

# BELLAGIO PUBLISHING NETWORK NEWSLETTER

An occasional publication concerning publishing and book development

Number 29

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*The Bellagio Publishing Network is an informal association of organisations dedicated to strengthening indigenous publishing and book development in Africa. The group includes publishers, donor organisations from both government and private voluntary sectors, and others who are concerned with books and publishing. This newsletter covers news of the Network and perspectives on publishing and book development.*

## News and Reports on Publishing

- 2 Editorial  
By Katherine Salahi
- 3 Reclaiming our own voices: the first international conference on Caribbean publishing  
By Jeremy Taylor
- 4 5th Kinshasa Book Fair  
By Corneille Monoko
- 6 Strengthening biomedical publishing in developing countries  
By Sulaiman Adebowale
- 7 *African Journal of Reproductive Health: development, challenges and prospects*  
By James Falaiye
- 8 Benchmark cultural work on Ifa wins 2001 Noma Award
- 9 5th IPA Copyright Conference to be held in Ghana

## Perspectives and Commentary

- 10 Cyprian Ekwensi  
By Charles Larson
- 12 What Cyprian Ekwensi meant to me  
By Kole Omotoso

## Departments

- 13 Review
- 14 New publications

## Editorial

Katherine Salahi

*Katherine Salahi is Co-ordinator, Bellagio Publishing Network*

‘You should have seen the delegates dancing the night away in the mud!’, said Ian Randle, founding President of the Caribbean Publishers Network (CAPNET). ‘And still they all turned up promptly the following morning for the workshops.’ As Jeremy Taylor’s report so vividly describes, the first CAPNET conference was a lively and truly pan-Caribbean affair which gave real impetus to CAPNET’s avowed aims of strengthening indigenous publishing in the region. The long list of ‘crucial areas for urgent action’ within the next three years underlines how much this network has to achieve, and how timely is its existence. The fact that so many delegates turned up in spite of the hurricane, and more especially in spite of the region’s history of fragmentation by colonial history and language, bears eloquent testimony to the perceived need for intra-regional co-operation as the way forward. It is also testimony to the sheer hard work of CAPNET’s founding team.

The choice of CAPNET’s conference title – ‘Reclaiming our own voices’ – resonates with the aims and aspirations of so many African as well as Caribbean publishers. Corneille Monoko sat quietly shaking his head at a meeting in Brazil while another speaker made the assumption publicly that the Democratic Republic of Congo was a country without books, never mind publishers. As Director of Kinshasa’s 5th Book Fair Monoko had hot-footed it from Kinshasa to Salvador-Bahia as one event ended and the other began. There is much to be done to improve book provision and the publishing industry in Congo, Monoko agreed. But locally published books do exist, published by Congolese publishers; 450 titles in 2001, all deposited in the National Library. In other words, in spite of the terrible conflict, writers continue to write, publishers publish, booksellers sell and readers read. We hope this heartening and reassuring news is followed by the news of stronger intra-African links with APNET and other publishers.

Sulaiman Adebowale’s report on the INASP seminar ‘Strengthening biomedical publishing in developing countries’ raises crucial issues to do with scholarly publishing in Africa. The seminar focused on biomedical journals publishing and various efforts aimed at correcting the acute information imbalance between north and south. INASP is to be commended for its support for African-published scientific journals. By making possible the participation of James Falaiye, *African Journal of Reproductive Health (AJRH)*’s Managing Editor, as a

speaker at the seminar, the mainly British participants had the chance to find out about a little-known African success story in scientific publishing. More importantly, it gave international exposure to the *AJRH* at a stage of the journal’s life when practical support would be welcome in the form of training, library subscriptions and improved distribution. The journal has an interesting history as an African-published journal that began life in the north, and continues to earn international respect for its professionalism after three years in its Nigerian base. It deserves strong support. Yet Adebowale rightly remonstrates with the narrow focus of initiatives that single out science and medical publishing for support to the detriment of other scholarly publishing. He argues cogently for the need to strengthen African scholarly publishing in all fields, thereby creating synergy in the dissemination of research as an effective tool for development.

Recognition for African publishing internationally continues to grow, though at times it appears to be an uphill battle. Among an increasing number of prizes for African writing, only the Noma Award for African Publishing, now in its 22nd year, recognises the importance of the African publishing of African writing. The International Publishers Association, an organisation that has been in existence for over a hundred years, will be holding an event on African soil for the first time when the 5th IPA Copyright Conference takes place in Accra in February.

We take this opportunity to salute the grand old man of African literature Cyprian Ekwensi in honour of his 80th birthday, with two articles about his life, his work and his significance. This most prolific and eclectic of African writers more than deserves our accolade not only for his works per se, but also for publishing them with Nigerian publishers when he surely had the chance to move outside the continent instead. Happy birthday, Cyprian Ekwensi!

Update on “The Internet, e-commerce and Africa’s book professions”, *Bellagio Publishing Network Newsletter*, no. 28, November 2001:

As a further indication of just how volatile the electronic publishing field still is, and as an update on Hans Zell’s article in the last issue, readers may be interested in an article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* of November 16, 2001; <http://chronicle.com/free/2001/11/2001111601t.htm>, which reports that

NetLibrary, one of the companies offering a service to publishers to distribute their books in digital formats, filed for bankruptcy protection on November 14. *The Chronicle* also reports that NetLibrary's assets might be purchased by the non-profit OCLC [Online Computer Library Center], which would then ensure continuity of access to NetLibrary's current collection of about 33,000 full-text books.



## Reclaiming our own voices

### The Caribbean Publishers Network stages the first international conference on Caribbean publishing

Jeremy Taylor

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The omens weren't all that good. Hurricane Michelle, the most damaging storm of the 2001 hurricane season, was lurking nearby, preparing to batter Havana, and drenching Jamaica with torrential rain. Not even the brilliant beaches of the Half Moon Resort near Montego Bay could tempt conference delegates away from the conference sessions.

But even if they didn't get much of a tan, they certainly left Jamaica in early November with a lot of enthusiasm about building a really effective Caribbean publishing industry. There were over 100 delegates from 25 countries, including all the four major language areas of the Caribbean.

