

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

31 May 2018

“Womxn’s writing, queer stories, history and spirituality highlighted at the seventh edition of Africa Writes festival”

Africa Writes, the UK’s biggest annual African literature and book festival brought to you by the Royal African Society, returns to The British Library and Rich Mix from Friday 29 June to Sunday 1 July 2018. Bringing together over 60 of the most influential voices in contemporary writing from Africa and its diaspora, this exciting literary weekend features writers from **Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, Somaliland, Uganda, South Africa, UK, USA and Zimbabwe**, and highlights womxn and queer writers who are changing the face of African literature.

Celebrated Somali-British poet **Warsan Shire** appears on Sunday 1 July, the first writer under 30 to headline the event in the festival’s seven-year history. In her first UK public appearance since her poetry reached millions of people in Beyoncé’s visual album *Lemonade*, Shire will be in conversation about her work, process and inspiration, and will speak about her new projects that explore the intersections of art and healing. She was awarded the inaugural Brunel International African Poetry Prize in 2013 and appointed as the first Young Poet Laureate for London.

Fellow young poets **Yomi Şode** and **Octavia Poetry Collective** will appear in the festival headline events. Following sold out shows at the Roundhouse and Battersea Arts Centre, British Nigerian Yomi Şode opens the festival at the British Library with his one-man show, *COAT*, exploring themes of identity, migration and displacement while cooking up a stew live on stage (29 June).

The womxn of colour poetry group **Octavia** hosts the Africa Writes 2018 Party (30 June, Rich Mix). Taking their name from the American science fiction writer Octavia Butler and inspiration from the \$1 billion-grossing Marvel film *Black Panther*, Octavia presents a Wakanda-themed event featuring art displays, **gal-dem** DJs and a line-up of poets including **Sarah Lasoye, Victoria Adukwei Bulley, Hibaq Osman, Rachel Long, Belinda Zhawi, Amina Jama**, 2018 African Poetry Prize winners **Theresa Lola** and **Momtaza Mehri** (the 2018 Young Laureate for London). Celebrated author and long-time advocate for writers of colour **Bernardine Evaristo** will deliver a speech on ‘Warrior Womxn Writers’.

Exploring themes of identity, migration and displacement, award-winning writer **Leila Aboulela** launches her new book *Elsewhere, Home* at the British Library – a collection of intimate stories of longing and exile set between Sudan and the UK (30 June). Hit books and pop-culture podcast **Mostly Lit** host a live version of the show with **Afua Hirsch**, journalist and author of *Brit(ish): On Race, Identity and Belonging* (30 June).

Historical fiction and non-fiction is the focus on 30 June: **Ayesha Harruna Attah** launches her third novel set in 19th century Ghana, *The Hundred Wells of Salaga*, and we delve into the intriguing history of African literary figures **Phillis Wheatley** and **ABC Merriam-Labour** in Georgian and Edwardian London.

As Zimbabwe prepares for national elections in August, and the nation reconfigures following the deposition of Robert Mugabe, young writers **Panashe Chigumadzi** and **Novuyo Rosa Tshuma** launch their new books

These Bones Will Rise Again and *House of Stone*, presenting inventive new ways of telling the nation's story and discussing its future (1 July). Highlighted in these books are the interactions between the world of spirits and the self, also a feature of **Akwaeke Emezi's** highly-anticipated debut *Freshwater*. The writer presents a pre-launch of her novel that explores the *obanje* of Igbo spirituality and religion, and the metaphysics of identity and being (30 June).

Stories of queer womxn are highlighted in an event featuring narratives from Nigeria, the UK, and Equatorial Guinea, and appearances by Cassava Republic publisher **Bibi Bakare-Yusuf**, UK Black Pride Founder **Phyll Opoku-Gyimah**, and gal-dem founder **Liv Little** (1 July). Writer and activist **Trifonia Melibea Obono** will join by video link to speak about her book *La Bastarda* – the first book by an Equatoguinean woman to be translated into English.

A key aspect of the festival programme each year is inspiration, discovery and new writing. Audiences and readers can get an introduction to Cameroonian literature, read new work by young people in Uganda, hear from the festival authors on their favourite pieces of writing in African Books to Inspire, and meet the 2018 **Caine Prize** shortlisted writers (30 June - 1 July). Poets and secondary school students will present their creative writing in a free showcase event, alongside the launch of the **Africa Writes Young Voices Anthology** produced in the festival's education programme (30 June).

Looking at translation and inter-generational interaction, **Numbi Arts** will host a discussion on contemporary Somali literature with writer **Hanna Ali**, whose work explores themes of womanhood, blackness, forced migration, religion and family trauma. The **Hargeysa International Book Fair** of Somaliland is showcased in an event to launch a collection of poetry entitled *Hargeysa Breeze* (30 June).

The programme includes workshops to develop skills and encourage participation: a masterclass in literary translation presented by **Wangui wa Goro** of SIDENSI, a workshop of Afrofuturist literature art, literature and fashion presented by **FUNCTION**, and a pitching event for budding writers to meet publishing industry experts. Also included are a workshop on small magazines and African literary networks, and a discussion on podcasts – the publishing industry's single fastest growing format – with **Not Another Book Podcast**, **BakwaCast**, **2 Girls & a Pod**, and **Africa in Words**.

Festival Programmers Marcelle Mateki Akita and Caitlin Pearson said: *"We are excited to present a huge range of voices from the continent and the diaspora at the seventh edition of Africa Writes. Young people from countries with uncertain and shifting political climates such as Zimbabwe, Somalia, Uganda and Kenya are writing some of the most inventive and exciting fiction around at the moment. In an apparent new era of insularity and hardening borders, we look at both the history and the present of what it means to belong in Britain, and through books, poetry and performance we celebrate Africa and the diaspora in its fullest sense"*

Audiences can also enjoy family storytelling events, a lively atmosphere and an international book fair with classics, recent publications and rare finds. All tickets are now available to book at bit.ly/AW2018Tickets.

