

UBUNTU 2.0 AT THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS: CELEBRATING RICH VOICES, CULTURE AND THE BLACK EXPERIENCE WITH V. OSARUMWESE, MCINERNEY, AGAPE, OMEKE, SU'EDDIE AGEMA, E. MWAMBULUKUTU AND ORAYYY

By **S. Su'eddie-Vershima Agema**

On October 12, 2023, the London School of Economics (LSE)'s GenDen halls resonated with the beats, tales, and voices of Africa, as the institution celebrated the second edition of the Ubuntu Café (Ubuntu 2.0) with the theme, 'Roots, Bridges, and Echoes: Reclaiming our Stories.' The event was a celebration of everything African and featured the amazing artistes Victory Osarumwese, Will McInerney, Chris Agape, Joshua Omeke, S. Su'eddie Vershima Agema and Elizabeth Mwambulukutu. It also marked the launch of the 'Tell Your Tale Literary Competition.'

Hosted by the Firoz Lalji Institute for Africa (FLIA), the Ubuntu Café was established in 2022 as an avenue for fostering connections amongst African students and the diaspora at LSE and those passionate about African culture. The major intent was to create an ambience that captures an informal public space where creativity, intellectual stimulation, and lively discussions find common ground. Building on this foundation, guests were ready for a stimulating experience and were not disappointed as the FLIA team, comprising Tosin Adebisi, Ivonne Olusoga, and Daniella Gutiérrez-Torres, ensured that the attendees had a memorable experience.

The event kicked off at 5:30 pm and was anchored by Orayyy, the dynamic creative who spiced the event with the right words at the best time with a sprinkling of humour, games and special dance moves. He ensured that every moment was infused with rich culture and camaraderie.

Will McInerney set the tone for the evening with an evocative performance of his poem, 'Trained by Fear' to the appreciative applause of the audience. Quickly switching from performer to host, McInerney introduced and engaged in a soulful discussion of the book, *Conversations from Last Night* with its author, Victory Osarumwese. Guided by the host, Victory took the audience through an emotive ride that detailed the journey of her book which she said had been in gestation since 2019. Her heartfelt rendition as a writer emphasised the deeply personal nature of her pulling prose and poetry. She explained that her book is written simply and from the heart, drawn from experience such that people will easily relate to it. She gave an emotional account of her writing journey. Among other excerpts, she read and performed 'London Tears', 'These Words' and 'Sorry, not Sorry', while sharing the stories behind them. Her words painted her experiences, frustrations, and the inspirations that birthed her poems.

Chris Agape, a noted PfAL alum and public health practitioner took the stage next. Attendees might have expected health insights from the afro-haired scholar but were pleasantly surprised at his unexpected crooning of the hit song, 'Never Enough' from the movie, *The Greatest Showman*. He was full of smiles as he left the stage despite the calls for an encore.

Next, the poet, Joshua Omeke came forward and read two poems, 'Flies of Wilderness' and 'A Coloured Dream' from his collection, *Joe's Collectanea*. Decked in splendid African attire, Joshua Omeke emphasised the importance of embracing one's roots. His performance, brimming with pride and elegance, was a testament to the beauty of African heritage.

Following, the multiple award-winning author and premier Black History curator at the University of Sussex, S. Su'eddie Vershima Agema performed the poem, 'A Boy Calls out for the Tribe in the Spirit of Marley' (the performative version of 'If You Were Nailed by a Bullet in Golgotha' set to excerpts

'from Bob Marley and Maya Angelou). His poem brought forth a poignant call to action with his performance, addressing systemic injustices against black individuals. His words resonated, urging for an active commitment to ensure justice for all and everyone to be their siblings' keepers. The theme seemed in line with his multiple award-winning collection, [Memory and the Call of Waters](#), which was a finalist for the \$100,000 Nigeria Prize for Literature 2022.

Elizabeth Mwambulukutu then took attendees on a trip down memory lane, sharing enchanting tales from African folklore. She not only enthralled listeners with her stories but also fostered an interactive session, inviting insights on folklore, which were eagerly shared by enthusiastic audience members.

The evening took a fashionable turn with a quick 'Best Dressed Prize' showcase that featured four of the best dressers at the event, as selected by MC Orayyy. This was followed by a closing address by Daniella Gutiérrez-Torres. However, her speech was interrupted by a heartfelt surprise – a showering of appreciation on her by the recently graduated members of PfAL from the 2022/23 batch. One by one, they shared stories of Daniella's impact, expressing how deeply she would be missed, especially with her impending departure from LSE. By the end, emotions ran high, with Daniella visibly moved, sharing warm hugs with those around.

As emotions settled, the atmosphere shifted to one of celebration. The music's tempo increased, calling everyone to indulge in a delightful spread of jollof rice, chicken, snacks, and refreshing drinks. Laughter, dance, and lively chatter filled the air as several phones clicked to new friends and acquaintances.

Ubuntu 2.0 proved to be a composition of beautiful rhythms, stories, shared experiences and a general celebration of being Black and African with an emphasis on the beauty of cultural heritages.

The event also marked the launch of the FLIA's *Tell Your Story Literary Competition* in honour of Black History Month at the London School of Economics with a focus on the Diaspora in the UK. Speaking on the Ubuntu event and the literary competition, Tosin Adebisi, Programme for African Leadership Senior Programme Manager noted thus: "LSE is devoted to promoting African art, scholarship and leadership. The Ubuntu Café is a key project that encompasses various events outside the traditional academic concerns that people know LSE for. These include poetry, film screening, cooking, and many other things. This delightful occasion of our October 2023 Ubuntu Café also marks the official start of our literary competition which will close on 31st October. We are open to prose, poetry and creative non-fiction and want to see how people can narrate their diasporan experience. It hopes to be exciting and so much fun!" Details of the competition which ends in only a few days can be found at <https://shamsrumi.org/lsebhm2023competition/>

In all, it was an event well spent and a chance that shows that there is also an awesome art edge to the London School of Economics.

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