

The Reset: History and the Darkling Plain

The theme of 2023 *Lagos Book & Art Festival, LABAF*, is *The Reset: History and the Darkling Plain*.

The event runs from Monday November 13 to Sunday November 19, 2023.

This thematic guide illuminates our choice of books and the discussions at the 25th annual edition of the country's longest running Literary Festival.

With *The Reset*, LABAF continues the debate around the national question through reviews and discussions of selected books that speak to the theme. The basic tenet is that a nation is imagined at the level of ideas, before it is physically constructed.

The conversations at every LABAF since 2005 have been a set of reviews of arguments about the nation building project and the current status of our collective humanity.

LABAF started in 1999, the year of Nigeria's return to democracy, but it was in 2005, at the 7th edition, for which we chose the theme: *Narrations of Survival*, that we began to purposefully set a theme around which the festival-long conversations would coalesce.

In the last five years however, every theme has been a takeoff, or a riff off the prior year's theme.

In 2020, we examined the nation/the world in a state of flux, a period of languor, so the theme was *A State of Flux*.

In 2021, we (the nation/the planet) had left the state of flux, but we were at a crossroad. So, the festival chose: *A Fork in the Road*.

In 2022, we were glimpsing 2023, a year in which we would go for elections. What better way to prepare everyone's mind for the choices to be made at the polls, than examine the kind of future we wanted for ourselves? LABAF's 2022 theme was thus "*Pathways to the Future*".

2023...

NOW we have a newly elected government which has taken over an estate nearing a Failed state. The world abroad is in a bigger turmoil than the one that greeted

Donald Trump in 2016. To get a grip on how we can reclaim our country, we have to examine where we are coming from.

It is those historical texts that we hope to engage more at the 2023 feast. LABAF 2023 seeks to engage with the past, learn and relearn from it and organize the future. That is why we chose the theme *The Reset: History and the Darkling Plain*.

The word is a much darker plain than Ken Saro-Wiwa glimpsed when he wrote *On A Darkling Plain*, an extended argument against the Biafra war, one of the few texts about the war from the perspective of a minority.

By gifting the Festival its theme, the book becomes one of the 15 books of LABAF 2023

Other books that will be discussed in the course of the seven days include

FICTION

- *SARO*, by Nike Campbell
- *Little Suns*, by Zakes Mda
- *Dust Child*, by Nguyễn Phan Quế Mai

NON-FICTION

- *A Measure of Grace*, by Akin Mabogunje
- *I'm Still with You*, by Emmanuel Iduma
- *Then Spoke the Thunder*, by Peter Enahoro
- *The New Map*, by Daniel Yergin
- *A Shred of Fear*, by Uche Nwokedi
- *An African Abroad*, by Olabisi Ajala
- *On a Darkling Plain*, by Ken Saro Wiwa
- *My Odyssey*, by Nnamdi Azikiwe

There are scores of other new titles that would also feature in the *CORA BookTrek* sessions that would be staged every day of the festival. The *Green Festival* segment dedicated to students and youths will also feature books by children/young authors and children literature writers.

About LABAF

A comprehensive 7-day Cultural Picnic, featuring literary campaign activities that include: Reading Sessions, Conversation around Books, Books Exhibition, Workshops on Art and Crafts, Live Music, Drama and Dance performances. The first three days of the festival feature strictly literary arts activities, including: BookTreks, Publishers' Forum, Writers' workshop and such other engagement with students and youths. Overall, LABAF is a carnivalesque atmosphere created to make Books and the Arts look Cool, while celebrating Ideas and Life in general.

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