The Jamaican publisher Ian Randle, who is President of the Caribbean Publishers Network (CAPNET), had given the conference a theme: 'Reclaiming Our Own Voices'. The focus was on the need for book and magazine publishing to be recognized as a crucial element in Caribbean cultural development and identity, and the importance of fostering an indigenous publishing industry instead of remaining dependent on overseas publishers. Several of the keynote speakers explored this concept in detail, including Professor Rex Nettleford (Vice Chancellor of the University of the West Indies) and Professor Tony Martin, himself a publisher, who outlined the long and distinguished intellectual tradition of the Caribbean. Nearly all the speakers and panelists were themselves Caribbean.

The conference identified several crucial areas for urgent action in 2002-2004. They included:

- Development of a viable marketing and distribution system, to allow Caribbean books and magazines to reach readers beyond our small domestic markets – but without the cost and frustration of trying to penetrate mainstream distribution channels in North America and the UK
- Translation and multi-language publishing, to allow the different language areas of the Caribbean to share their writers' work. In a special paper, Dame Pearlette Louisy, Governor General of St Lucia, also outlined the case for publishing in Caribbean indigenous languages such as Créole, Papiamentu and Garifuna
- Professional training, not only in editing and translation, but in the many entrepreneurial skills that publishing demands – everything from the art of the deal to effective marketing. The conference was followed by two fully-subscribed three-day workshops in Kingston, dealing with marketing and editing, which barely scraped the surface of the demand
- Solid data on the existing publishing industry in the Caribbean, not only to highlight its needs but also to persuade governments of the importance of publishing as a cultural enterprise. A preliminary survey of regional publishing resources, funded by the Department for International Development (DFID – the UK government agency), was presented at the conference and will be followed by a final report in 2002
- Rapidly advancing technologies, which will open up a new world of possibilities for forward-thinking publishers in the next few years. Dirk Koehler from The World Bank and Michael Smolens of 3Billion Books outlined the shape of things to come, including a global network of print-on-demand facilities which will turn conventional printing and distribution patterns upside down
- Closer collaboration between existing regional publishers, in the form of co-publishing, joint ventures, rights sales, co-editions and mutual distribution arrangements
- Publishing that is market-driven rather than project-driven. Not surprisingly, there was some lively discussion on where to start – with an idea of what 'ought to be published', or a sense of what the market happens to want?
- A truly regional book fair catering to all language areas of the Caribbean.

Nearly all the conference delegates were housed in the Half Moon Resort's sumptuous villas, sharing dining and leisure facilities. This encouraged a high level of networking and camaraderie, not to mention carousing. There was also an evening of readings, at which Austin "Tom" Clarke entertained delegates with his tales of capturing a Barbadian pig in pursuit of a good pig-tail soup. Several rising young Caribbean writers performed recent work, including novelist Oonya Kempadoo, poet Paloma Mohammed, and performance poet Jacinth Henry-Martin, who is also St Kitts's culture minister.

CAPNET elected a new eight-member Council for 2001-2002, whose members are now developing action plans to address the issues raised at the conference. The Network plans to publish the proceedings of the conference, and to stage a one-day symposium, probably on translation issues, in November 2002 in Belize or Puerto Rico, followed by a second full conference in November 2003 in Curaçao.



## 5th Kinshasa Book Fair

### 23 November – 1 December 2001

Corneille Monoko

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*translated from the French by Sulaiman Adebowale*

The series of activities marking the 5th Kinshasa Book Fair was held from 23 November to 1 December 2001, at the Académie des Beaux Arts, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo. The fair, also known as *Bibliophilie '01*, brought together not just publishers but also other actors and entrepreneurs involved in promoting culture in the Congo. The trade event this year centred on three major activities: a seminar on the country's National Book Council, an exhibition of Congolese writing in all its forms, and the meeting of cultural entrepreneurs.

#### *The National Book Council in the Democratic Republic of Congo*

The fair's organising committee set up a meeting of actors in the book trade on 23 November, to discuss the question of the need for a national book council. The participants summed up needs to be addressed as follows:

- 1 develop a structure to study, plan and implement a book policy that is embedded in the country's cultural policy;
- 2 elaborate the working documents and structure of the book council and the strategies to adopt in the implementation of the council; and
- 3 set up a working secretariat with the responsibility of drafting the framework for the governing structure and of developing a collective database and network of competence and knowledge in publishing in the country.

These statements demonstrate that actors in the book sector are no longer willing to leave the situation as it is, they are determined to propose effective book policies or, if necessary, to put pressure on public institutions, to ensure that they recognise the realities of publishing and literature in the DR Congo. For book actors, these objectives also signify a sincere commitment and an existential necessity for the sustainability of the industry.

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The working group formed at the end of the meeting comprises the following members:

- Corneille Monoko, Foire du Livre de Kinshasa;
- Jean Pierre Manuana, Centre de recherche et de documentation de l'enseignement supérieur et universitaire de Kinshasa (CDESURK);
- Prof Manda Kizabi, Université de Kinshasa;
- René Pambu Pasha, Centre internationale de civilisations Bantou (CICIBA-RDC);
- Pierre-Aimé Mobembo, Association des Bibliothécaires, Archivistes, Documentalistes et Muséologues (ABADOM);
- Bokeme Sha ne Molobay, Président du salon internationale du livre de Kinshasa (SILKIN).

### *The 5th Kinshasa Book Fair*

The 5th International Kinshasa Book Fair was opened by Madame Marthe Ngalula wa Fuana, the Minister for Arts and Culture and Madame Manoka, Vice-President for International Cooperation. The main highlight of the opening ceremony was a literary award event. La foire du livre de Kinshasa awards were given to Boka and Lutumba, the composers of 'Débout Congolais', the country's national anthem, and known to every child in the country since 1960. The ceremony also witnessed the launching of a new literary award competition, 'Entre les bras du fleuve', organised by the Communauté française de Belgique, represented at the occasion by Mr Freddy Jacquet. The competition is open to Congolese writers below the age of 30.

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The fair provided an opportunity for local publishers to promote their titles to the public and link up with authors as well as other publishers. The fair continued till 1 December 2001. Prominent among the activities at this year's fair were: visits from pupils and students led by the Institut National des Arts, which also organised a cultural workshop; book clubs; an exhibition of writings, illustrations and literature for and from children, who made up 80% of the visitors; workshops coordinated by the Association des auteurs et illustrateurs des livres pour enfants – ALIELE/Congo [Association of Authors and Illustrators of Children Books]; and the editorial board of the comic book *Bleu blanc*.

