

Amnesty International Group 22 Pasadena/Caltech News

Volume XXIII Number 1, January 2015

UPCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, January 22, 7:30 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, February 10, 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, February 15, 6:30 PM. Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion group. This month we read, "A Marker to Measure Drift" by Alexander Maksik.

COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hi All

Happy New Year and best wishes to all!

Hope everyone had a great holiday season and that 2015 will be a better year for human rights all over the world.

One of our Group 22 members, Laura Brown, received a response from President Obama regarding a letter she sent on Ebola. See a copy of the letter in this newsletter.

Kathy

RIGHTS READERS

Human Rights Book Discussion Group

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

Next Rights Readers meeting:

Sunday, February 15, 6:30 PM

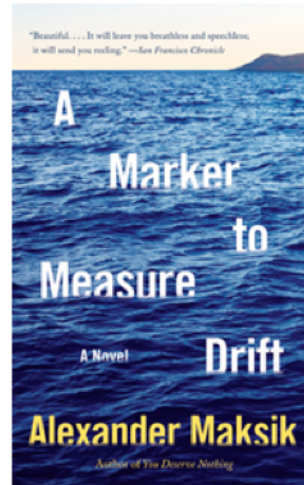
Vroman's Bookstore

695 E. Colorado, Pasadena

BOOK REVIEW by Norman Rush
The New York Times, Aug. 23, 2013

A Marker to Measure Drift

by **Alexander Maksik**



Can the literary novel ever really get its arms around the problem of human evil? It keeps trying — a difficult assignment for the poor beast. In any case, an undaunted Alexander Maksik has brought his skills to this very

problem. His second novel, "A Marker to Measure Drift," recounts a season of homeless exile in the life of a 24-year-old Liberian woman fleeing an episode of gruesome violence incidental to the overthrow of the tyrant Charles Ghankay Taylor, in 2003. Maksik has produced a bold book, and an instructive one.

"Marker" is an aftermath novel. Jacqueline, its heroine, suffers from unbearable suppressed memories, from remorse over failures to have anticipated the bloody destiny ordained for her family. The dangers and indignities of flight and destitution, stark as they are, weigh less than her mental torment. Maksik is, of course, hardly the first American writer to set a tale in the context of African brutality. The grim fact is that for some of the more absolute forms of malevolence — communal violence gone mad, for one — Africa has been a recurrent theater.

Despite the consensus view that the continent has, in the last 20 years, risen brilliantly in terms of G.D.P. growth, explosive gains in elite income, improved infrastructure and better governance, outbreaks of mass violence continue in conflicts taking place at the edges of public consciousness. Think of Uganda, Nigeria, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo. Susan Minot's new novel, "Thirty Girls," to be published next year, concerns a victim of the crazed insurgency led by Joseph Kony in Uganda. Mark Lee's 1998 novel "The Lost Tribe" deals with an unnamed Central African republic most likely based on Uganda. Dave Eggers's 2006 novel "What Is the What" dramatizes the fate of one of the Sudanese Lost Boys. Philip Caputo set his 2005 novel "Acts of Faith" in

Sudan, where the unending civil war seemed to be coming to an end. It is returning in fire. The subject renews itself, alas, and the geography accommodating violence expands: the faith-based slaughters proceeding in Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq (still!) await their literary anatomists.

Maksik writes, credibly, across the boundaries of gender and, in this book, race. He has written before from a woman's point of view. One narrator of his first novel, "You Deserve Nothing," is a young Frenchwoman who determinedly seduces her instructor at an international school in Paris. The book received praise as an evocation of disordered passions, as an erotic fantasia along the lines of James Salter's novel "A Sport and a Pastime." (Later, it came to light that the book was apparently a roman à clef, when the humiliated woman Maksik seems to have based his heroine on accused him of violations of confidence.)

By way of contrast, the heroine of "A Marker to Measure Drift" is a blameless young woman who has been rescued from death almost happenstantially by her French journalist lover as he scrambles to leave a Monrovia falling into the hands of an armed rabble of murderous teenagers. Thereafter permanently abandoned by her Frenchman, penniless, she is forced to cobble together an existence, sleeping in caves or unfinished buildings, in the crevices of the tourist milieu on the island of Santorini.

"Marker" is a study of scarred consciousness struggling to come to terms with the violence done to it in a moment of cataclysmic horror. Jacqueline needs to relive and transmit the truth of her descent into hell if she is to renew the desire to keep living. (A classic realization of the drive to disarm evil by retelling may be found in António Lobo Antunes's novel "The Land at the End of the World," based on the author's experiences as an army medic in Angola during Portugal's last colonial war.)

