

AFRICA ASSERTS ITS IDENTITY
Part I: The Frankfurt Book Fair

by Barbara Harrell-Bond



The 1980 Frankfurt Book Fair focused on books "printed and published in Africa." Many participants got their first exposure to the richness and diversity of African literature, despite the problems — largely economic — that inhibit Africa's publishing industry.

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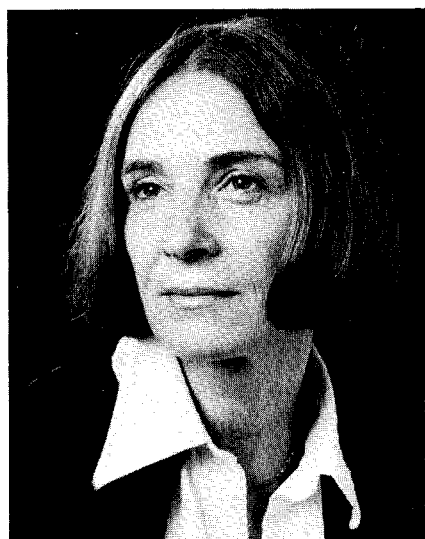
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In a discussion on the politics of information, Mario de Andrade, Commissar of Information in Guinea-Bissau, observed that the international dissemination of information has a one-way, vertical structure which is monopolized by the West and which excludes all "real communication." "Be it audio-visual or the written word," he continued, "it is, in the final analysis, the monopoly who decides and selects which subjects are in their opinion to be diffused. The result is that it is the monopoly which determines the importance of information which, in turn, provides the basis for an image of the world reality and consequently its impact."¹ Indeed, the image of Africa as the "Dark Continent" still prevailing today (which had its origins in the theories of racial superiority developed to justify the slave trade and imperialism) was created mainly in Europe by non-African authors.²

Twenty years ago there was virtually no publishing industry in Africa worth mentioning and only a handful of African writers were publishing outside the continent. With the establishment of the East African Publishing House in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda and Editions CLE in Cameroun, and with the proliferation of state and private enterprise houses in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa, a quiet publishing revolution has nevertheless begun. Outside specialist circles, however, few people in the West know that today it is possible to purchase literature written by African authors and published by indigenous companies. Fewer still have read such books because the publishing industry in Africa continues to suffer from the one-sided flow of information from

North to South on which de Andrade commented. As he put it, "How can there be real communication so long as the world is divided by a frontier between countries which are the producers and exporters of information and countries which are the consumers and importers of this information?"

Nor has this imbalance been limited to North-South dimensions. Said Mzee, the East African publisher who organized the Halle 7 exhibit, "Printed and Published in Africa," noted that, "despite the progress Africa has made in book production, the industry remains something of an enigma, not least to the Africans themselves. Probably no one knows for certain how many publishing houses exist on the continent. Africans in the west do not know what is published in the east and vice versa, and the linguistic barriers that divided the continent into Anglophone, Francophone, and Lusophone stood in the way of any meaningful interaction between them."³

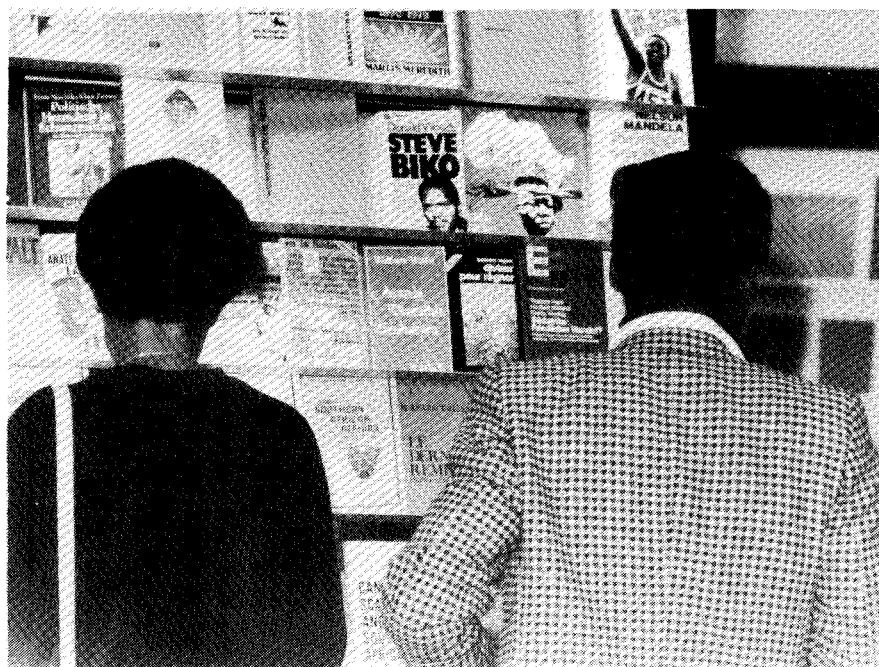
It was an awareness of the commercial obstacles to redressing the balance of information transmission that led to the decision to focus the 1980 Frankfurt Book Fair (*Messe*) on Africa. The fair, which dates back to the Middle Ages, attracts publishers from all over the world to exhibit and sell their books and, above all, to buy and sell international rights and negotiate co-publishing agreements. It is the single most important international book trade gathering; this year more than 5,100 publishers from 92 countries exhibited some 280,500 books, 84,000 of which were new publications. The 1980 fair (October 8-13) had as its

