who will graduate with a LLM law degree from the University of Cape Town**, almost half a century after the original submission of his thesis, which was rejected at the time for quoting a then-banned person.

PEN SA President Nadia Davids' play ***At Her Feet***, which evokes the experiences of four Muslim women in Cape Town whose lives are touched by 9/11 and by the honour killing of a Jordanian girl, returns to the Baxter Theatre this month. Tickets are available [here](#).

FAREWELL

Editor's note: *I am sad to note that this will be the last newsletter I will edit, as I will be leaving PEN SA at the end of this month. It has been a privilege to contribute to such an important organisation. I will continue supporting this Centre's work and will remain an active member – I ask you all please to do the same. Thanks for all the conversations and support over the past year, and for contributing to this Centre's long, complicated and rich history. Newsletters will resume in the new year.*

– Nick Mulgrew, PEN SA Head of Communications



New and upcoming releases from PEN SA members include *Southern African Muckraking*, edited by Anton Harber.

Please send us your new releases

to newslettereditor@pensouthafrica.co.za.

NEW! Poets: Submit Your Original Manuscript for uHlanga's 2019 Open Submissions Call (Deadline 28 February 2019; opens 1 February 2019)

Publishers: Apply to the 2019 Istanbul Fellowship Program (Deadline 30 November)

Apply to Pro Helvetia's 2019 ANT Mobility Fund for Artists (Deadline 30 November)

The 2019 Brunel International African Poetry Prize Open for Entries (Deadline 12 December)

[Click here to view all calls for submissions](#)

WELCOME

Welcome to new PEN SA Professional Member, Rev Dr BR Rudi Buys.

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.

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