In a way, Jacqueline's struggle stands as a metaphor for the literary novel itself when it engages enormity. Readers can't help wanting "the one bright book of life" to end at least consolingly, if not straight-up happily. There is a homiletic bias to the stories novelists tend to tell best. Maksik finds his own way of squaring the circle of disaster and hope, signaled late in the book by a shift from past to present tense.

Is Maksik's grueling depiction of a woman in torment successful as a work of fiction? I think it

is. The point of view is convincing. As for any idiosyncrasies the reader may be looking for in Jacqueline's voice as a child of Liberia, they are few — as might be expected, given her background as a thoroughly westernized member of the country's ruling elite who has been educated in Britain. Her place of refuge, outdoor Santorini, is keenly described, the details of the setting jaggedly selected, in the same way they might impress themselves on a harried, homeless young woman. The mechanics of trying to stay fed and sheltered are given plausibly enough. Maksik's narrative style, using short, declarative sentences and sentence fragments, fits the story's tenor and pace.

The sustained representation of Jacqueline's search for release, for haven, has moments of bleak poetry: "She couldn't say that she was leaving, that she had somewhere to be. If she did she'd have to walk in the direction of that place and there was no place."

Jacqueline is afflicted with flashbacks, not of the violence in her past, but of moments that should have been forewarnings. Illusory images of her father and mother accompany her. They dispense irrelevant advice. It's a bad dream Jacqueline inhabits, but Maksik makes the reader share it. The novel is a tense read. Will this unprotected woman, haplessly wandering, fall prey to predators of the European kind? That's a concern. She's also careless about where she leaves her passport.

"A Marker to Measure Drift" isn't constructed to go deep into the heart of darkness, the wellsprings of the terrible killing in West Africa. Maksik brings us to the scene, ultimately, but not through it. The story ends there.

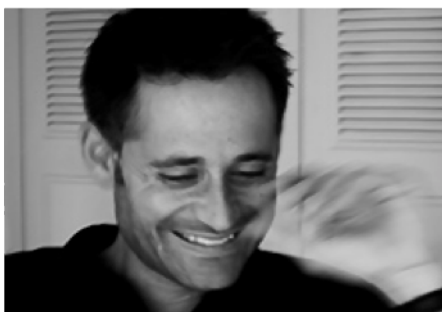
The question of complicity on the part of Jacqueline's family in Charles Taylor's reign of terror comes up in a serpentine way at different points. "Later," Maksik writes, "she listened to the BBC as the U.N. unsealed Taylor's indictment: murder, torture, rape, sexual slavery, terrorism, looting, the unlawful recruitment of child soldiers. . . . Her father looked at her and smiled a cold smile, a smile that meant, What I'm about to say is the last we'll speak of it. . . . He said, 'That's Ghankay. Exceptional men have exceptional habits.' "

It is of course made evident that the degree of guilt Jacqueline faces serves only to make her suffering worse. Those who destroyed Taylor were achieving revenge, after all.

A piety frequently turns up in reviews of contemporary novels set in violent African venues: that such works can't help raising consciousness, leading to moral pressure, leading to change. How much truth there is in that I don't know. We keep hearing it. It's a hope. And I'm sure this hope resides in the heart of Alexander Maksik, who has illuminated for us, with force and art, an all too common species of suffering — grievous, ugly and, unfortunately, a perennial.

Norman Rush is the author of "Whites," "Mating" and "Mortals." His new novel, "Subtle Bodies," will be published next month.

AUTHOR BIO



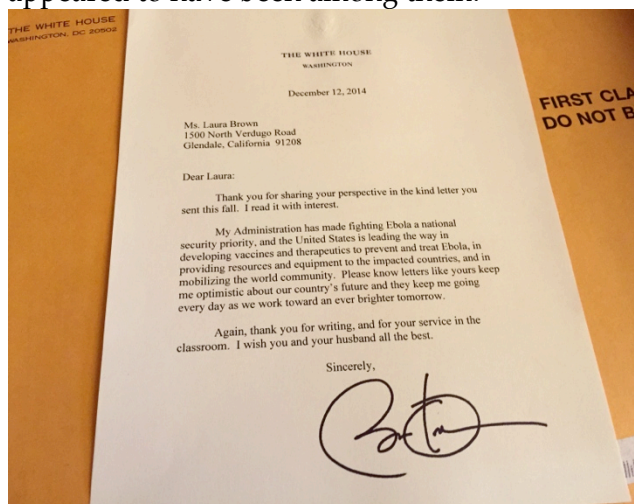
Alexander Maksik is the author of the novels *You Deserve Nothing* and *A Marker to Measure Drift*, which was named a New York Times Book Review Notable Book of 2013. His writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Best American Nonrequired Reading*, *Harper's*, *Tin House*, *Harvard Review*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *The Atlantic*, *Salon*, and *Narrative Magazine*, among other publications. He is a contributing editor at *Condé Nast Traveler*, and his work has been translated into more than a dozen languages. A graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, he has received a Pushcart Prize and fellowships from the Truman Capote Literary Trust and The Corporation of Yaddo.