theme "Africa—a Continent Asserts its Identity."

Such book fairs have much more than commercial significance. The average reader may not realize that decisions made by the publishing houses ultimately determine the kind of reading material available to him. To believe that such commercial enterprises merely *reflect* the tastes of their customers is naive; the publishers are also active agents in *determining* what the public chooses to buy and thus play an important role in shaping the consciousness of society. This is particularly true as far as the image of Africa is concerned. Al Imfeld of the Evangelical Press Service in Germany put it this way:

It is the publishing industry itself that perpetuates the European orientation in literature and it is here that our European preoccupation with ourselves stands out most. In the northern hemisphere, from Japan to the Soviet Union, from Europe to North America, nearly a million titles by us or about us are published or reprinted every year. Other cultures and continents tend to go under in the deluge of paper and ink. The greatest victim of our ethnocentrism is the Third World. Books supported by no lobby, little advertising, and only meager profits have only an outside chance in the tough literary marketplace.⁴

Five years ago Peter Weidhaas assumed the directorship of the Frankfurt Book Fair. He observed that, while an increasing number of publishers from the so-called Third World were participating in the fair, only a small group of insiders had any conception of book production in Africa, Latin America, Asia, or the



The fair marked a great step forward in the dialogue between Africa and the West, and among the African states themselves.

But anyone who is in doubt about its meaning in that context need only be reminded that a British governor of Rhodesia in the 1950s defined the partnership between black and white in his territory as the partnership of the horse and its rider.⁶

He went on to acknowledge that the expression of this colonial ideal in such "stark and crude" terms might startle reasonable white people into "indignant unrecognition." Although this sentiment might now be more politely formulated, he insisted "it was and is the fundamental attitude of Europe to Africa." He continued:

Even the enunciation of the metaphor in human/animal terms is neither new nor accidental. Let there be no mistake about it. In confronting the black man, the white man has a simple choice: either to accept the black man's humanity and equality or to reject him and see him as a beast of burden. For centuries Europe has chosen the beastly alternative which automatically has ruled out the possibility of dialogue. You may talk to a horse, but you do not wait for a reply.⁷

In her address marking the formal opening of the fair, Dr. Hildegard Hamm-Brücher, Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Office in Germany, referred to Achebe's imagery of partnership in the dialogue between Europe and Africa. "Has our relationship with the black people of Africa ever been recognized by us as a problem," she asked, "*a problem of our own culture?* When I say 'we,' I mean not only Germans, I mean the people of our entire cultural orbit, all those referred to as 'whites' in Black Africa, all those who up to the more recent past referred to the Africans as 'savages.'" She questioned whether Europeans have truly changed their attitudes toward people of different color or cultural origin. While we are willing to recognize their governments and to trade with them, "do we really see the human substance? Do we know the people—do we have the

Arab world and only a few publishing companies from those parts of the world, most of them state-owned, could afford to rent exhibit space. Recognizing the significance of books as a means of transcending national and cultural boundaries and appreciating the commercial importance of the fair in that process, he decided that something had to be done. Hence, he conceived the idea of having a special theme for each fair. In 1976 it was Latin America, two years from now it will be Asia—this year it was Black Africa.

Peter Weidhaas hopes to raise public consciousness—through literature⁵—by helping to create a market for books from these parts of the world and to interest European publishers in translating them and getting them into the bookshops. Africa, as he noted, tends to be "woefully neglected." It was "only an exotic outsider, little noticed in the literary marketplace." Many people still believe that Africa has no publishers other than the subsidiaries of the large multinationals operating on the continent.

