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Nigerian authors make bold statements at the Olympics

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THE famous Theatre Royale in Stratford East, London, has since middle of last month been rechristened 'Nigeria House', hosting a variety of cultural expressions by select Nigeria artistes, including actors, craftsmen, movie producers, musicians and writers.

A central event is the Literature Showcase which featured a total of six writers over a three session held July 26th, 30th and 31st. The authors drawn from home and abroad were UK-based Diran Adebayo, Chibundu Onuzo, Ade Solanke, Nnorom Azuonye and Zainabu Jallo. Others were the 2001 and 2012 winners of the Caine Prize for African writing respectively — Helon Habila and Rotimi Babatunde.

Titled Nigeria House Literature Showcase, the event sponsored by the Bank of Industry (BOI) and produced by British Council was anchored by the Committee for Relevant Art, CORA, organisers of the quarterly Art Stampede and the yearly Lagos Book and Art Festival, LABAF.

Running from July 23 to August 15, the event aims at showcasing the best of Nigerian literature through book readings, conversations on literature and a display of a wide range of books by Nigerian authors at home and in the Diaspora.

Divided into different segments, the event saw the authors fielding questions from moderators and the members of audience, mostly Nigerians and Africans living in London. The event was also broadcast live on the popular online art affairs radio station, BubblesFm.com; and each of the sessions was anchored by different moderators, who were Mr Lookman Sanusi, a theatre artiste and CEO of the Bubbles FM; Dr. Ike Anya, a medical doctor and literary critic; and Dr. Sola Adeyemi, a London-based theatre artiste and performing arts scholar.

Speaking on their writing experiences, especially on the theme of Multiculturalism, Nnorom Azuonye, a poet and founder of Sentinel Magazine, publishers of Sentinel literature quarterly said, "the fact of living and writing in the UK has not altered his sensibility about the authentic stories of his people, especially issues that affect the social and cultural life of Nigeria. According to him, "though you hear bad stories about the country, people still fall in love; they still make babies, they still live life in the country".

Speaking on different experiences that informed their writings the authors said democracy unlike the military regime the country passed through for years has encouraged more writers to express themselves and tell the African story to the world.

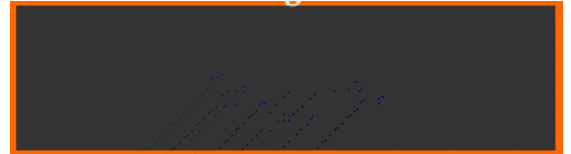
They informed that Nigerian authors are using fiction to tell the world of what is happening in their different communities.

Diran Adebayo said though he lives in London, he loves Nigeria and tries as much as possible to reflect its story and the stories of the people in his work.

In similar vein, the playwright, Ade Solanke, said even though she was born and has lived in UK all her life, she believes that Nigeria is capable of holding its own in terms of human resources and capacity to become a centre for high literary production.

The blogger and fiction writer, Chibundu Onuzo, who was recently voted the best black student in Britain, shared of Solanke's belief in Nigeria, but noted that the country needs to start getting its act together, so it can effectively tap into the resources of its youths to advance its global interest.

Commenting on his style of writing, Rotimi Babatunde, who recently won the Caine Prize for African



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writing, said, "I don't write against anybody or government, I write the way I see things; I write what I would read years after."

Taking a general view of the country's literary scene, Azuonye said, "we don't have a healthy book review tradition in Nigeria, most book reviewers in the country do not reveal anything wrong in a book, they conceal them and make you believe all about a book is positive. They do this so that they don't become a target, especially when the book in question concerns a celebrity." He stated that such attitudes are not healthy to the book industry, as reviewers are expected to tell what are bad in a book, so that, authors can learn from them and improve on their works.

The literary event is part of the activities planned to promote Nigerian arts, culture and lifestyle in the ongoing Olympic games in London.

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