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Press Accreditation is now open [via this link](#).

For Images, Logos and Artist Bios, [Download the Press Pack](#) on Dropbox.

Follow us on **Twitter** and **Instagram** [@AfricaWritesUK](#) and **Facebook** [#AfricaWrites2018](#)

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Notes to Editors:

- 1. Africa Writes** festival is an annual celebration of contemporary literature from Africa and the diaspora brought to you by The Royal African Society. Launched in 2012, every year Africa Writes showcases established and emerging talent from the African continent and its diaspora in what is now the UK's biggest celebration of contemporary African writing. www.africawrites.org
- 2. The Royal African Society** is a membership organisation that provides opportunities for people to connect, celebrate and engage critically with a wide range of topics and ideas about Africa today. Through our events, publications and digital channels we facilitate mutual understanding between the UK and Africa across academia, business, politics, culture and education. We amplify African voices and interests, reaching a network of more than one million people globally. www.royalafricansociety.org.uk
- 3. The British Library** is the national library of the United Kingdom and one of the world's greatest research libraries. It provides world class information services to the academic, business, research and scientific communities and offers unparalleled access to the world's largest and most comprehensive research collection. www.bl.uk
- 4. Rich Mix** is East London's independent arts venue, based in the heart of one of the most diverse and vibrant parts of London – Shoreditch / Bethnal Green. Rich Mix is a charity and social enterprise that offers over 600 events each year across live music, film, dance, theatre, comedy, spoken word and a range of creative activities for people of all ages and all cultures. All profits go back to support arts and community activities which nurture new and local talent. www.richmix.org.uk
- 5. Africa Writes 2018** is made possible through the financial support of Arts Council England and the Miles Morland Foundation, and the partnership of these institutions and organisations: AFREADA, Africa in Words, Afrikult., Bakwa Magazine, bookshy, Brittle Paper, Department of English, University of Bristol, Enkare Review, FUNCTION, Hargeysa International Book Fair, Mostly Lit, Numbi Arts, Octavia Poetry Collective, SIDENSI, The Caine Prize for African Writing, The Literary Consultancy, Writivism, Africa Book Centre, Atlantic Books, Cassava Republic, Faber & Faber, Hurst, Market FiftyFour, New Beacon Books, Saqi Books, Team Angelica, The Indigo Press, October Gallery, Alt. Africa, gal-dem, Granta, Bare Lit Festival, Centre of African Studies, University of London.
- 6. Confirmed Line up:** Warsan Shire, Yomi Şode, Leila Aboulela, Afua Hirsch, Akwaeke Emezi, Novuyo Rosa Tshuma, Panashe Chigumadzi, Ayesha Harruna Attah, Chike Frankie Edozien, Trifonia Melibea Obono, Sarah Lasoye, Victoria Adukwei Bulley, Hibaq Osman, Rachel Long, Belinda Zhawi, Amina Jama, Theresa Lola, Momtaza Mehri, Bernardine Evaristo, Kinsi Abdullah, Nancy Adimora, Hanna Ali, Dfiza Appeah, Bibi Bakare-Yusuf, Joanna Brown, Candice Carty-Williams, Emma Dabiri, Nonyelum Ekwempu, FUNCTION, John Gordon, Stacy Hardy, Jama Musse Jama, Danell Jones, Maria Kakinda, Madhu Krishnan, Mostly Lit, Liv Little, Sharmaine Lovegrove, Dzekashu Macviban, S.I. Martin, Layla Mohamed, Zaahida Nabagereka, Ziki Nelson, Zahrah Nesbitt-Ahmed, JC Niala, Irenosen Okojie, Olufunke Ogundimu, Makena Onjerika, Troy Onyango, Phyll Opoku-Gyimah, Martin Orwin, Not Another Book Podcast, Deirdre Osborne, Christopher Ouma, Ranka Primorac, Farrah Serroukh, Ade Solanke, Wole Talabi, Wangui wa Goro, Kate Wallis and 2 Girls & a Pod.

Listing Information**FESTIVAL (Adults and family)****Africa Writes 2018****Friday 29 June, 20:00 – Sunday 1 July, 19:30**The British Library, 96 Euston Rd, London NW1 2DB www.bl.uk

Nearest tube: King's Cross

Party at Rich Mix, 35-47 Bethnal Green Rd, London E1 6LA www.richmix.org.uk

Nearest tube: Liverpool Street / Old Street

Ticketed headline events & day passes £8 - £18

Festival website: africawrites.orgTicket booking link: bit.ly/AW2018Tickets

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Warsan Shire in Conversation**Part of Africa Writes 2018****Sunday 1 July, 17:30 – 18:45, The British Library****Ticket Price: £15 - £10**Ticket booking link: www.bl.uk/events/warsan-shire-in-conversation**Yomi Sode's COAT****Part of Africa Writes 2018****Friday 29 June, 20:00 – 21:00 (doors at 19:30), The British Library****Ticket Price: £12 - £8**Ticket booking link: www.bl.uk/events/coat**Octavia Poetry Collective presents: Africa Writes Party 2018. The Year of the Womxn****Part of Africa Writes 2018****Saturday 30 June, 20:00 – 00:30, Rich Mix****Ticket Price: £10 - £8**Ticket booking link: <http://bit.ly/OctaviaAfricaWrites>