

The Nigeria Prize Shortlist is Out

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Yesterday, The Advisory Board for The Nigeria Prize for Literature announced its shortlist of three for the 2021 edition. They are: *The Girl with Louding Voice* by Abi Dare, *The Son of the House* by Cheluchi Onyemelukwe-Onuobia, and *Colours of Hatred* by Obinna Udenwe — three books that are now in the running to win the \$100,000 cash prize.

The Nigeria Prize is sponsored by the Nigerian Liquefied Natural Gas (NLNG). In July, the jury of the Prize announced a shortlist of eleven out of the 202 entries submitted last year. The eleven writers include, *Delusion of Patriots* (Obianuju V. Chukwuorji) *Give Us Each Day* (Samuel Monye), *Imminent River* (Anaele Ihuoma), *In The Name of Our Father* (Olukorede S. Yishau), *Mountain of Yesterday* (Tony Nwaka) *Neglected* (Lucy Chiamaka Okwuma), *The Colours of Hatred* (Obinna Udenwa), *The Girl with The Louding Voice* (Abi Dare), *The Return of Half- Something* (Chukwudi Eze), *The Son of The House* (Cheluchi Onyemelukwe-Onuobia), *Your Church My Shrine* (Law Ikay Ezech).

Out of these eleven, the shortlist of three has now been released.

The announcement was made by the Chair of the Advisory Board, Professor Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, in a virtual conference on Zoom, which had in attendance literary journalists and other panels of judges.

Each year, the Prize Board focuses on a genre. For this year, it is prose fiction. The shortlisted novels present strong female protagonists in dynamic ways and intersect with cultural, political, and socio-economic circumstances of Nigerian society and the world at large.

This year's jury was led by Professor Olúwatóyìn Jégédé, at the Department of English, University of Ìbàdàn. Also in the panel is Professor Tanimu Abubakar, a Professor of Literature in the Faculty of Art, Ahmadu Bello University, and Dr. Solomon Azumurana, a Senior Lecturer in the Department of English at the University of Lagos. They all concede that the three novels are intriguing and take an outstanding approach to their subject. The novels "tell human and indeed universal stories of rural as

against urban life, suffering and survival, loss and redemption, decline and renaissance, destruction and reconstruction, and death and rebirth," they wrote.

The Girl with the Louding Voice revolves around the story of a girl-child, Adùnní, who is made to marry an elderly polygamous man at a vulnerable age because of poverty. The marriage becomes a means to an end. The novel thematizes early marriage, child sexual abuse, challenges of productive health, and domestic violence and so on.

The Son of the House engages the crossing of paths and what fate can bring in the world of two women: Nwabulu, a one-time housemaid and now a successful fashion designer, and Julie, an educated woman who lived through tricks, deceits, and manipulations. Their stories mutate on the backdrop of heteropatriarchy, poverty, and neglect.

The only male writer on the shortlist is Obinna Udenwe, whose book, *Colours of Hatred*, takes a confessionist angle weaving the tale around the protagonist, Leona of the Dinka tribe, who goes on to kill her father-in-law. The novel explores love, hatred, war, revenge, oppression, extra-judicial killings, military rule, displacement, and exile.

The International Consultant for this year's prize is Tsitsi Dangarembga, an acclaimed Zimbabwean author of *Nervous Conditions* (1988). She has been hailed as one of the most important novels of the twentieth century and was included in the BBC's 2018 list of the 100 books that shaped the world. Her novels, *The Book of Not* (2006) and *This Mournable Body* (2018) were longlisted for the Booker Prize 2020. Her plays have been performed at the University of Zimbabwe, and her short musical *Kare Kare Zvako*, (Mother's Day, 2005) was screened at Sundance. Her films have also received international recognition.

Other NLNG Advisory Board members are Professor Olú Ṣbáfẹmí, the 2018 recipient of the Nigerian National Order of Merit (NNOM), playwright, poet and Professor of English at the University of Ilorin, and Professor Ahmed Yerima, a professor of Theatre and Performing Arts, a playwright, theatre director, and a 2006 Laureate of The Nigeria Prize for Literature.

For more than a decade now, NLNG Prize has been the most financially rewarding African literary prize. Last year Jude Idada won the prize with his children's book, *Boom Boom*. At Olongo Africa, in the following weeks, we will showcase interviews with the shortlisted writers, as well as reviews of the shortlisted entries for the 2021 Prize. Stay tuned.