

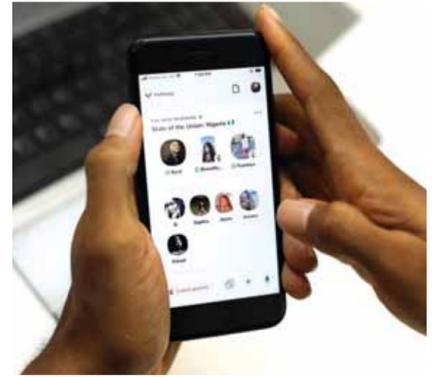
Lifestyle | Features



In this file photo a protester displays a banner during a demonstration to press for the scrapping of Special Ant-Robbery Squad (SARS) on Lagos - Ibadan expressway, a major link from Lagos to other parts of the country blocked by the protesters. — AFP photos



Basil Abia, Organizer of New Nigeria Movement gestures during a state of the union meeting with other Nigerians via Clubhouse application.



Basil Abia, Organizer of New Nigeria Movement prepares for a state of the union meeting with other Nigerians via Clubhouse application.

BEING NIGERIAN 101: SOCIAL MEDIA GROUP DEBATES IDENTITY

What does it mean to be Nigerian? In a country of 210 million inhabitants with more than 500 native languages and hundreds of ethnicities that was colonized by the Portuguese and the British, identity can be a daunting question. But using the power of social media, two activists have decided to take it on through a forum called The New Nigerian. Hosted on the platform Clubhouse, the group's 45,000 members can join chatrooms on languages and culture, politics and citizenship, pop culture, technology and well-being. Its creators say the goal is to help subscribers "relearn to be Nigerian".

"Like in a lot of 'Black countries', many people don't know their history and their culture," says Lola Adele-Oso who co-founded the forum with Eniola Mafe. A former activist with the movement to release schoolgirls kidnapped by Boko Haram, Adele-Oso runs a lifestyle brand that promotes everything from apparel to small-group travel. "Who are we? Who are our heroes?" she says. "As citizens, we can't

become a better version of ourselves if we don't know where we come from."

'Indifference not an option'

The inspiration for The New Nigerian came during last October's #EndSARS protest movement against brutality by the country's SARS-or Special Anti-Robbery Squad. The protests that followed broadened to a larger call for reform and were the largest in modern Nigerian history before security forces cracked down on demonstrators. A former activist, Mafe's work in technology and sustainability requires her to travel between Geneva and Lagos. "I was in Geneva at the time, my eyes on Twitter, my ears on Clubhouse," says Mafe, "Within the diaspora, we were trying to know what's going on, debunking fake news, organize donations."

"It became soon evident that we could use this platform as a tool. We decided to keep the momentum." The "Lekki killing" of October 20, 2020, when the army opened fire on protesters, marked a brutal

end to popular #EndSARS protests in the streets and also on the Internet. But for Mafe and Adele-Oso, it also became the moment to start awakening consciences with civic and political engagement. "Being politically indifferent is not an option anymore," Mafe says. Within days of being created, The New Nigerian gathered thousands of subscribers, becoming one of the fastest growing communities on Clubhouse.

A platform for live audio content that reports some 10 million weekly active users, Clubhouse lets people create, participate in or just listen to discussions on all kinds of topics. The New Nigerian's subscribers log on to discuss current affairs and life in Africa's most populous country. But the group's chatrooms also host courses on history, Nigeria's different languages, local philosophers and debates on myths from Yoruba culture.

While many of the participants are from the south of Nigeria, the founders say the platform promotes a sense of unity in a country where ethnic and separatist ten-

sions always simmer close to the surface. Some hardliners in southern states have been calling for more independence or even a breakaway for their regions. Mafe describes a "New Nigerian" who is able to embody diverse points of view. "They are very progressive in terms of gender or sexual orientation," says Mafe. "We want to include everyone and we will never be tribalistic. Never."

'Hungry for knowledge'

Basil Abia is a 26-year-old political researcher and New Nigerian member who organizes four weekly chatrooms on current affairs topics and Nigerian history. With fellow researchers or invited specialists, they discuss the slave trade and decolonization, but also the heritage of the great Edo kingdoms or the Sultans of Sokoto. The talks draw up to 200 listeners from Nigeria and around the world. "Nigerians are hungry for this knowledge. Sometimes we start at 11pm until 7am! But I have to say... I love talking!" he says. Abia says he was beaten by police during

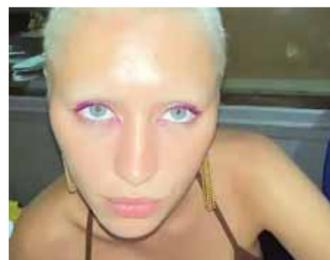
last October's protests. Like Mafe and Adele-Oso, he also identifies the #EndSARS movement as a turning point he says pushed people to take an interest in politics.