<http://alexandermaksik.com>

Amnesty Group 22 member gets response from President Obama
by Laura Brown

As a frequent letter writer for Amnesty International's urgent actions for the past 6 years, I can count on one hand (while making the peace sign!) the number of times officials have written back. Once, I got a letter from the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs in Prague,

assuring me of his government's support for Roma families that had been displaced. More recently, on the first day of Winter Session at GCC, I found a large, stiff manila envelope from the White House waiting for me in my teacher's box. It was a personal response from President Obama on the issue of Ebola. According to a New York Times article, "Picking Letters, 10 a Day, That Reach Obama," a staff member chooses ten letters a day that are delivered to President Obama at the White House, and mine appeared to have been among them.



I had sent off a letter September 26, praising the president for his substantial commitment to fight Ebola. I was very impressed that he had decided to take this humanitarian action, countering those who said it wasn't our problem. At the time, he pledged to help West African nations with a \$1 billion-plus plan. "We need a broader effort to stop a disease that could kill hundreds of thousands, inflict horrific suffering, destabilize economies, and move rapidly across borders," Obama said, as reported by the Voice of America.

Just three days after the president promised immediate action on the crisis, the first Ebola patient diagnosed in America, Thomas Eric Duncan, was admitted to a hospital in Dallas with advanced symptoms, and later died. The World Health Organization reported on January 7, 2015, that there have been at least 8,000 deaths from Ebola and that there is "no identifiable downward trend" in Guinea. So, it will take continued involvement and commitment on the part of all those who can help to get the upper hand on this disease. I know our president is committed, because he told me so! Never underestimate the value of a well-timed letter.

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE

Gao Zhisheng

by Joyce Wolf

Five months ago, China released human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng from prison, but he is still not free. He lives now with his wife's parents in Xinjiang Province, essentially under house arrest, subject to 24-hour police surveillance.

Radio Free Asia reported on January 8 that Gao is allowed a brief phone call every few days with his brother Gao Zhiyi, who said that Gao's mental health "seems OK now." (Subjected to torture and solitary confinement during his three years in Shaya Prison, Gao could barely speak when he was first released.)

<http://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/gao-zhisheng-house-arrest-01082015160550.html>

The RFA article does not mention the current state of Gao's physical health, nor can I find any recent online updates about whether he has been able to obtain the dental and medical treatment that he urgently required after his release.

We would very much like to send Gao Zhisheng messages of support and New Year greetings, but it is not possible to send him anything by mail now, according to the Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/GaoZhishengLawyer>. However, this page posted the following request on January 7:

"Tell us in the comments below why Gao inspires you. Feel also free to share this post to raise more awareness on Gao and his work for defending activists and religious minorities in China. (Falun Gong Practitioners, Victims of medical malpractice, Christians...). Thank you and Happy New Year!"

If you are on Facebook, please respond or click on Like. If you would like to respond but don't have a Facebook account, you can send your comment to aigp22@caltech.edu and we will post it for you.

For current news updates, you can check the Twitter account dedicated to Gao Zhisheng, <https://twitter.com/GaoZhisheng>. His wife, who escaped to exile in the U.S. in 2009, posts in Chinese at <https://twitter.com/GengHe1>.

Here's hoping that 2015 may finally be the year that sees Gao Zhisheng truly free and reunited with his family!

DEATH PENALTY NEWS

By Stevi Carroll

Andrew Brannan: 1st execution of 2015

The state of Georgia, infamous for the execution of Troy Davis, holds the 'honor' of performing the US's first execution of 2015.

Andrew Brannan volunteered to serve in the US Army in 1968. His combat experience in Vietnam earned him two Army Commendation Medals and a Bronze Star. In 1984, Veterans Administration doctors diagnosed Mr. Brannan with post-traumatic stress disorder. By 1990, his condition deteriorated, and he was granted 100 percent disability. In 1996, Mr. Brannan's doctors further diagnosed him as being bipolar.

