

AFRICA AT FRANKFURT BOOK FAIR AND FRANKFURT BOOK FAIR IN AFRICA 1980 - 2018.

Review by Ruth Kumpmann for Pavillion Lettres d'Afrique, FBF 2018



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Start 1980: Focus Swarzafrika/Black Africa

Peter Weidhaas was the Frankfurt Book Fair director (1973-ca 2000).

In the preface of the Catalogue Africana of the International Exhibition on Africa he said: no more books about Africa written by non-Africans, but new African books written by African authors themselves.

The *Focus on Black Africa* at the 32nd Frankfurt Book Fair in 1980 was a big success. Many African writers, publishers, journalists and institutions were involved as well as European ones.

Also in 1980 and directly linked to that, was the foundation of the society with the long name: **Society for the Promotion of African, Asian and Latin America Literature**. Today in short: **Lit Prom** (Literature Promotion)

Peter Weidhaas was one of the initiators. Since then the society, Lit Prom, has been closely connected to FBF. The FBF director is always on the board of Lit Prom. We work very closely together on different projects.

Lit Prom is functioning in Germany, Austria, Switzerland as a not-for-profit literary agency. It organizes the translation fund for the Foreign Ministry, a book club, a

magazine and a newsletter. It also organises events and maintains a database with fiction titles translated into German from all these countries.

Peter Ripken was for many years its director and he is very well known for his expertise in African literature and the book markets. He organized a campaign called *Africanissimo* to promote African literature in the German speaking areas of Europe. Initiated together with the *Deutsche Welthungerhilfe*, it worked together with around 30 organizations/groups and 12 publishers specializing in books from and on Africa. *Africanissimo* was backed by the Commission of the European Union, the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development and several church organizations. Launched in March 1997 in Leipzig, it pursued activities for more than three years: PR material (posters, magazines) reading tours with African authors from 1997 to 2002; up to 130 readings every year with 12 authors in 1997. 4 exhibitions were held on Amaodou Hampate Ba, Chenjerai Hove/Zimbabwe, Griots/Storytellers in Guinea: history and stories in an introduction to African Literatures. Workshops were delivered for booksellers. Materials were given to teachers.

I had the honor of coordinating this *Africanissimo* campaign. Iija Trojanow and Hermann Schiz were very much involved. Some of you may know them.

Long before that in the mid-sixties, the FBF started the so called Invitation Programme. Each year a group of small publishers from Asia, Africa, Latin America and both Central and Eastern Europe are invited to exhibit at FBF. The Invitation Programme makes it possible for publishers who would normally not have this opportunity to introduce themselves at the industry's biggest get-together in Frankfurt. Among these invited publishers each year we have normally 4 publishers from different African countries. Or we invite a representative institution like APNET which we have been able to invite for several years as an exception in order to present more African publishers. Over the years, around 2000 African publishers have displayed their titles in Frankfurt. And as the rights business was mentioned earlier- I would like to mention that all invitees get a seminar on international publishing including the rights business.

And we have exhibitors from African countries at Frankfurt nearly every year from, South Africa (a collective stand)and Nigeria and Ghana and sometimes (but rarely) from one to two other countries.

As we are speaking about book fairs we cannot forget the ambitious Zimbabwe International Book Fair. The Frankfurt Book Fair organized a German collective stand there for some years in the nineties and at the beginning of 2000. See the [Africana Catalogue!](#)

Unfortunately the ZIBF lost its importance and Frankfurt Book Fair looked for a possibility to change this engagement and go even deeper. We found a good partner in the PASA (South African Publishers Association) and founded the Cape Town Book

Fair together as a joint venture. The first fair was held in 2006. Our aim was to have a Pan-African consumer and professional fair. We were still involved in 2010 – but as the South African publishers didn't want a Pan-African professional fair – we exited this business. The publishers wanted to focus on a big consumer fair.

The very well established *Peace Prize of the Börsenverein* was awarded to Chinua Achebe in 2002. This was the second time it would be awarded to an African writer after Leopold Sedar Senghor in 1968.

In 2013 Lit Prom organized its yearly literature festival in Frankfurt under the focus *Afrikanissimo*.

In 2017 the Guest of Honour, France, was not only focused on France: its outreach and motto was the **Francophonie**. This was of course a great possibility for African countries. A French invitation programme enabled around 20 francophone African publishers to come to Frankfurt last year. The best news is that we have them here also this year!

Altogether 34 publishers from 19 African countries are in Frankfurt this year – the biggest presence since 1980!

And the situation is even better this year: we have the **first African Pavillion** here where we are currently seated. And a curated programme (thanks to Raphaël Thierry) – focusing on professional topics and literature as well.

Altogether around 30 events on African topics on 4 different stages!!!

You can see it as a signal in this connection that the opening press conference of FBF which took place this Tuesday saw the award-winning Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie as guest speaker.

We really hope this is a new start for a big and important African presence in Frankfurt! And more book fairs and literature events to come up in African countries.

Thank you,

Ruth Kumpmann, October 2018
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Frankfurt Book Fair