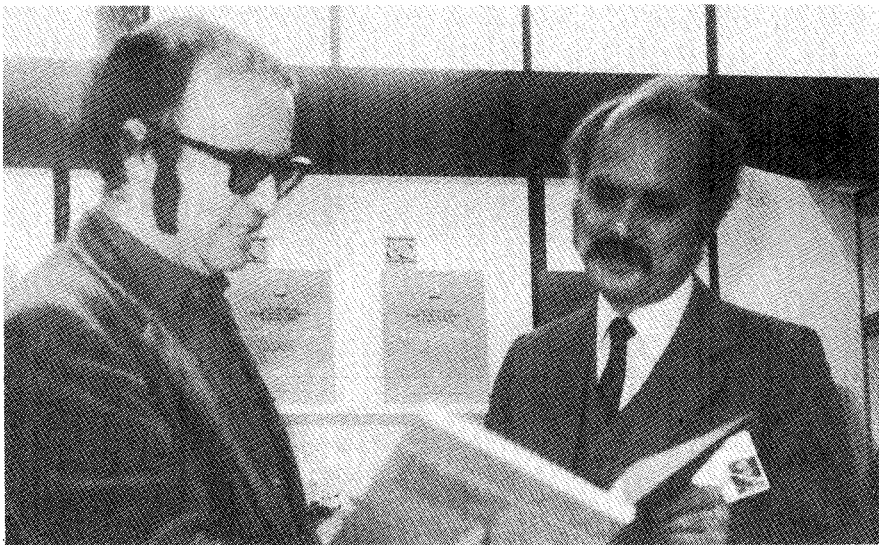
By aiding the publishing industry in Africa, the organizers of the 1980 fair hoped also to promote a cultural awareness which would extend beyond Frankfurt and even beyond the book trade. Through the financial support of the German Foreign Office, many publishers and authors

from Africa were able to attend who otherwise could not have afforded to come. Approximately 180 publishing houses from 29 African countries participated. The facilities made available, together with the enthusiasm of German journalists, academics, and members of activist groups, provided, as Imfeld put it, a remarkable "chance for Africa to tell its story." The fair marked a significant step forward in the dialogue between Africa and the West and, perhaps of equal importance, among African states themselves. This *Report* will describe events and attitudes at the fair against the background of the publishing revolution taking place in Africa.

Are We Ready for Dialogue with Africa?

In a widely publicized address to the Berlin Festival last year, Chinua Achebe considered the factors that impede cultural dialogue between North and South—in this case between Europe and Africa. *Partnership*, he observed, was the key word but it was also the source of the problem, since no definition of partnership can exclude the notion of equality. Said Achebe:

And equality is the one thing which Europeans are conspicuously incapable of extending to others, especially to Africans. Of course partnership as a slogan in political rhetoric is frequently bandied about.



Peter Weidhaas, Director of the Frankfurt Book fair, with Hans Zell (left), editor of the African Book Publishing Record.

desire to know them? Have we indeed got rid of our 'white pride'?... Despite our centuries of cultural growth and our own, equally poignant, learning processes and despite our superiority in material things, are we not sometimes, in our communication with Africa, the more ignorant and indigent of the two partners and indeed the learners? After all, the Africans whom we encounter in this cultural dialogue feel at home in at least two cultures—and that makes them richer in cultural matters than we are."

Europe's readiness for genuine dialogue with Africa on the basis of equality is a moot question. From the perspective of African writers and publishers who attended the Frankfurt Book Fair this year, the West's continued complicity with the racist regime of South Africa is ample evidence that it is not. This complicity was demonstrated by the ten stalls where South African publishers were exhibiting their books. The "dialogue" at the fair had a decided political character from the outset. Many African writers and publishers called for an immediate walkout unless the South Africans were forced to leave. There was a

demonstration march to the South African stalls and a "sit-in" by participants—black South African writers whose books and very presence were forbidden in their country made speeches denouncing the white-ruled regime. The African exhibition in Halle 7 was officially closed on the second day as a gesture of protest and a petition was circulated demanding that the South African publishers be excluded next year.

The platform the fair provided for Africans to educate the German public about the West's continued contribution to the economic and political oppression of the black peoples of Africa, particularly in South Africa, was used in a number of other dramatic ways. Those who thought that "culture" or "literature" may be divorced from economics and politics were given considerable food for thought.⁸

The Exhibition in Halle 7: "Printed and Published in Africa"

The exhibition in Halle 7 of the Frankfurt Messe was probably the largest display of African books ever to have been assembled. There were some 2,000 titles from 180 publishing houses from all over the continent, and the "Africana" section—that is, books published about Africa outside Africa—included 540 publishers from 26 countries showing some 3,500 books and journals.

In his introduction to the catalogue of Africana, Peter Weidhaas reminded his readers that books

A poster prominently displayed: "Africans are being discriminated against in this town. While they display their art and while you enjoy their music and literature, they are being rejected by landlords and turned away from public places."



written by non-Africans about Africa always contain a "double message." While on the surface they may appear to present information about Africa, "between the lines, they tell us a good deal about the identity of the non-African author, about the spirit of the time of which he is a part, and of the culture that shaped him." This exhibition would require "an active visitor who is willing to examine...just how great that gap between reality and projection is." He hoped that the joint exhibition would provide a chance to "reduce the gap between African realities and non-African projections."