In January 1998, Mr. Brannan was stopped by Officer Kyle Dinkheller. Mr. Brannan had been driving 98 mph. The video camera in Officer Dinkheller's vehicle recorded Mr. Brannan's erratic behavior which included cursing, dancing in the street, and saying "shoot me." After a scuffle, Mr. Brannan went to his car, took out a high-powered rifle, and shot to death Officer Dinkheller. (How Mr. Brannan had access to a high-powered rifle given his mental conditions is a topic for another discussion.)

In a statement just prior to his execution January 13, Mr. Brannan said, "I extend my condolences to the Dinkheller family, especially Kyle's parents and his wife and his two children."

In response to Mr. Brannan's execution, Sister Helen Prejean posted on Facebook, "We send our young people into conflicts where they witness and experience horrors most of us will never know, and we fail to provide them with the support they need when they return home and face disability and demons as a result of those experiences. Where is our culpability in this? When do we say no to piling horror upon horror?"

George Junius Stinney, Jr. - Conviction Overturned

In 1944, George Stinney, Jr., 14, and his sister, Aime Ruffner, eight, were tending a cow grazing in a field. Two white girls came up to these young African-American children and asked about where to find some plants. Aime told them she did not know and the white girls left. Later the white girls were found dead in a

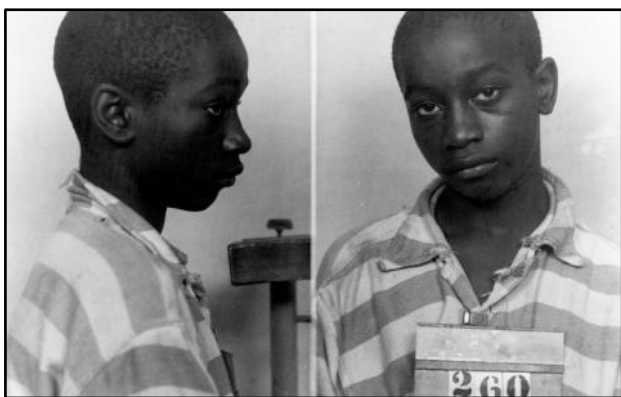
ditch, their skulls crushed by a 12-inch drift pin, a piece of metal used to hitch railroad cars together.

Without his parents' knowledge, George Stinney, Jr. was taken from his home and to jail. His trial was overseen by an all-male, all-white jury. His lawyer presented no witnesses in George's defense and barely cross-examined the states few witnesses. George was found guilty and was executed in the electric chair 53 days after his conviction.

While George Stinney, Jr. did confess, Circuit Court Judge Carmen T. Mullen said during her recent ruling on the case that George was separated from his parents, had no lawyer present, and may have been "coerced into confessing to the crimes due to the power differential between his position as a 14-year-old black male apprehended and questioned by white, uniformed law enforcement in a small, segregated mill town in South Carolina."

The family of George Stinney, Jr., is "thrilled and relieved" with this exoneration, but as Miller W. Shealy, Jr., a lawyer who helped argue this case said, "It's difficult for them to celebrate because no one's coming home and no one's getting out of prison."

Frankie Baily-Dyches, a relative of one of the murdered girls, said, "I believe he confessed. He was tried and found guilty by the laws of 1944 ... and it needs to be left as is."



George Stinney, Jr., above, was 14 years old when he was executed in the electric chair in South Carolina in 1944. He was the youngest person executed in the US in the 20th century.

Ohio Puts Executions On Hold

First, those pesky European pharmacies refused to sell the drugs US prison authorities use to execute people. They said they didn't want their drugs used to kill people, so prison authorities

decided they would use compounding pharmacies in the US to produce the lethal mix that could be injected into the death row inmates veins to kill them. This was followed by a few 'botched' executions during which the person being executed writhed - perhaps in pain - and gasped for breath. The Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections is delaying their upcoming executions during the time they need to secure their lethal drugs. The two-drug regimen of midazolam and hydromorphone will be scrapped as they add thiopental sodium to pentobarbital, a drug already used. The paperwork for this change had to be filed with US District Judge Gregory Frost 30 before Ohio's next scheduled execution on February 11. At this point, Warren Hennes and Ronald Phillips have their executions stayed. For Ohio and other death penalty states, the saying could be "Better dying through chemistry." With that said, let's remember that should Tennessee not be able to have access to lethal injection drugs, their electric chair is charged up, legal, and ready to go.

United Nations General Assembly Resolution

In December 2014, 117 countries voted to support a UN resolution calling for an international moratorium on the use of the death penalty. This is the fifth time the General Assembly has voted on this issue, starting in 2007 when 104 nations cast 'yes' votes.

