

Amnesty International Group 22 Pasadena/Caltech News

Volume XXIV Number 3, March 2016

UPCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, March 24, 8:00 PM. *Monthly Meeting.* We meet at the Caltech Y, Tyson House, 505 S. Wilson Ave., Pasadena. (This is just south of the corner with San Pasqual. Signs will be posted.) We will be planning our activities for the coming months. Please join us! Refreshments provided.

Tuesday, April 12, 7:30 PM. *Letter writing meeting* at Caltech Athenaeum, corner of Hill and California in Pasadena. This informal gathering is a great way for newcomers to get acquainted with Amnesty.

Sunday, April 17, 6:30 PM. *Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion group.* This month we read "**Foreign Gods, Inc.**" by Okey Ndibe.

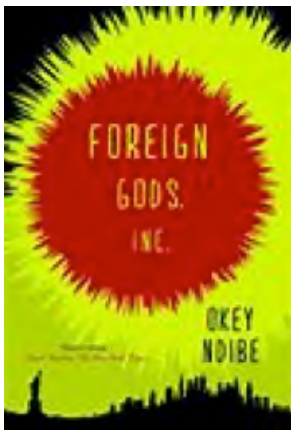
COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hi everyone

March marks the death of our former Group 22 co-coordinator, Lucas Kamp, last year from pancreatic cancer. Let's continue to keep Group 22 strong in his memory.

There is a vigil in April to mark the birthday of Iranian human rights activist Narges Mohammadi that Alexi has helped organize. See Alexi's article for further information.

Con Cariño,
Kathy



Next Rights Readers meeting:

**Sunday, April 17
6:30 PM**

**Vroman's Bookstore
695 E. Colorado Blvd
Pasadena**

Foreign Gods, Inc.

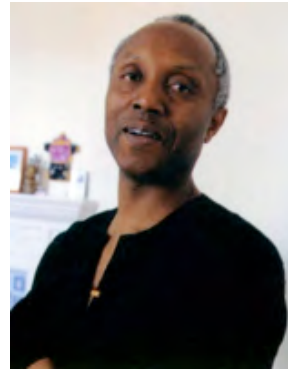
by Okey Ndibe

RIGHTS READERS

**Human Rights Book Discussion
Group**

**Keep up with Rights Readers at
<http://rightsreaders.blogspot.com>**

AUTHOR BIO



Okey Ndibe (born 1960) is a novelist, political columnist, and essayist. Of Igbo ethnicity, Ndibe was born in Yola, Nigeria. He is the author of *Arrows of Rain* and *Foreign Gods, Inc.*, two critically acclaimed novels published in 2000 and 2014

respectively. Ndibe is one of the foremost respected and admired contributors to the social and political essence of Nigeria.

[from Wikipedia]

BOOK REVIEW

The New York Times

By JANET MASLIN DEC. 29, 2013

Trying to Filch the Blessings of the Idol Rich 'Foreign Gods, Inc.' by Okey Ndibe

Okey Ndibe's razor-sharp "Foreign Gods, Inc." steps into the story of a Nigerian-born New Yorker called Ike, just as everything in his life has begun to go horribly wrong. The only thing worse than Ike's present situation is the plan he makes to remedy it.

Ike, whose name is correctly pronounced EE-kay, has an Amherst degree cum laude in economics. But his accent has kept him from finding a job. So he works as a cabby, with customers who call him "Eekay," which means "buttocks" in Igbo. He has made a bad marriage to a woman who walked off with his savings, and debts now overwhelm him. The only thing he has of value is something of age-old mystical significance that is not exactly in his possession. And, intellect notwithstanding, he gets the bright idea of acquiring and selling it from a trendy article in New York magazine.

A friend sends Ike the article about an art gallery called Foreign Gods Inc., which gives this book its terrifically apt title. Only in

mimicking a slick American idiom does Mr. Ndibe falter, and that's probably to his credit. (From the fake New York magazine: "A summons to heaven doesn't come easy or cheap," says a gallery patron, referring to the place's most expensive upper floor.") But the gist of the piece is that a dealer named Mark Gruels traffics in deities from faraway places, which mean nothing but money to either him or his customers. As the book begins, Ike arrives at the gallery to see a tanned woman holding a squat statue to her breast, leaving *Foreign Gods* and getting into her BMW.

Ike is desperate enough to believe that Gruels will pay big money for Ngene, the powerful war god that presided over the Nigerian region where he was raised. Mr. Ndibe has his own memories of war to draw upon: He grew up in the midst of the Biafran war and was a Nigerian journalist and academic before coming to the United States, as a protégé of Chinua Achebe. He has had a distinguished teaching career and is the author of one earlier novel, "Arrows of Rain" (2000). But "Foreign Gods, Inc.," which arrives early in January, will still have the impact of an astute and gripping new novelist'

Not far into the book, Ike is on his way back to Nigeria with only one plan in mind: to steal what he thinks is an inanimate object and bring it back to New York. That scheme alone is evidence of how far he has strayed from his roots, and how much of a re-education awaits him.

