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James Murua's Literature Blog

EXPLORING AFRICAN LITERATURE



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with James Murua

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Frankfurt Book Fair 2018: African Book Fairs and Literary Festivals. #FBF18

📅 October 12, 2018 💬 2 Comments

👤 Corinne Fleury Dr Ibrahima Moctala Lô Dr Jama Musse Jama Dr Madhu Krishnan Elliot Agyare Frankfurt Book Fair Frankfurt Book Fair 2018 Olatoun Gabi Williams Ruth Kumpmann

African Book Fairs and Literary Festivals #FBF2018 were a topic of discussion at the African pavilion at the Frankfurt Book Fair 2018 on October 11, 2018. Making contributions were Dr Madhu Krishnan, Dr Jama Musse Jama, Dr Ibrahima Moctala Lô,

Ruth Kumpmann, and Corinne Fleury. They were moderated by Olatoun Gabi Williams.

The African Pavilion at the Frankfurt Book Fair 2018 hosted a panel to discuss asserting and connecting identities. The specific topic of focus was African book fairs and literary festivals with panelists moderated by Olatoun Gabi Williams who was here with her Borders Literature for All Nations hat. Williams knows a helluva lot about the scene which is why she was qualified to run this panel. Here are my notes from this panel.

Ruth Kumpmann, Frankfurt Book Fair.

Ruth Kumpmann was on the panel to show what the Frankfurt Book Fair had been doing to support African publishing at their book fair. This began in 1980 when the fair's country focus was "Black Africa" which represented the whole of the African continent south of the Sahara. After this experiment, they founded the society for the promotion of African, Asian, and Latin American publishers known as Litprom.

They would also work with African based book fairs especially the Zimbabwe International Book Fair which hosted a publishers indaba. When that fair lost its lustre, they partnered with South African publishers to set up the Cape Town Book Fair in 2006 to fill the gap left by the discontinuation of the Zimbabwean fair. While the partnership was initially successful, the South Africans were more interested in your typical book fair and less on the publishers meeting side. The partnership would eventually be abandoned.

Since 1980, there have been 200 publishers that have featured at the Frankfurt Book Fair. This year, the fair would host 24 publishers from 19 African nations.

Corine Fleury, Foire du livre de jeunesse de Maurice, Mauritius.

Corine Fleury was there to talk about the festival Foire du livre de jeunesse de Maurice, Mauritius which in English is the Mauritius children's book festival. In Mauritius, there was a festival (called the International Confluences Book Fair) that was extremely popular in 2013 and 2014 (check out our coverage [here](#)). Unfortunately for the publishing industry, there was a change of government and the new leadership decided to

abandon the fair to their shock. For three years there was no major literary event and Fleury decided to set up a festival for kids with minimal funds. The festival which happened from September 15-16 this year had 2,000 people attend which was not bad for the country of 1.2 million.

The best part for the event organisers was that those who attended the festival got to know the local writers, publishers and illustrators. This was encouraging as before the event, most of the public in Mauritius only knew about the foreign writers.

Dr Madhu Krishnan, Writivism, Uganda.

Dr Madhu Krishnan who is with the Writivism Festival spoke about the need to distinguish between book fairs and literary festivals. She stated that literary festivals which are public facing are distinct from book fairs which was industry specific.

Elliot Agyare, Ghana International Book Fair, Ghana.

Elliot Agyare is the President of the Ghana Book Publishers Association and a mover at the Ghana International Book Fair. He started his presentation quoting the legendary Chinua Achebe, "A man who calls his kinsmen to a feast does not do so to save them from starving. They all have food in their own homes. When we gather together in the moonlit village ground it is not because of the moon. Every man can see it in his own compound. We come together because it is good for kinsmen to do so." This quote was the one that he would see as referring to a book fair which is about people meeting.

The Ghana International Book Fair was started in the 1970s with the support of the Ministry of Education and the minister's support. After the ministry ended its support, the fair lost its gloss. The Ghana publishers had to relook at the fair idea especially after the Zimbabwe Indaba was no more.

With the new fair, Agyare and his team moved the event from the national theatre to a convention centre which was a risk as this would significantly increase their costs for venue. They invited exhibitors from all over the continent and they would have 18 of them at the most recent edition. Apart from exhibiting books for sale, participants were also given training on various topics to build capacity.

Dr Jama Musse Jama, Hargeysa International Book Fair, Somaliland.

Dr Jama Musse Jama made his presentation starting with a preamble of the many tsunamis that Africans had been suffering in slave trade, colonialism, corrupt leaders and more. Added to these in some states was terrorism and war making some live in post conflict societies.

He founded the Hargeysa International Book Fair in 2008 and at the time people were concerned that the country was still suffering from the post conflict period. He and his team felt that this was the thing that they could contribute.

When the festival started in 2008, there were 2,000 participants, at the most recent run had over 10,000 showing up showing that the festival was set up at the right time. The festival was also there at the period when many more books started being produced by Somali writers.

Dr Ibrahima Moctala Lô, Foire Internationale du Livre et du Matériel Didactique de Dakar, Senegal.

The final presentation was made in French by Dr Ibrahima Moctala Lô which was a mite disconcerting as before this time all the speakers were presenting in English. A young woman was quickly asked to perform the role of translator and she would do a pretty decent job if you consider that she hadn't known she would be doing this. Dr Lô explained that the Foire Internationale du Livre et du Matériel Didactique de Dakar also known as the Fildak which happens in Dakar started 33 years ago. The festival organised every two years by the ministry of culture is meant to create a favourable climate for the publishing industry. It is not the only festival that happens in the West African country.

The most recent running of the Fildak was in 2017 where an expo with 56 exhibitors featuring. The guest country who was to be Congo but they backed out at the last possible moment and they had to find a replacement. That space was taken up by the Islamic League. The fair had "books youth and the economy" as the theme and hosted seminars around future of the library.

While Dr Lô had a lot more to share, he would be cut off by the panel moderator because of time running out. This was always

likely to happen as there were presentations to be made by six people and there was only an hour to make it happen. It didn't help that the presentation that was last was the only one in French meaning it could look like the person was cut off because of the language he was speaking.

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1.  **Borders** says:

October 19, 2018 at 10:47 pm

Thank you very much for this generous report, James!



James Murua says:

October 21, 2018 at 12:40 am

It was my pleasure.

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