"You have to understand the political establishment, the social contract, the principle of justice and human rights, to know who you want as a leader," he says. Since the protests, and with the country's economy hit hard by the pandemic and spiralling inflation, Abia says some middle and upper-class Nigerians have left to live in Dubai, Ghana, Great Britain, the US or Canada. President Muhammadu Buhari's recent Twitter ban dealt a serious blow to freedom of expression and access to information, further discouraging Nigeria's hyper-connected youth. But Abia has decided to stay and help build the new Nigeria of which he dreams and discusses daily. "I dedicated my life, my skills, my education to this country," he says. "I will stay here till I die." — AFP



Iris Law 'loves' her new blonde buzzcut

The 20-year-old actress admitted her long locks were always a "deciding factor" in how good she felt about herself but after undergoing a radical transformation for her role as Soo Catwoman in upcoming TV show 'Pistols', she no longer has to worry about her appearance. She told British Vogue: "I had a lot of hair - it was very light and fluffy - and it would always be the deciding factor on whether I felt good or not. I just love it like this. "I don't need a hairstylist when I get ready. Bleach it and then it's ready! "It definitely reduces the time it takes to get ready, especially when I'm seeing my friends; I don't have to be in a hurry and, like, scrape my hair back!" Iris only decided to go blonde to hide the botched attempts she'd made at shaving her hair, so she's keen to improve her skills to do it herself in the future. She said: "I've had people bleach my hair and I've done it with my agent because he bleaches his hair as well, so we did it together. But I tried to shave my head



myself and I shaved a huge chunk out, so that's initially why I went to blonde - to hide the chunk I took out! "So I haven't tried to do anything myself since then. I would like to teach myself because there's something empowering about being able to if I'm on holiday or traveling." Iris walked the red carpet at the Cannes Film Festival premiere of 'The French Dispatch' on Monday and was delighted with how her hair complemented her white Christian Dior dress. She said: "This was the first look I tried on and it really stood out. Straight away I knew I wanted to wear it. It's a really beautiful, simple dress, with layered, pleated chiffon. It's chic and classic but it has an interesting twist at the neckline. "I really liked the dress because it's chic and classic. This is my first month being blonde and I love it with the creamy white dress." — Bang Showbiz

King bans unvaccinated relatives from Thanksgiving vacation

Gayle King plans to "ban" unvaccinated relatives from her Thanksgiving celebrations. The 66-year-old presenter addressed the "problem" of people not taking up coronavirus vaccinations so she's decided to take drastic action with her own family in the hope it will make them change their mind. Speaking to Dr. Anthony Fauci, President Joe Biden's chief medical adviser, on 'CBS This Morning', she said: "I don't know how many more times you can say to people, 'Listen, it will save your life'. "I have this problem with some members of my own family, which I'm now going to ban for Thanksgiving vacation. That's how strongly I'm taking what you're saying." The infectious diseases expert had appeared on the show on Monday to discuss the importance of getting the vaccine, particularly in the face of the highly-contagious Delta variant. He said: "We really to get more people vaccinated because that's the solution. This virus will, in fact, be protected against, with the vaccine." Gayle previously admitted having the vaccine had given her her freedom back because she'd spent the last year "so afraid" to leave the house in case she contracted COVID-19. She said: "I was so afraid to leave the house. We were broadcasting from here, so I'd literally go from my bedroom to the TV room to the kitchen to the bedroom to the TV room. For excitement I'd go stand in the living room and wave at the birds! 'Hi, birds! Hi!' I was so afraid. "But now I am vaccinated. It is my superpower. I am vaccinated. ... I'm taking little baby steps [back into the world]." And the broadcaster admitted she had grown "tired of being scared" and hiding away from the world. She said: "Here's the thing: I'm tired of being scared. Honestly, I've been so afraid, hunkered down here at home. I'm tired of being scared." — Bang Showbiz