As with previous editions of the fair, exhibitors and visitors also had the chance to see artworks (ceramics and sculptures) being created as part of the fair organisers' efforts at bridging the frontiers within the arts.

In spite of the continued difficulties faced by the publishing industry – notable are the weak purchasing power of the general public and the meagre resources and equally weak marketing competence of local publishers – there is a growing publishing industry in the country. According to the depository of the National Library of the Congo, 450 titles were published in DR Congo in 2001. It is remarkable that, amidst the conflict in the country, books were rolled out of the press, in as great a quantity as the

minerals which form the basis of the senseless pillage that has ravaged the nation for some years now.

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### *The cultural entrepreneurs meeting*

Under the auspices of the Ingénierie Culturelle et Artistique de Kinshasa (ICAK), cultural entrepreneurs in the DR Congo gathered for the third time during the Kinshasa Book Fair on 26 November.

The outcome of this meeting saw the creation of a platform known as Organisation Congolaise de l'Entrepreneuriat Culturel (OCEC). The body's main objectives are to promote their work, participate in the drafting of a cultural policy and inject resources and knowledge from culture and the arts in the development processes of their society.

A working group has been set up to run the affairs of the body until the election of a secretariat. Its members are:

- Corneille Monoko, Président de La Foire du livre de Kinshasa
- Placide Pidi a Gumama, Directeur du Festival Socioculturel de Gungu
- Nono Bakwa, Directeur de Festival Internationale de l'Acteur

The committee has already begun work on its first main series of activities: to put in place a viable training programme and to develop a web site on culture and the arts in the Congo.

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The 6th Kinshasa Book Fair is scheduled for 30 November to 8 December 2002. Detailed information is available from Corneille Monoko.



## Strengthening biomedical publishing in developing countries

seminar held at the BMA House, London, November 2001

Sulaiman Adebowale

*Sulaiman Adebowale is Editor, Bellagio Publishing Network*

A one-day seminar on the role of international commercial and non-profit publishers in strengthening biomedical publishing in developing countries was organised by the INASP-Health Information Forum in London on 20 November 2001. The seminar gathered about thirty participants from biomedical publishing, professional and non-governmental organisations, mainly from the UK and three publishers from Nigeria and Vietnam.

James Falaiye, Managing Editor, *African Journal of Reproductive Health (AJRH)* published by the Women's Health and Action Research Centre based in Benin City, Nigeria, made a presentation on the priorities of biomedical journal publishers in Africa. Using the experience of the *AJRH*, Falaiye traces its efforts at maintaining a viable indigenous scientific publishing outfit in Nigeria. He touched on the enormous challenges being faced and efforts needed to support indigenous publishing in Africa. The need to find ways of surmounting the problems becomes more pertinent when looked at in the context of the *African Journal of Reproductive Health*, which was published and managed in the United States by Harvard University Press until 1999 when its management and production were transferred to Nigeria. [See p. 7 for a brief discussion of the journal in this issue of the newsletter.]

The second lecture delivered by Ian Bannerman (Blackwell Publishing, UK) looked at what Blackwell and other international commercial publishers have been doing to ensure that biomedical journals are available and accessible to researchers and health practitioners in the developing world. These efforts have included discouraging barriers to authorship, promoting both print and online readership, and supporting local networks for distribution of their journals.

The third and final presentation by Elizabeth Dodsworth (CAB International) provided the perspective of a non-profit organisation working towards improving access to reliable information for healthcare workers in developing countries. She discussed how, despite being governed by the complexities of an intergovernmental organisation, CABI has strived to meet the capacity-building needs of developing countries (which largely

make up its membership) under a global development programme. It has been involved in various initiatives in the dissemination of agricultural research in collaboration with regional bodies and development assistance agencies.

The various debates and discussions at the seminar do project a willingness to redress the ever-growing information gap between the developed and developing world. Various initiatives from different actors were touched upon – which in a sense are not novel in strategy but, unlike others before, more in line with the IT age, e.g., PERI, Health Internetwork, and SciDev.net – which are geared towards improving the access to information for health professionals and researchers.

However, the validity of these various efforts will be undermined if, as Sally Morris, Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers (ALPSP), rightly signalled at the start of the gathering, they do not strengthen indigenous publishing. The question is more than providing researchers in the developing world with the state-of-the-art content in mainstream science published in the developed world. It includes ensuring that scientific content is produced efficiently locally and distributed effectively at home and abroad.

Secondly, the current focus of these initiatives is indirectly detrimental to the overall objective of research publishing as a tool for development. Most programmes focus on science and medical publishing, leaving out scholarly publishing and research in, for instance, the social sciences and humanities, and in so doing not just stimulating a chasm between academics in the various fields, but also undermining the benefits of knowledge that may accrue from a developed multidisciplinary research publishing. The developmental impacts of cross-disciplinary knowledge have been known to be invaluable to resolving health and socio-economic issues if ideas from the natural and social sciences and humanities are collectively harnessed effectively.

Thirdly, publishing in the developing world, scholarly journal publishing in Africa in particular, is arguably not yet fully developed enough to warrant a separation of initiatives to strengthen it. Scholarly publishers in the biomedical sciences in Africa are likely to be helped the more if they can tap a favourable industry as a whole.

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# *African Journal of Reproductive Health* – development, challenges and prospects

James Falaiye

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The decision to publish the *African Journal of Reproductive Health* came out of a burning desire to make available research findings in reproductive health in Africa to the world of researchers. From just an idea it became a reality and today we have a journal that is well accepted by publishers and researchers worldwide. The specific objectives of the journal were: (1) to promote the scientific study of reproductive health in Africa; (2) to provide an avenue through which researchers in Africa can document their findings in reproductive health research; (3) to provide a scientific understanding of the reproductive health needs in Africa; and (4) to provide a forum for policy makers, service providers and reproductive health advocates to exchange information and to dialogue on all aspects of reproductive health in Africa.

