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PEN South Africa newsletter / Women's Day Edition, 2019 / Q&A with Zubeida Jaffer; Celebrate SA's vibrant women publishers; Zonnebloem library inspires reading and respect; PEN SA Statement on Sentencing of Stella Nyanzi; calls for submissions; members' news, and more!

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Women's Day Edition
12 August 2019

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Women's Day Message from PEN SA President, Nadia Davids

They walked together.

At PEN South Africa we focus on the relationship between freedom and expression, believing that the one cannot exist fully without the other. We understand freedom of expression as the right to be able to write, think and exchange ideas, unhampered and un-harassed, a right that is, crucially, also about full and equal access. These rights are in almost every instance, gendered; as the **PEN Women's Manifesto** states, "For women to have free speech, the right to read, the right to write, they need to have the right to roam physically, socially and intellectually. There are few social systems that do not regard with hostility a woman who walks by herself."

Our Women's Day issue features a range of brave, inspiring women who have worked hard to create change, to push back against precisely this hostility. In this newsletter you will find an interview with **Zubeida Jaffer**, the anti-apartheid journalist once imprisoned for her activism, a tribute to **Toni Morrison** - one of the greatest

and a feature on the **Sunflower Library at Zonnebloem** school. It's a baggy, rangy issue that responds as much to unfolding events as it does to the significance of our national holiday.

In Jaffer's interview she reflects on the profound trauma of her imprisonment and torture, but states that when she emerged from jail it was with a deepened commitment to freedom of expression, "My detention made me passionate for everyone's right to express themselves freely" and that today, she is gratified to see how South African women "cower less and stand up to tell their stories."

Our interviews with Alison Lowry, Thabiso Mahlape and Zukiswa Wanner, detail their extraordinary, game-changing work in publishing, and the feature on the Sunflower Library at Zonnebloem School - one of the oldest, most storied schools in Cape Town - describes a space as special as it is important.

Our statement on the recent sentencing of Dr Stella Nyanzi, an act that we unequivocally condemn, can be found [here](#).

And finally, we mourn the passing of a literary icon, the brilliant and irreplaceable Toni Morrison, the writer who left no mind unstirred or heart untouched. Morrison was a long-time PEN member and the vice president of PEN International and today, her words are with me, "The function of freedom is to free someone else."



In thinking through this issue, I found myself looking again and again at that iconic 1956 photograph of Lillian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph, Rahima Moosa and Sophia Williams marching on Pretoria, protesting the implementation of the Apartheid Pass Law on black African women. Chosen because they were activists and leaders, but also because they were representatives of different racial groups, they made a formidable, compelling quartet. As a girl I poured over this photograph, moved by the women's courageous and deliberate performance of trans-racial solidarity, and amazed too, by those out of shot, the 20 000 women who had also marched-at great risk- and who later would stand in silent protest for thirty minutes before singing

I thought about the many photographs that followed this one, of women holding placards at meetings, making speeches at rallies, women arrested, women frightened or firm faced, women marked by pain but still full of non-negotiable resolve. I thought about the images of women wiping tear-gas from their children's singed eyes, the ones of women tortured, women banned, women attending funerals, women being buried themselves. South Africa's battle for freedom has always been defined, shaped, insisted upon by women; at every possible juncture, women have demanded and fought for their liberty.

I looked at that 1956 photograph and I wondered - not without heartbreak - how those four women would have felt about our country today, how they would have negotiated the landscape of unimaginable violence women and girls find themselves in, what they might have thought about the endless reproductions of small and large-scale misogyny. I imagined that Ngoyi, Joseph, Moosa and Williams too would have been heartbroken, but I also found myself hoping that they might have taken comfort in the remarkable women -some of whom are featured in this issue - who work daily to shift that paradigm and empower girls and women.

I thought about those 20 000 marching women and was grateful that our foremothers had set such an extraordinary example. Each one of them, named or unnamed, known or unknown, celebrated or forgotten, a profile in courage.

A Happy Women's Day to you all,

Nadia Davids
PEN SA President



Zubeida Jaffer on imprisonment, censorship

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Throughout her illustrious career as a journalist and author, Zubeida Jaffer has never shied away from standing up against oppressive systems.

During the eighties, she was detained and tortured twice and continues to be hampered by the after-effects of these horrendous experiences that many journalists endured under apartheid.

In the lead-up to Women's Day 2019, we reached out to Jaffer with a few questions about her imprisonment, how it shaped her writing and her thoughts about women's stories in South Africa.

[Read more.](#)



Career Q&As with three of SA's top women publishers

In celebration of Women's Month, PEN SA is proud to profile three of South Africa's most vibrant women publishers.

Alison Lowry, Thabiso Mahlape and Zukiswa Wanner have each made a unique and valuable contribution to the local publishing industry.

We sent each of them a set of questions about their careers and received the most wonderful responses!