Willow Smith gets 'super excited' by face wash

The 20-year-old singer has a "pretty simple" skin care regime but loves trying out new products and incorporating them into her daily routine. She told Allure: "I have a pretty simple skin-care routine, but I love different products. I get super excited when I get a new face cleanser. Recently, I've been exploring way more with face and lip masks. "The lip masks are really new for me, because I'd never used them before this year. That's a new addition to my skin-care routine. "[I Love Dr. Jart+]. The moisturizing face masks are my everything. I've been implementing that into my skin-care routine at least twice a week." The Anxiety frontwoman was introduced to fragrance at a

young age by her mother, Jada Pinkett Smith, who she hailed a "perfume genius" because of her ability to mix her own scents. She said: "My mom was a huge perfume fan. A perfume genius, no pun intended. (Shout-out, Perfume Genius, you're awesome, I love your music.) "Anyway, [my mom] would mix essential oils and make her own perfumes. I remember being young and smelling her and thinking, 'What's the mixture today? Peppermint and clove? Nag champa and chamomile? That was a source of joy for me as a kid." The 'Whip My Hair' singer is the new face of Alien Goddess and she was thrilled to work with Thierry Mugler because of the history of the brand. She said: "I had seen some old photos and videos of fashion shows from Mugler in the past - it was just fire. Even then, they were innovating and doing such unique and different things. "The name feels cosmic and spacey, but the scent is so floral, warm, and earthy, it has both of these extremes. [Plus] the name is Alien Goddess. I so relate to that." — Bang Showbiz

In from the cold: Nordic cinema breezes into Cannes

Nordic movies are among the hottest properties at Cannes this year, bringing their understated cool to the world's top film festival. On its first full day, Cannes fell head over heels for a Norwegian romantic drama, "The Worst Person in the World", the early favorite for its top prize, the Palme d'Or. Previously unknown lead Renate Reinsve "takes off like a rocket" in the quirky romantic drama, gushed one critic. While Joachim Trier's "gloriously sweet" story almost passes for fast-paced, other Nordic offerings require a bit more work before yielding their subtle pleasures, especially to viewers stepping into the cinemas from the hot and hectic bustle of the Cannes circus.

'Mild, tender'

"The Nordics have a mild, tender gaze on the world. It's very discreet," said Sofia Norlin, a Paris-based Swedish director who also writes for film magazine Point of View. "It's like a door that opens slowly to cast light on the shadows, and on the faultlines of life. It's very smooth," she told AFP. Finnish director Juho Kuosmanen, whose "Compartment No 6" is also vying for Cannes' top prize admits that his minimalist style risks slipping below the radar of viewers as they watch a slow train rumbling north in snowbound post-Soviet Russia.

"I worry whether people get those nuances, but if I exaggerated those feelings, the humor and the sadness, then it wouldn't be my film," he told AFP. "I feel I'm always putting on the soft pedal, always doing less, and even less." Nothing much happens at first in the Arctic trip bringing together a Finnish wannabe archaeologist and a rough-and-ready Russian worker who travel from Moscow to "that shithole" Murmansk, as the Russian calls it. "You need to get on the wavelength first, but then you start to see the details," Kuosmanen said. "It's a film

full of love and good humor, but most of it happens at the end. You can't have light without the darkness."

'We're not that loud'

Another slow-moving Cannes movie, Icelandic entry "Lamb" by Valdimar Johannsson, brings sumptuous landscapes into the equation in a tale of a couple in a remote corner of Iceland grieving for the loss of a child, and who get a wondrous second chance at parenthood. It's another slow burner, starring Noomi Rapace, more than a decade after the Swedish actress achieved world fame as the badass hacker Lisbeth Salander in the "Millennium" trilogy.

"We're quite minimalistic, we're not that loud," Rapace told AFP. "I'm loud, but I'm the exception," she laughed. Emmy winner Rapace regularly plays in big productions, which include Ridley Scott's "Prometheus" and Guy Ritchie's "Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows", but regularly returns to Scandinavia to shoot arty, independent films, such as "Lamb" in which she plays an Icelandic-speaking character for the first time. "I feel like there's a great wave of amazing film-makers now in Scandinavia," she said. "It feels like a movement, an earthquake. There's a kind of contagious bravery that's spreading."

Mia Hansen-Love displayed a different kind of bravery with her decision to take her French director's eye to the remote Swedish island of Faro for her main competition entry "Bergman Island". The rugged windswept scenery where Ingmar Bergman produced several of his films is not just the backdrop for the story around a couple of film directors looking for inspiration, but a discreet character in its own right. "In that sense, Mia Hansen-Love adopts some of the Scandinavian style of cinema," said Norlin. —AFP



(From left) Finnish actress Seidi Haarla, Finnish director Juho Kuosmanen, Russian actor Yuri Borisov, Russian actress Dinara Drukarova, Finnish actor Tomi Alatalo and Finnish producer Jussi Rantamaki pose as they arrive for the screening of the film 'Hytti No6' (Compartment No6) at the 74th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France. — AFP