At the beginning two editorial offices were established for the journal, one in Germany and the other in Nigeria. The German office was responsible for most of the production and distribution processes. However, because the vision of the founding editor was to have a journal that is African-based the production process was gradually transferred to Nigeria, with the employment of a managing editor who had experience in book publishing for the Nigerian office. The process began in 1998 and by the end of 1999 production and distribution was being managed entirely from Nigeria, the editorial office in Germany serving as a point for peer-review of articles.

The first issue of the journal was published and printed in 1997 in the USA. At that stage only two issues were published per year; one in April and the other in October. Because of the large numbers of articles being accepted for publication in the journal the editorial board decided to commence publishing three issues per year from 2001. This has greatly reduced the period between submission and publication of articles.

Publishing such a scholarly journal in Africa has not been without its challenges. One major challenge we have

faced is distribution. Most researchers in the developing countries, for whom the journal is actually meant, cannot afford to pay the subscription rates for the journal; in essence we have had to battle with a low subscription base, with about 90 per cent of our subscriptions coming from the developed countries.

Another challenge is that of staff training. Major training programmes on journal publishing take place in the developed countries, and we do not have provision for overseas training. We therefore are seeking for collaboration with donor agencies, training institutions and other actors in publishing engaged in and willing to look at strategies to reinforce our capacity in publishing.

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Notwithstanding, we have made significant strides within the short period that the journal has been in circulation. Positive comments from individuals worldwide attest to the quality of the articles and production when compared with other journals from Africa. Despite the high cost of production and distribution and the low subscription base, we have maintained regular and timely production. The journal has come to be one of the best of its kind produced in Africa. It has enjoyed the privilege of being included in the Medline. It is also one of the journals whose tables of contents and abstracts are being published on the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP)'s African Journals Online Project.

One of our plans for the future is to have a website so that our articles can be published online. When the journal was being published in the US it enjoyed the privilege of being included on Harvard University's website, but since every production process has been shifted to Nigeria this has stopped and thus there is an urgent need to establish a new site that could be operated from Nigeria. INASP has started a process to assist in doing this by training two of our staff members on internet publishing at a workshop they organised in Zimbabwe in October 2001. More support from other organisations is required to realise the online plans.

We are also considering the possibility of increasing the number of issues published from three to four per year to enable us to cope with the number of articles being accepted for publication and in so doing work towards

expanding the avenues for scholarly research in Africa. In order to make the journal self-sustaining we will need to work harder in our marketing activities, especially in getting more subscribers and sourcing for advertisements and other outlets to promote its visibility and also alleviate part of our financial expenses.

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*The prevailing context of dwindling resources for journals acquisition for libraries and research institutions affects publishers the world over... [However] efforts such as bulk subscriptions of the journal through international organisations for distribution to scholars, or international commercial publishers' support in allowing smaller publishers access to their distribution networks, could go a long way towards strengthening African publishers.*

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We are aware that the prevailing context of dwindling resources for journals acquisition for libraries and research institutions affects publishers the world over. However, scholarly researchers from Africa have even fewer opportunities than their counterparts in the North. Efforts such as bulk subscriptions of the journal through international organisations for distribution to scholars, or international commercial publishers' support in allowing smaller publishers access to their distribution networks, could go a long way towards strengthening African publishers.



## Benchmark cultural work on Ifa wins 2001 Noma Award

*Odun Ifa /Ifa Festival* by Abosede Emanuel is the 2001 Noma Award Winner. The book was published in 2000 by West African Book Publishers Ltd in Lagos.

The jury praised the work as

an outstanding and significant cultural document, and an important part of the movement of cultural reclamation from within Africa. It assumes direct intellectual responsibility by the Yoruba for their collective history and culture; and extends the scope of Ifa studies in a new and original way. It is uniquely subtle, the coverage is extensive and well informed, and the author displays deep familiarity with indigenous sources, living practitioners and scholarly literature. The book, the product of thirty years' work, will stand as a benchmark for years to come.

Ifa is a system of divination and one of the oracles comprising the traditional religion of the Yoruba. *Odun Ifa* is the annual Ifa festival, during which specific rites and ceremonies are performed. In addition to history, rites and rituals, the book provides an extensive sample of Ifa verses – in Yoruba and English translation – relating to the sixteen principal paired Odu of Ifa. The jury further commended the book as 'providing a holistic view of Ifa, reflecting the power of its historical myth, morality and place in the Yoruba worldview'.

The £10,000 22nd award will be presented at a special ceremony to be held at the Nigerian International Book fair in Abuja on Saturday, 18 May 2002.

The jury singled out two further books for special commendation: *From Cane Fields to Freedom. A Chronicle of Indian South African Life* by Uma Dhupelia Mesthrie (Roggebaai, SA: Kwela Books, 2000) and *Richtersveld. The Enchanted Wilderness* by Graham Williamson (Gauteng, SA: Umदाus Press Pty Ltd 2000).

*From Cane Fields to Freedom* is a pictorial account of the social history and political experiences of the South African Indian community. 'The photographs in the book are described as visually stunning and beautifully reproduced; and the introductory account and photograph captions are remarkably comprehensive, surefooted and scholarly. The author succeeds in illuminating the way Indians in South Africa have created a specifically Indian, yet genuinely South African Indian identity. She has a fine sense of the richness of the history and conveys it with flair and subtlety.'

*Richtersveld* is commended as 'a superb description of one of Africa's last truly untamed wildernesses. It covers the ecology of the Richtersveld, an arid area on the border of



Namibia and South Africa. In an accessible style, the reader is led through the evolution of the wilderness over its whole geological and biological contribution to African natural history. It is a stunningly beautiful book, a work of scholarship, a valuable contribution to African natural history and a work of love and passion. The scholarship is impeccable and impassioned; the text is comprehensive in scope. The illustrations, layout and reproduction are excellent.'

The novel for young people about an African rite-of-passage story, *Because Pula Means Rain* by Jenny Robson (Cape Town; Tafelberg Publishers, 2000) also received an honourable mention from the jury. Robson explores the depths of the isolation, suffering and search for self-acceptance by an adolescent boy with albinism.

Eighty-five titles from 56 African publishers in 19 countries and in nine languages were submitted for the 2001 competition.

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The Noma Award was established in 1979 as annual prize for an outstanding book from Africa. It is open to any author who is indigenous to Africa, and the work must be published by an indigenous African publisher.