At first, he is simply struck by the physical changes to his native land: Where did all those zinc-roofed concrete buildings with satellite dishes come from? But then the sense memories of the place begin to seduce him, and he falls into a swoon of reminiscence that would be enchanting, if it were not constantly interrupted by the harsh realities of his relatives and former neighbors.

Ngene the war god plays some mysterious role in all of this. Much of the village's hardship dates back to the disruptive visit of a British missionary who was determined to teach the superiority of Christianity to Nigerian pagans. Even this takes the form of materialism, as the increasingly mad Englishman, Stanton, insists that his God is more powerful because he owns everything, while the Nigerian gods possess nothing. Nothing but the hearts and minds of their followers.

Stanton is gone, but in his wake he left bitter divisiveness and a terrible conflation of religion and greed. So Ike returns to find that his mother, who for years has had Ike's sister bombard him with plaintive, begging letters ("Mama wonders if you want us to eat sand"), has fallen under the spell of a pastor who sees religious commitment in terms of dollar signs.

The influence of America is everywhere, and so are its own foreign gods: Ike finds impoverished Nigerian kids watching old reruns of Michael Jordan playing basketball, talking about what they would do if they were as rich and widely worshiped as he once was. They'd buy houses. Cars. Shirts with brand names on them. And pizza, even though not one of these kids has ever tasted it. They've just seen people eat it on American TV, and the people look happy after they do.

Ike's journey through his past is so richly evocative that he and the reader may almost forget what he went home to do. But by the time he turns his attention to Ngene, whose high priest is Ike's uncle, it's clear that Ngene is more than just a wooden artifact. The past has proved, to anyone who would take heed, that Ngene is powerful, indestructible, vengeful and not easily subject to the whims of others. So a great deal more than art dealing is at stake as Ike enacts the final stage of his crazy, misbegotten plan.

Throughout "Foreign Gods, Inc.," Ike's hard-won urban Americanness, the kind that allowed him to drive a New York taxi, slowly evaporates. It is replaced by a more primal, physical life, as he becomes more attuned to sounds and smells, especially to the stinks of suffering, failure and fear.

Mr. Ndibe invests his story with enough dark comedy to make Ngene an odoriferous presence in his own right, and certainly not the kind of polite exotic rarity that art collectors are used to. At one point, the novel compares him to the demonic Baal, and Ngene shows many signs of wishing to live up to that reputation. In Mr. Ndibe's agile hands, he's both a source of satire and an embodiment of pure terror.

[www.nytimes.com/2013/12/30/books/foreign-gods-inc-by-okey-ndibe.html]

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE Narges Mohammadi

by Alexi Daher

As in previous years, Amnesty has been doing an annual Nowruz (Iranian New Year) in solidarity to prisoners of conscience in Iran and their families. You can access the action from the Individuals at Risk page of the Amnesty International USA website:

<http://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/campaigns/individuals-at-risk>

or from the Iran page:

<http://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/iran>.

The seven cases for this year include: Seven leaders of Iran's Baha'i community; physicist Omid Kokabee; human rights defender Narges Mohammadi; journalist Hossein Ronaghi Maleki; artist Atena Farghadani; student and women's rights activist Bahareh Hedayat; and human rights attorney Abdolfattah Soltani.

We are midway in our planning for the Narges Mohammadi vigil, on her birthday April 21. Please reserve the date: April 21st, 2016 at 5:30 pm, and join us in solidarity to demand the immediate release of Narges Mohammadi and to bring awareness to the global community that human rights violations continue to be a blatant 21st Century problem.

Invitations to join the vigil can now be forwarded to the community, organizations, and local Amnesty groups. If you know a group who would want to be involved, would want to organize vigils, or join in other solidarity actions on that day, they can contact me at alexi.daher@gmail.com.

Invitation to the Vigil:

Human Rights Violations STILL a Blatant 21st Century Problem

Join Amnesty International, Caltech Pasadena Group 22

Vigil on Thursday, April 21st, 2016 at 5:30 pm

To Support, Never Forget the Legacy and Demand the Immediate Release of Human Right Defender Narges Mohammadi

On Thursday, April 21, 2016, Narges Mohammadi's birthday will be marked with a candlelight vigil at (location TBD). The vigil will take place in honor of Narges Mohammadi, who fought and is still fighting for human, women, and children's rights in Iran. She is currently a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned solely for her peaceful exercise of her rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly.

The right to privacy and the right of free speech have consistently been under attack by controlling governments and entrenched powers whether in the East or in the West; packaging them as Salil Shetty, Secretary General of Amnesty International, says, "in opposition to national security, law, and order" and contributing to the "crushing of civil society." As a collective and global community we have the moral obligation to stand in solidarity and call on governments to defend international law and to protect people's rights.

