

# Writing Repression

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The workshop 'Writing Repression' is part of the initiative 'Literatures of Change: Culture and Politics in Southern Africa' funded by the Nordic research councils. It will bring together researchers, authors and activists for a conversation about literary responses to repression in Zimbabwe.

Decades of crisis, corruption, poverty and violence in Zimbabwe have left their mark. Millions of people have left the country, while many of those who have stayed behind have had to conceive of strategies for surviving and sometimes resisting a violent regime. The political developments since November 2017 in particular have been accompanied by short bursts of revived international attention to the Zimbabwean political scene. Would the change of leadership post-Mugabe mean increased freedoms or simply a new face to the same repression, journalists were asking. Yet such news-driven media attention is not enough to uncover the continuous day-to-day public and private responses to censorship and violence. For uncovering such responses, we need to draw on a range of cultural sources, especially literature.

Valuable work is already being done on how the Zimbabwean diaspora has responded to the condition of exile (McGregor and Primorac 2010). The main emphasis of such research, however, has been on the creation of political communities of resistance abroad. To the extent that literary production has been examined, there has been a tendency to focus on white expatriates (Harris 2005; Primorac 2010). An overwhelming amount of the work done on Zimbabwean writers focuses on those few who have access to publishing, either through their expatriate status and/or their whiteness. This creates a skewed archive which ignores much of the literature produced within Zimbabwe outside the realm of conventional publishing (Harris and Hällén). The new project 'African Street Literature', based at the Nordic Africa Institute, aims to rectify this omission (<http://nai.uu.se/news/articles/2017/11/29/112629/index.xml>).

Bringing together that project with researchers who work on expatriate writing and others who focus on the political context in Zimbabwe, this workshop will explore forms of writing in and against a repressive society. It will study the silencing of dissenting voices and strategies to circumvent censorship. Casting the net wider than the latest news reports, the workshop will place those practices in their context by considering how these strategies have evolved and depart from those of the UDI era when the white settler regime sought to repress dissent. Participants are invited to consider the ways in which various genres are deployed to overcome obstacles to expression. 'Writing Repression' thus aims to study repression both as a theme engaged with by writers and as a phenomenon which constrains literary voices and which is negotiated through choices of thematic focus, genre and publishing strategy.