The jury is chaired by Walter Bgoya from Tanzania, one of Africa's most distinguished and respected publishers, with wide knowledge of African and international publishing. The other members of the jury in 2001 were: Luli Callinicos, South African scholar and historian, currently writing the biography of Oliver Tambo; Dr Ato Quayson, Director of the African Studies Centre and Fellow of Pembroke College, University of Cambridge; and Mary Jay, Secretary to the Managing Committee (the jury). The Award is sponsored by Kodansha Ltd. Japan.

Entry conditions are available on request from the Secretary, The Noma Award, PO Box 128, Witney, Oxon OX8 5XU, UK. Tel: +44-(0) 1993-775235; Fax: +44-(0) 1993-709265; email: maryljay@aol.com



## 5th IPA Copyright Conference 20-22 February 2002, Accra, Ghana

The 5th International Publisher's Association Copyright Conference is to be held in Accra, Ghana, from 20 to 22 February 2002. The conference is part of IPA's effort at organising forums to discuss issues around copyright and publishing. Previous ones have taken place in Tokyo, Japan, 1998; Turin, Italy, 1994; Paris, France, 1990; and Heidelberg, Germany, 1986. The proposed conference will be the first IPA event to take place in Africa.

More than 300 publishers from all over the world are expected to participate, together with authors, copyright specialists, librarians and state officials from various countries. In many respects, international efforts towards the discussion of intellectual freedom and copyright protection are more important than ever. The theme of the Conference – 'Encouraging creativity through copyright protection' – and the topics of the working sessions address topical issues currently debated at the international level and affecting publishers' interests around the world.

The IPA was founded in 1896 and is the publishing industry's international organisation. It covers 78 national, regional and specialised trade associations in 66 countries. IPA's principal objectives are to promote copyright and freedom to publish and to represent publishers' interests towards international organisations. IPA organises a major international congress or copyright conference every second year. It is an accredited non-governmental organisation with observer status to the United Nations.

Additional information about the conference, including pointers on registration and hotel accommodation can be downloaded from the IPA website at: <http://www.ipa-ue.org>. All requests regarding registration, practical information, social programme should be sent to the Organising Committee of the Conference in Ghana:

Ghana Book Publishers Association, +233 21 223948 (tel),  
+233 21 223948/220107/220271 (fax),  
email: ipa2002@ghana.com or

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## Cyprian Ekwensi

Charles Larson

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Writing a quarter of a century ago, Ernest Emenyonu, the Nigerian writer and critic, stated passionately of Cyprian Ekwensi:

He has been praised and blamed but never correctly assessed as a writer. Critics who seem unable to cope with his versatility, not to mention his vast volumes have abandoned him, and in effect his growth as a writer, which can be clearly discerned in a chronological study of his works, has been missed by many (Emenyonu, E., *Cyprian Ekwensi*, London: Evans. 1974. p. 3).

Ekwensi is not only one of the most prolific African writers of the twentieth century but also a man who has had several different professional careers besides that of writer. An Ibo, he was born in 1921 in Northern Nigeria, but attended secondary school in Ibadan, in an area of the country that is predominantly Yoruba. His familiarity and apparent ease with several of his country's major ethnic groups have been reflected in his fiction.

Ekwensi's education continued in Ibadan [at Government College, Ibadan] and then at Achimota College in Ghana. He studied forestry and worked for two years as a forestry officer. He also taught science courses briefly, worked for Radio Nigeria and, in 1949, entered the Lagos School of Pharmacy, subsequently continuing his studies at the University of London (Chelsea School of Pharmacy). During these years, Ekwensi also wrote his earliest fiction. He has frequently been identified as one of the major forces in the Onitsha Market Literature though his book-length publication, *Ikolo the Wrestler and other Ibo tales* (1947), was published in London. When Ekwensi's ever-popular novel *Jagua Nana* (1961) was first published in the United States in 1969, the author listed nineteen books to his credit, beginning with *When Love Whispers* (1947).

Ernest Emenyonu identifies the significance of *When Love Whispers*: 'This short, light romance was one of the earliest works of fiction in English in Nigeria and may have helped to inspire the popular Onitsha pamphlet literature'. Unlike other Nigerian writers, Cyprian Ekwensi made the transition from writing for readers of Onitsha Market literature to a mainstream audience. Stated another way, Ekwensi discovered quite early in his career that there were Nigerians who could be lured into reading if there was suitable material to attract their attention. *When Love*

*Whispers, Jagua Nana* and several of the writer's subsequent works mine the field of western popular fiction: sex, violence (though never as extreme as in the West), intrigue and mystery in a recognisable contemporary setting, more frequently than not in the fast-paced melting pot of the big city. To all this, Ekwensi has further added a relentless fascination with African women – in short, his works contain all the elements of western bestsellerdom, except that in recent years the concept of the bestseller in the Nigerian book market has been eclipsed by the country's depressed economy.

*Jagua Nana* was so popular in the 1960s that a film version was planned by an Italian movie company. The mere idea that a film of this sensational novel might provide the world with an unflattering glimpse of life in Nigeria led to discussions in the Nigerian parliament that resulted in an abrupt cancellation of the project. Emenyonu notes the irony of this incident because it happened almost at the same time as Ekwensi was awarded the Dag Hammarskjöld International Prize in Literature (1968).

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*Ekwensi discovered quite early in his career that there were Nigerians who could be lured into reading if there was suitable material to attract their attention. When Love Whispers, Jagua Nana and several of the writer's subsequent works mine the field of western popular fiction: sex, violence (though never as extreme as in the West), intrigue and mystery in a recognisable contemporary setting, more frequently than not in the fast-paced melting pot of the big city.*

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This ironic juxtaposition is important because Ekwensi has written just as many 'literary' works as sensational ones, though he is more often remembered for the latter. Of his early books, *The Drummer Boy* (1960), *Passport of Mallam Ili* (1960), *Burning Grass* (1962) and *Iska* (1966) are all 'serious' novels, some produced by academic publishers (such as Cambridge University Press) for the African market, and becoming set texts for the West African School Certificate examinations. There has always been this pull in Ekwensi's writing between the sensational and the serious, the playful and the concerned.