The most recent resolution included an addition that focuses on the rights of foreign nationals. The 1963 Vienna Convention requires the notification of foreign nationals of their right to inform their consulate or embassy of their detention. This is important because in Southeast Asia, drug mules receive the death penalty, and some domestic workers in Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern countries are arrested and do not understand the judicial process nor the language in which the process is carried out. The International Court of Justice ruled in 2004 the US violated the 1963 Vienna Convention when authorities did not inform 51 Mexican nationals of their rights to notify the Mexican consulate of their detentions, and in 2014, Edgar Tamayo and Ramiro Hernandez, two of the Mexican nationals this ruling referred to, were executed in Texas.

The United States was among the 38 nations to vote against the UN resolution calling for a worldwide moratorium on the death penalty.

Life After Justice

What happens to people who are released from prison, especially if they were wrongfully convicted? These exonerees are not given the same re-entry services that parolees receive. Recidivism rates vary depending on the crime and can be as high as 70%. The Life After Justice Center wants to curtail these statistics to help former inmates successfully re-enter society. The founders are Antoine Day and Jarrett Adams. Mr. Day was convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced to 60 years in prison. After ten years, his sentence was overturned. Mr. Adams was released from prison more than nine years into his prison term when the 7th Circuit reversed his conviction because of ineffective assistance of counsel. To see a short video about these two men who are working to help others, go to <http://vimeo.com/90243116>.

Stays of Execution

January

7	Warren Hennes	Ohio
8	Christopher Roney	Pennsylvania
13	Mark Edwards	Pennsylvania
14	Rodney Reed	Texas (new date set)
15	Dennis Reed	Pennsylvania
15	Richard Vasquez	Texas (new date set)

Executions

December 2014

9	Robert Holsey	Georgia Lethal injection - 1-drug
10	Paul Goodwin	Missouri Lethal injection - 1-drug

January 2015

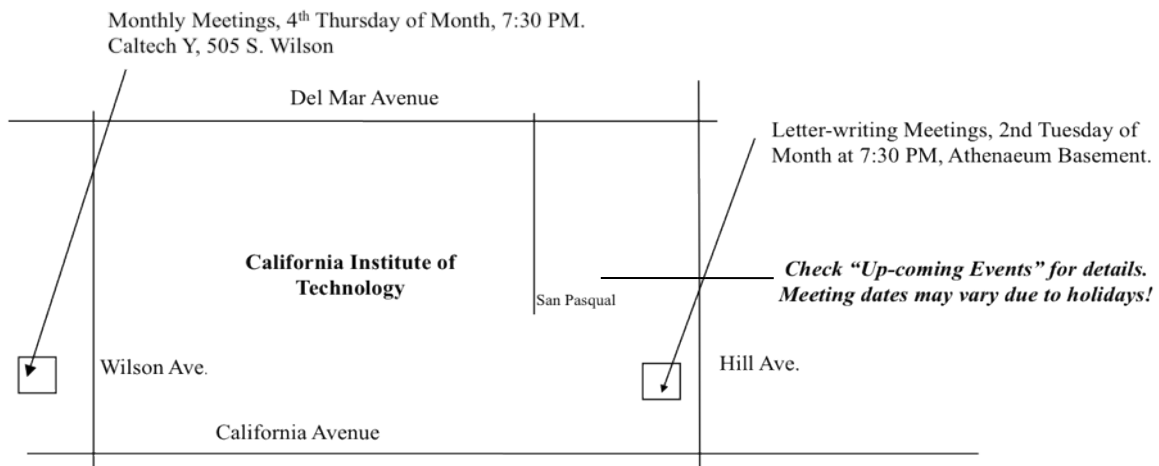
13	Andrew Brannan	Georgia Lethal injection - 1-drug
15	Johnny Kormondy	Florida Lethal injection - 3-drug
15	Charles Warner	Oklahoma Lethal injection - 3-drug

WRITE FOR RIGHTS (DECEMBER) GROUP 22 LETTER COUNT

Jorge Lázaro Nunes dos Santos	10
BRAZIL	
Liu Ping	13
CHINA	
Rampyari Bai & Safreen Khan	9
INDIA	
Moses Akatugba	10
NIGERIA	
Murad Shtwei	12
OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES	
Women & Girls of	9
EL SALVADOR	
Raif Badawi	12
SAUDI ARABIA	
Chelsea Manning	5
USA	
Darrell Cannon & Anthony Holmes	4
USA	
Hadiya Pendleton	6
(USA):	
TOTAL	90

GROUP 22 JANUARY LETTER COUNT

UAs	35
POC (thank-you card to Sen. Boxer)	1
Total	36
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
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<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.