This event is part of an international collaboration with local and International Amnesty Groups in Belgium, Germany, Denmark and the USA, demanding Narges Mohammadi's immediate release and renewing our commitment to continue to bring awareness on human rights violations around the globe and its devastating impact on individuals, their families, and their communities.

Amnesty International Group 22 (Caltech/Pasadena) encourages the community throughout Los Angeles to join us at (location TBD) at 5:30 pm. Individuals can participate through Twitter by tweeting this action's hashtag, #UnitedforNarges. On April 21st, the day of the vigil, participating Groups and individuals will video stream the events of April 21, tweet, and retweet, connecting all the vigils through streams of pictures and videos.

Community members can participate independently by placing a lit candle in their front window beginning at 5 pm. Take a picture and tweet it with the action's hashtag #UnitedforNarges on April 21, to shine a light on human rights abuses, and as a sign of hope that all detained individuals-at-risk, like Narges Mohammadi, are immediately released.

If you and your own group want to be involved and organize vigils or other solidarity actions on that day, you can contact Alexi Daher at alexi.daher@gmail.com, or via Twitter at [Alexi@AdaherAI](https://twitter.com/AdaherAI).

DEATH PENALTY NEWS

By Stevi Carroll

The Justice that Works Act of 2016

I spoke with Terry McAffrey, Amnesty's California coordinator for The Justice that Works Act of 2016. He said he would send some petitions to me for us to use to get signatures needed for it to be on the ballot. I will pass them out when I get them - I hope by our monthly meeting on the 24th. He will be in LA for a meeting on April 12th, and after that, I will have more to report.

Pope Francis

In February, Pope Francis once again called for a worldwide abolition of the death penalty. He combined it with prison conditions generally and said "all Christians and people of goodwill are called today to work not only for the abolition of the death penalty, but also in order to improve prison conditions, in respect for human dignity of persons deprived of liberty." He appealed to Catholic politicians to make "courageous and exemplary gesture and ensure that no convicted inmate is executed during the church's Holy Year of Mercy, which ends on November 20." (We can remember that Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia's final legal action was to let Gustavo Garcia, a man in Texas, be executed a few days before Pope Francis's sermon.)

It (the death penalty) does not render justice to the victims, but rather fosters vengeance.

- Pope Francis, March 20, 2015

Something's Happenin' Here

For some reason, people who might be thought of as strong supporters of the death penalty are saying something completely different. In both Utah and Washington state people intimately connected to the execution of the death penalty are on the record as opponents of it.

Creighton Horton, a prosecutor in Utah with 30 years' experience, wrote in an op-ed earlier this month that he has come to believe the death penalty does not make us safer. He does believe individuals who commit what are now capital crimes "should never be allowed the opportunity to victimize society again." One of his concerns is that innocent people may be sentenced to death. He also has seen how use of

the death penalty can be unfair to the victims' families since the time from sentencing to execution may be extended which denies the families 'closure'. When a person is found guilty of murder and is sentenced to life without parole, Mr. Horton said then "the victims' families are able to move on with their lives."

Utah State Senator Steve Urquhart (R) introduced a measure to abolish Utah's death penalty, but unfortunately had to withdraw it in mid March because while he came close to having the needed support "there were enough lawmakers on the fence in the GOP-controlled House of Representatives that the debate would have taken hours and irritated legislators." And even if he had gotten enough support, Republican Governor Gary Herbert might have vetoed it. Some of the conservative lawmakers who favor abolishing the death penalty think the years of appeals delay any justice that might be served and others express concerns that the government could execute someone who has been wrongly convicted.

I see a positive opening in Utah.

In Washington state, 78 people have been executed since 1904 (while Texas has executed four people already in 2016, just a little perspective here). Even with that small number in Washington, 56 former and retired judges have urged the Washington Supreme Court to declare the death penalty unconstitutional. Retired judges are not given to take a side publicly on an issue, but these judges see this situation as one of fairness where assuring fairness is difficult because of the arbitrary nature of the death penalty.

These judges signed the American Civil Liberties Union's friend-of-the-court brief along with the League of Women Voters of Washington, Murder Victims' Families for Reconciliation and several faith organizations.

Presently, nineteen states and the District of Columbia do not have the death penalty. Perhaps we will see more to follow, even California.

Ah yes, and then there's Virginia

We remember how difficult it has become to get those lethal injection drugs. On March 7th, the Virginia state Senate approved a bill that makes the electric chair the default method of execution should those drugs not be available. At this time, the bill has been sent to Governor Terry

McAuliffe (D) who has not said whether or not he will sign it.