Cyprian Ekwensi has written hundreds of short stories, radio and television scripts, several dozen novels, including children's works, yet in the 1970s he said that his writing had brought him both fame and poverty:

Five decades or more of writing novels, novellas, short stories, children's books, have brought me world fame but not fortune. If I were an American living in America

or Europe, I would be floating in a foam bath in my own private yacht off the coast of Florida (letter to author, 8 March 1999).

Like many of his peers, Ekwensi agrees that the reading culture of his country (and of the continent) has changed drastically during the course of his fifty-year career. Even more extreme changes have taken place in the world of publishing. When he began writing in the days of Onitsha Market literature, 'the books came out spontaneously and unsolicited. They were hawked and distributed quickly. In many cases the author was also the publisher.' Books often sold quite well; several of his most successful Onitsha publications were reprinted frequently. Today, 'There is rigid control by the publishers (and by the economy). Your book has to fit into their schedules and programmes and not the other way around. Radio and TV and, lately, video have destroyed the reading culture.' What little reading there is, is chiefly of set texts within the schools.

Ekwensi especially bemoans the state of 'big business' publishing, which has altered the entire context of writing for the author:

There are big African publishers with foreign partners and there are Nigerian publishers on their own and there are aspiring author self-publishers. The objective of all of them is to sell books, but it is more lucrative to have as your customer the World Bank project or the Ministry of Education or the Petroleum Trust Fund. These conglomerates place large orders and some authors, especially of textbooks, benefit by the bulk sums paid in royalties. Always bear in mind that publishing is a business. The small publisher of creative books is a retailer whose returns will not pay the rent for the author's one bedroom apartment, much less buy him a decent *agbada* for the family ceremonials. But his friends have by now heard that he has become an author and that is a feather in his cap.

Of the 'book launch' that Soyinka and others have so decried, Ekwensi states that the publisher with enough clout can rake in thousands of naira by way of recouping investments. The money is shared as per agreement but this system fails to provide regular income for the writer. 'Writers, typically, have to sign contracts loaded in favour of the publisher', granting them control of world rights which they are 'incapable of selling or enforcing'. Authors seldom receive royalties from their books without demanding them: 'I have yet to know of an African author *living in Africa* who died a wealthy man from his writing. The rich ones all live abroad.'

Perhaps the major problem that Ekwensi identifies is an attitude towards the creative writer himself/herself:

Writing is still regarded not as a career but as a charitable pursuit – designed to educate and entertain readers with nothing coming to the writer. The mention

of money appears obscene, but the glamour is there and thousands do take the plunge, but support it with moonlighting or chasing jobs in construction companies or ministries. As for writing being a career, the writer will have to try the Media – especially radio, television and the regular press. Journalists thrive there, but creative writers get diverted and the creativity gets washed out of them if they must take the bread and butter home. Ending up in the gulag of some dictatorial government is just one of the hazards of the trade.

Ekwensi none the less has kind words to say about Spectrum Books in Ibadan which published one of his more recent novels, *Jagua Nana's Daughter* (1986). My conversations with Joop Berkhout, the publisher, revealed that current sales of the novel total a couple of thousand copies a year – in a country once considered to be full of readers (interview, 6 August 1998).

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*[I]n the days of Onitsha Market literature, 'the books came out spontaneously and unsolicited. They were hawked and distributed quickly. In many cases the author was also the publisher.' Books often sold quite well; several of his most successful Onitsha publications were reprinted frequently. Today, 'There is rigid control by the publishers (and by the economy). Your book has to fit into their schedules and programmes and not the other way around. Radio and TV and, lately, video have destroyed the reading culture.' What little reading there is, is chiefly of set texts within the schools.*

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Except for those years when he studied pharmacy in England, Ekwensi has remained a Nigerian writer living in Nigeria. He supports himself by his profession as a pharmacist, yet still he keeps writing, moving with the times (when I talked to him recently, he enthusiastically described a short story he has published on the Internet: [See Ekwensi, Cyprian, "No Escape from S.A.P" at <http://www.ishmaelreedpub.com/ekwensi.html>]). In his response to my questionnaire, he identified himself as 'one of the pioneers of modern African writing'. No one in the field of African literature would question that. Still, I can't help wondering whether, if he had his writing career to begin all over again, he might not consider the expatriate route of so many of his contemporaries:

Living abroad the African writer is then in the midst of publishers, booksellers, world writers and others who respond to his presence and give him his due place in

society. He even becomes an Ambassador of African cultures, which is as it should be. Communication is speedy and efficient and all the world becomes a stage on which he can play his part. Even so, the Exile is homesick, out of touch and is only postponing the evil date when he will come home and find he has become irrelevant.

It's a dog's life.

It is impossible to determine the antecedent of the pronoun in the concluding statement: the African writer in exile – or all African writers?

Extracts from *The Ordeal of the African Writer* (2001) by Charles R Larson, published by Zed Books (London and New York), pp 64–69. We gratefully acknowledge Zed Books for permission to publish this piece. 

## What Cyprian Ekwensi meant to me

Kole Omotoso

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The first major city that began what was to be my wandering around the world was Onitsha, the market emporium on the eastern shore of the Niger. That visit gave me a novelette about the story of a young school girl who, after visiting her boyfriend during the holidays, left his house 'with a weight inside her', or words to that effect. I could relate to that story. I was a school-boy. We were already learning to write love letters from pamphlets sold in the Onitsha market that taught us *How to Write Love Letters!*

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*It was during one of those visits to Cairo that I found a surprise, an Arabic translation of Cyprian Ekwensi's People of the City, the story of a journalist in Lagos entitled Ahl-il-Madinah.*

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On a visit to Lagos I found *The Yaba Roundabout Murders*. Today, of course, there is no longer a Yaba Roundabout. That Ekwensi novelette taught me the importance of space in fiction writing. Ekwensi was putting on paper my environment and it was so delightful!

During one long vacation, the Federal Ministry of Information where Ekwensi was an information officer,

advertised holiday jobs for students. I was into my Higher School Certificate programme at Kings' College, Lagos. The advertisement had to do with writing and I thought it was what I could do. I was sent to go and see Cyprian Ekwensi. I was delighted. I knew the man. Well, I had read some of his writing. He must be dying to help me! Ekwensi took one look at me and asked me to leave his office since they already had the complement of the people they wanted. I obviously did not make any impression on him.