[Read more.](#)

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PEN South Africa condemns sentencing of Dr Stella Nyanzi

In the wake of Women's Day 2019, PEN South Africa is issuing a statement condemning in the strongest terms the recent sentencing of prominent Ugandan academic, feminist and LGBTI+ campaigner, Dr Stella Nyanzi to 18 months in prison.

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

Read more.



and respect

In 2016, the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) report revealed that the majority of South African Grade 4 pupils cannot read with comprehension.

In many ways, South Africa's literacy problem can be ascribed to the fact that there aren't enough spaces where age-appropriate, interesting and relatable books are freely available for children to pick up and read, and where adults model a culture of reading.

The Otto Foundation is on a mission to change that, one school library at a time. PEN SA recently spent a couple of hours at Sunflower Learning Centre in Zonnebloem, the foundation's flagship library, and met a few of the women (and girls) who've made it such a special place.

Read more.

A tribute to Toni Morrison

When PEN SA board member, Yewande Omotoso was in high school, a Special Author Project led her to the wise and wonderful words of Toni Morrison.

This encounter with Ms Morrison also heralded a turning point in her life.

"I began to flirt with literature and the thought of becoming a writer myself," Omotoso writes. "And ever since and hopefully forever still Toni Morrison remains this figure looking over me, inspiring me to do the best work I can, presiding as it were over whatever my attempts."

Read Omotoso's beautiful tribute to the legendary author who passed away on Monday, 5 August 2019.

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impepho press: Holding Space for the Intersectional Feminist Voice of Africa

Impepho, reputedly one of the earliest herbs used by African healers, is a powerful indigenous medicine renowned for clearing spiritual pathways. So, when vangile gantsho, Sarah Godsell and Tanya Pretorius joined forces to tell Pan African feminist stories, 'impepho press' was identified as the most appropriate name.

This Women's Month, Pen SA revisits the interview it conducted with Ms gantsho earlier this year.

[Read more.](#)

MEMBERS' NEW TITLES

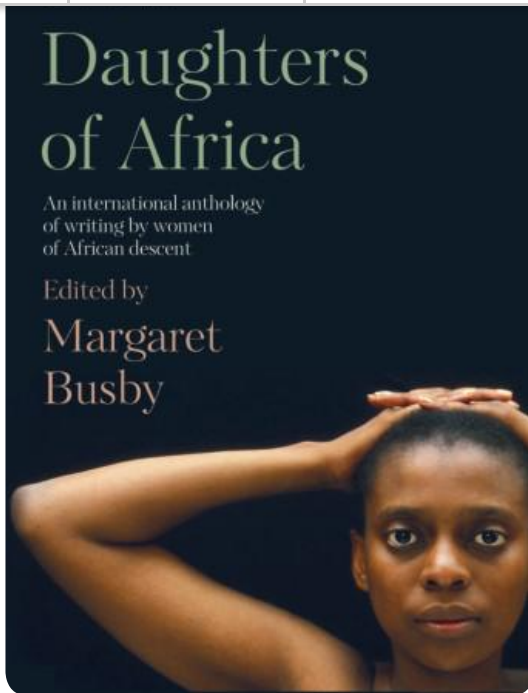
CALLS FOR SUBMISSIONS

NEW! [Call for submissions: The Journal of African Youth Literature \(JAYL\)](#) (Deadline 30 September)

[Imagnary House Opens Submissions](#) (Deadline 31 August)

[The Bare Life Review](#) requests submissions from immigrant and refugee authors

[Apply for the Logan Nonfiction Program](#) (Deadline 15 October)

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New and upcoming releases from or featuring PEN SA members includes *New Daughters of Africa: An international anthology of writing by women of African descent* edited by Margaret Busby.

The anthology features writing by PEN SA President, Nadia Davids, as well as PEN SA board members, Sisonke Msimang and Yewande Omotoso.

Please send us your new releases to newslettereditor@pensouthafrica.co.za.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Refer to our August literary events calendar for information on literary festivals, book launches, panel discussions and poetry readings – available [here](#).

Please submit your literary events for inclusion on our events calendar by e-

MEMBERS' NEWS

Warmest congratulations to PEN SA professional member, **Carien Smith** on being selected as a JIAS Writing Fellow for 2020.

Warmest congratulations to the following PEN SA professional members on being shortlisted for the 2019 Sunday Times Literary Awards: **Terry Kurgan, Nozizwe Cynthia Jele, Claire Robertson** and **Mark Winkler**.

Warmest congratulations to PEN SA professional member, **Nkateko Masinga** on being longlisted for the African Writers Award by the African Writers Development Trust.

Warmest congratulations to PEN SA professional member, **Karin Brynard** whose book, *Weeping Waters* has been shortlisted for The Crime Writers' Association's International Dagger Award. Special mention to translators, Isobel Dixon and Maya Fowler.

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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 newslettereditor@pensouthafrica.co.za

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