Romell Broom

September 15, 2009, the executioners at the death chamber located in the Southern Ohio Correctional Facility in Lucasville, Ohio, tried to execute Romell Broom. After two hours and 18 attempts to find a vein into which the lethal drug could flow, his execution was called off. On March 16 with a 4-3 decision, the Ohio Supreme Court authorized the state to try for the second time to execute him. The reasoning in this case is interesting and I will take it from the Death Penalty Information Center's article:

Justice Judith Lanzinger, writing for the majority, said the event was not a failed execution because setting the IV line was only a "preliminary step" to an execution and the execution itself "commences when the lethal drug enters the IV line." The majority reasoned that "because the attempt did not proceed to the point of injection of a lethal drug into the IV line, jeopardy never attached." The court denied Broom an evidentiary hearing on his claim that a second execution attempt would constitute cruel and unusual punishment, assuming that prison personnel would this time adhere to the state's execution protocol. It wrote: "Strict compliance with the protocol will ensure that executions are carried out in a constitutional manner and can also prevent or reveal an inmate's attempt to interfere with the execution process. We simply are unable to conclude that Broom has established that the state in carrying out a second attempt is likely to violate its protocol and cause severe pain." Justice Judith French dissented, saying, "The majority's decision to deny

Romell Broom an evidentiary hearing on his Eighth Amendment claim is wrong on the law, wrong on the facts, and inconsistent in its reasoning. If the state cannot explain why the Broom execution went wrong, then the state cannot guarantee that the outcome will be different next time." In a separate dissent, Justice William O'Neill wrote, "Any fair reading of the record of the first execution attempt shows that Broom was actually tortured the first time. Now we embark on the task of doing it again." Dr. Jon Groner, who examined Broom shortly after the 2009 botched execution, described the attempts at accessing Broom's veins as, "somewhere between malpractice and assault." Broom's attorneys said they intend to seek further review in other courts."

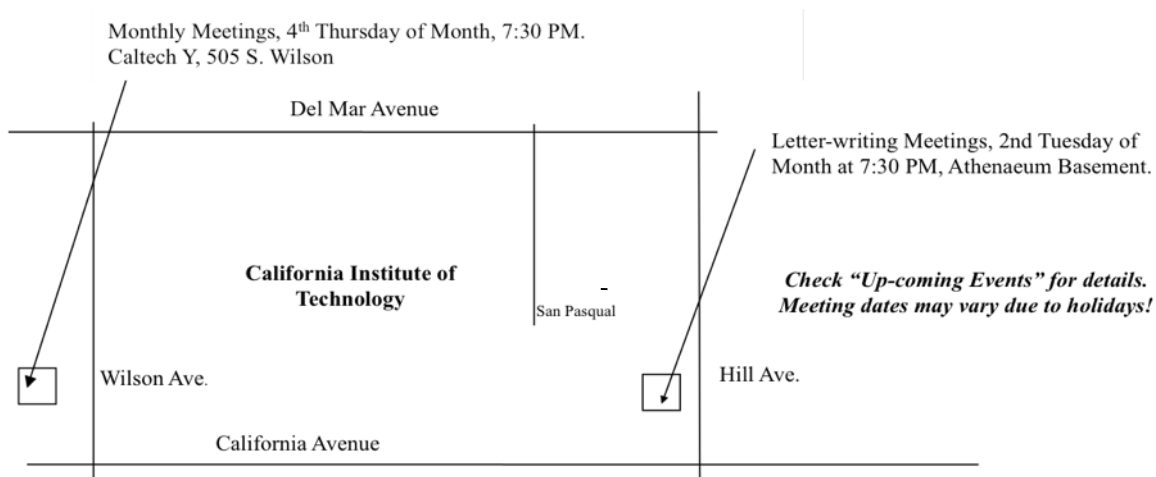
Stays of Execution

March		
14	Daniel Blank	LA
15	Thomas Meadows	PA
16	Ricky Javon Gray	VA
16	Jeffrey Martin	FL
17	Mark James Asay	FL
18	Christopher Johnson	PA
23	Alva Campbell	OH

Execution

March		
9	Coy Wesbrook	TX
	Lethal Injection 1 drug (Pentobarbital)	

GROUP 22 MARCH LETTER COUNT	
POC	6
UAs	12
Total	18
To add your letters to the total contact aigp22@caltech.edu	



From the 210 exit on Lake Avenue, head south, turn left on Del Mar
 From the 110 continue on Arroyo Parkway north, turn right on California
 Street parking is generally available.

Amnesty International Group 22
 The Caltech Y
 Mail Code C1-128
 Pasadena, CA 91125
www.its.caltech.edu/~aigp22/
<http://rightsreaders.blogspot.com>



Amnesty International's mission is to undertake research and action focused on preventing and ending grave abuses of the rights to physical and mental integrity, freedom of conscience and expression, and freedom from discrimination, within the context of its work to promote all human rights.