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*Cyprian Ekwensi published in Nigeria. He was one of the initial writers who published their works at home along with T.M. Aluko of One Man One Wife fame. These important writers initiated the story of Nigerian publishing.*

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The next encounter with Cyprian Ekwensi was years later. I had spent three years working on contemporary Arabic Literature for a doctoral thesis for the University of Edinburgh, with additional supervision at the then Centre for Middle East Studies in Oxford and the American University in Cairo. It was during one of those visits to Cairo that I found a surprise, an Arabic translation of Cyprian Ekwensi's *People of the City*, the story of a journalist in Lagos entitled *Ahl-il-Madinah*. I was thrilled. I bought two copies. I came back to teach at the University of Ibadan in 1972 and on the occasion of a Nigerian writers meeting with John Updike of the United States of America, I met Cyprian Ekwensi and gave him a copy of the Arabic translation of his book. He was naturally surprised to see it because he knew nothing of it. Over the next few years I attempted to track down translations of African writing into Arabic as well as tried to encourage more to be done. But that is another story.

Cyprian Ekwensi is important in Nigerian writing for many reasons, but especially because he believed in himself and made us believe in ourselves. Not just as writers. The writing is justly pan-Nigerian. This is as it should be. What is also important is that Cyprian Ekwensi published in Nigeria. He was one of the initial writers who published their works at home along with T.M. Aluko of *One Man One Wife* fame. These important writers initiated the story of Nigerian publishing.

It is no wonder then that Cyprian Ekwensi was such a strong supporter of the process that brought about the creation of the Association of Nigerian Authors, the now ubiquitous ANA. Sometimes, some commentators have given the impression that it was the work of one man. This is short of the truth.

On the occasion of the 80th birthday of Cyprian Ekwensi, I wish to say Long Live Ekwensi, to continue to charm us with our stories! 

## REVIEW

### *Glendora Review: African Quarterly on the Arts, vol. 3 no. 2. Plus Glendora Books supplement no. 6 2001*

ISSN 1118-146X. Annual subscription: individuals inside Africa \$70, outside Africa \$92/£58. Institutions inside Africa \$82, outside Africa \$112/£70. Glendora International Nig. Limited, 168 Awolowo Road, PO Box 50914, Ikoyi, Lagos, Nigeria. +234 1 2692762 (tel/fax), email: 105271.11@compuserve.com; www.glendora-eculture.com

### *Position: An International Arts Review, vol. 1 no. 2. Plus Review of Books supplement*

ISSN 1595-6512. Annual subscription: individuals inside Africa \$70, outside Africa \$95/£68. Institutions inside Africa \$85, outside Africa \$135/£75. Back Page Productions 33, Little Road, PO Box 604, Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria, +234 1 4707570 (tel), +234 1 866910 (fax), email: positionngr@yahoo.com; www.positionmagazine.com

Both *Glendora Review* and *Position* reconfirm that the shortcomings of identity-embedded construction are not so glaring because of the fluid diverse nature of the inhabitants of the world we live in. Rather, that the seemingly distinguishing elements among groups, peoples, classes, individuals etc., are becoming more in line with the varying approaches to how we define and redefine ourselves today. Hence, the similarity and divergence of these two bold publications from Nigeria on popular arts and culture.

Where *Glendora Review* positions itself in the backdrop of 'a time of swift and confounding changes...that simultaneously invites and rejects statements of self-definition and redefinition...that the idea of "Africa" would seem most problematic' (p.144), *Position* reviews conventional publishing concepts of market and readership. Instead of answering the questions 'who do you publish for? Which is your world?', it retorts with 'Position. Whose position?' It believes 'that maintaining faithfulness to a defined geography of publishing would be at the expense of sincerity... [when] there are enduring principles ...[which] owe no citizenships nor keep nationality boundaries. There are experiences that we share, sometimes painful experiences; in relating with them we learn about other lessons that bring us into a better understanding of ourselves and situations' (p. 3).

Equally audacious is what they have both set out to achieve. *Glendora* believes it is on the right track by

'consciously cultivating an aesthetic space for heterodoxy, a celebration of the eclectic, and even the confounding'. It reiterates that given the context of its being 'forged in the crucible of marginalization', its role as a vehicle for varying forms of literary and artistic genres becomes the more relevant for creative artists around the 'African hemispheres'. As a reminder, this well-produced journal is bold in typography and design, with typefaces literally collapsing and merging on top of one another.

In its third volume and backed by a new team of substantive editors and editorial board (comprising Sola Olorunyomi, Akin Adesokan, Olakunle Tejuoso, and Ololade Bamidele), *Glendora* promises a 'fascinating experience'. In this issue, *Glendora* attempts a 'utopian' exploration of that phantasmagoric city of contradictions called Lagos. Utopian not for its depiction of Lagos but, as Dele Jegede, the guest editor admits, for the limitations of trying to capture the essence of such a complex city in a medium as the journal. Yet the issue manages to paint a rich nostalgic and contemporary canvas of Lagos. Elements of anonymity and indifference are captured through architecture, night life, music, video film-making, poetry etc; the mixed bag of colours and sounds which make the city both vibrant and pitiful. A city bursting with relentless energy amidst collapsing infrastructure and barbed-wire fences.

*Position* in its vol. 1 no. 2 issue suggests another stimulating attempt at reaching out to spaces – or 'pulses' – of transition both within and without, at home and abroad, with a view to understanding our changing selves and environments. The images of Beirut, Lebanon and the Niger Delta in Nigeria impact strikingly for both their familiarity and explosiveness. There is an ironic twist to the fact that, in the eyes of for instance the Lagosian or the West African, the images of the Lebanese 'other' merge so much with theirs. With a group of informed editors and contributors (Dapo Adeniyi, Ben Zulu, Maja Pearce, Kofi Anyidoho, Mia Couto, Bisi Sylva, Karen King-Aribisala, Funso Aiyejina, Omowunmi Segun and Remi Raji-Oyelade), one would also expect an exciting exploration.

Arguably, these are seductive yet daring perspectives from two publications devoted to contemporary art forms and culture. Scholarly publishing, in which the two publications are camped, is a tough cookie. Much as we may want to view multiple spaces in multiple times with multiple eyes, the bottom line in a ruthless, dogmatic, unforgiving sector still remains sustainability. That is, regular, high quality and efficiently distributed publications. Long may they succeed.

**Review by Sulaiman Adebowale**



## NEW PUBLICATIONS

compiled by Sulaiman Adebowale

*L' Edition Africaine en français pour la jeunesse 2002* [African Publishing in French for Children 2002]. La Joie par les Livres, ISBN 2-9513753-2-8, 26pp November 2001, av. Générale de Gaulle, 92147 Clamart cedex, France. +33 1 40831462 (tel), +33 1 40940404 (fax), email: [interculturel@lajoieparleslivres.com](mailto:interculturel@lajoieparleslivres.com) [www.lajoieparleslivres.com](http://www.lajoieparleslivres.com)

This well-presented annotated catalogue is a valuable resource on children's books in Africa. It contains important information on the publishers of children's titles in Francophone Africa and France, including a selection of their titles in French and local languages, associations of writers, artists and publishers, book clubs, libraries, bookshops and other actors in the book chain.

The revised third edition of the catalogue includes information on notable prizes and awards and book publishing fora in Africa, not just Francophone Africa. It also contains a few children's books publishers in South Africa and Namibia. This catalogue will be useful for actors in the publishing industry in Africa.



The *African Book Publishing Record* vol. XXVII no. 3 2001, ISSN 0306-0322. Annual subscription: £185/\$295 / DM578. K.G. Saur Verlag GmbH, Orlestrasse 8, 81373 Munchen, Germany. + 49 (0)89 769020 (tel), + 49 (0)89 76902150 (fax), email: [info@saur.de](mailto:info@saur.de); [www.saur.de](http://www.saur.de)

The *ABPR* compiles bibliographic listings of book publishers or subsidiary companies in Africa. It covers books, pamphlets, reports and series titles in English, French and some African languages. It serves as a supplement and update of the *African Books in Print* (fifth edition, London: Bowker-Saur, September 2000).

This issue also contains the annual 'Africana Reference Works: An Annotated List of 2000 Titles' edited by Jill Young Coelho, and articles and book reviews on publishing related topics.



*Upgrading Book Distribution in Africa* edited by Tony Read, Carmelle Denning and Vincent Bontoux, ISBN 1901830 15 2, xx + 252 pp, incl. illustrations, 2001, ADEA Working Group on Books and Learning Materials, Distributed by the African Books Collective Ltd, The Jam Factory, 27 Park End St. Oxford OX1 1HU, UK. +44 1865 726686 (tel), +44 1865 793298 (fax), email: [abc@africanbookscollective.com](mailto:abc@africanbookscollective.com) [www.africanbookscollective.com](http://www.africanbookscollective.com)

The 12th volume in the series of *Perspectives on African Book Development* published by the African Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) looks at some of the questions around equitable and effective textbook distribution systems in sub-Saharan Africa. The study provides a broad analysis of the key issues affecting book distribution in Africa. The information is gleaned through major case studies from Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Malawi, Niger and Uganda and mini studies from Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Senegal, Tanzania, and Togo.

In addition to providing an overview, it also recommends vital options that policy makers need to consider in developing a national framework for efficient textbook delivery. This detailed survey of textbook distribution in the region also includes a glossary of common terms used in the book and education sectors. It is an essential resource for all those concerned with seeking solutions to improve access to educational material in Africa.



*Education for Librarianship and Information Science in Africa* edited by Michael Wise, ISBN 0-9679101-5-3, 302 pp 2000, \$24.95, International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) and International Academic Publishers, PO Box 26290, Colorado Springs, CO 80613, USA. [www.iacademicpublishers.com](http://www.iacademicpublishers.com)

This fifteen-chapter study examines the state of development of education and training for librarianship in Africa. The volume gathered by the late Michael Wise, a prominent figure in library development in Africa, has been described by Ian M. Johnson, Chairman IFLA Professional Board, as a 'source of inspiration for the small band of teachers [of librarianship and information science] in Africa, and some fresh insights for the international community that seeks to support them'.



# The African Publishing Companion: A Resource Guide

Researched and compiled by Hans Zell Publishing Consultants

ISBN 0-9541029-0-8 258 pp. 297x210mm (A4) wire bound £80.00/\$130.00 combined print and online version (not available separately). Publication date: January 31, 2002

www.africanpublishingcompanion.com

Published both in a print version and in electronic format, *The African Publishing Companion* offers a collection of concise yet detailed information about many aspects of African publishing and the book trade. Purchase of the print version will entitle purchasers free access to the password-protected online version, and updates for a period of 24 months. The online version can be found at [www.africanpublishingcompanion.com](http://www.africanpublishingcompanion.com)

*The African Publishing Companion* is intended as a one-stop reference source that will facilitate access to a wide array of information relating to African publishing, and to serve as a desktop companion for quick answers to questions about the African book industries and the various players, organizations, and publications involved. And much more:

- ✂ Pulls together a broad range of up-to-the-minute information previously only available through consultation of several separate sources, or not previously available either in print or online formats.
- ✂ Extensively cross-referenced, and includes over one thousand Email addresses, and links to Web sites and a variety of Internet documents.
- ✂ Contains an extensive bibliographic survey of the literature on the key issues and topics that dominate African publishing today, with an emphasis on the most recent literature published over the past five years.
- ✂ Fully searchable online version will be kept current with new material and extra entries added at regular intervals.
- ✂ A wide-ranging bibliographic survey of recommended reading on various high-profile topics associated with African publishing and book development. It will include details of books, substantive articles, papers in edited collections, and a variety of Internet documents, providing sources for reading – and leading to a fuller understanding – about the different issues as they relate to the African book industries. A short abstract is provided for each item, and references to published reviews are included for a number of the books. Although some historically important documents will also be included, the emphasis will be on the most recent core literature published over the last five years, up to the end of 2001.

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*International Book Publishing: An Encyclopedia*, Philip G. Altbach and Edith Hoshino (eds.), 726 pp, 1995. New York: Garland \$95 (cloth). Available from Garland Publishing, Inc, 1000A Sherman Ave, Hamden, CT 06514, USA.

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