Halle 7 was more than a place to view imaginatively arranged books and to meet publishers from Africa. At the center was a stage with attractive, informal seating for a large audience. Here poetry and prose were read by well-known African authors, discussions and debates took place between African writers and publishers, musicians performed modern and traditional African music, and there were African dancers and dramatic performances. It was here, too, on the first day of the fair, that groups of African writers and publishers met to organize the demonstration against the participation of South African publishers. The hall also contained a restaurant serving West African dishes, staffed by African students living in Germany.

Although only members of the book trade were allowed entry in the mornings, the public was permitted to attend the fair every afternoon until 6:30 P.M. The attention given to the African theme by the media, particularly radio and television, insured that nearly everyone in Germany heard about the Book Fair. Thousands of people, including busloads of schoolchildren, made their way through the exhibits each day and many attended a special "Africa Evening" featuring Senegalese musicians and dancers.

The "Printed and Published in Africa" exhibition organized by Said Mzee showed these visitors how the industry had developed over the decade. Most made their first acquaintance with such publishing houses as Cameroun's Editions CLE, Nigeria's Fourth Dimension, or Zimbabwe's Mambo Press. For still more visitors, the stands provided the first glimpse of publishing in Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau.

In a special Frankfurt Book Fair double number of the *African Book Publishing Record* (ABPR), editor Hans Zell reported on the dramatic increase in book production throughout Africa:

Although no up-to-date or reliable statistics are available, we estimate that production is increasing by at

least 50 percent annually. New companies are emerging all the time, and there is evidence of a great deal of imaginative entrepreneurial skill and rapid growth of some indigenous firms, particularly in Nigeria and in Kenya. And in Francophone Africa we have witnessed the very impressive start of Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines, a publishing undertaking set up with the enlightened support of two African governments. Elsewhere, indigenisation decrees in several African countries have ensured that the majority equity of the major UK multinationals has been transferred to African ownership. Although co-operation and ties still exist between multinationals and their former branches in Africa, the bulk of the publishing decisions are no longer made in London, but by African executive personnel. And whilst it is true that the much-maligned multinationals, despite the fact that majority shareholding may have been sold to African partners, have still much working to their advantage, and whereas it is similarly true that they still dominate the lucrative educational markets in Africa, there is also evidence that the multinationals are now engaged in publishing new African-oriented books and literature, published in Africa, by Africans.⁹

In his review of the exhibition, Mzee emphasized that it made no claim to reflect the publishing industry in Africa in its entirety. "Notable absences" included some ministries of education, which in many countries are the sole publishers of educational material at the primary and secondary school level. Nevertheless, the exhibition permitted some general observations about the products of the industry in Africa and he pointed to a number of trends.

He noted that apart from documenting the "multinational, indigenous, and Christian contributions to modern African publishing, the exhibition showed that links are being established between African states. This is particularly the case between Francophone and Lusophone countries." However, he observed, "Sadly, few translations of African creative writing in French



Sipho Sepamla, South African writer.



Senegalese dancers performing at the African evening program.



and Portuguese have appeared in Anglophone Africa."

African publishing, he said, is the liveliest in those countries where "despite the overpowering presence of multinational and state publishing" there is still room for private initiative. On the other hand, the recent success of Les Nouvelles Editions (NEA) in Senegal with its winning of the Noma award proves that "state publishing does not have to be synonymous with churning out propaganda for the ruling party."

The exhibition was divided into 21 different categories which were to some extent, as Mzee explained, dictated by the amount of material submitted. African creative writers made up the largest single group. Other subjects included: critical works on African literature, drama and music, ethnology and anthropology, language and linguistics, sociology, history, politics, religion, medicine, philosophy and psychology, law and administration, technology, children's books, textbooks, and reference works.

African literature, Mzee avered, is "taking a new direction." "No longer are the rejection of Western values and their attendant calamities, the nostalgic longing for an idyllic past or 'the false start' in Africa the only themes which occupy the minds of African writers," he said. There is a new crop of writers who have not been educated in universities abroad, and whose writing describes their own experiences in their own society and, hence, those of the large majority of their countrymen. Such writing, which Albert Gerard has described as "clinical realism," was exemplified, said Mzee, by Mariama Bâ's Noma-prize winning novel *Une si longue lettre* (see Part II of this series) and Musa Ly Sangare's *Sourd-muet, je demande la parole*.

The many historical works submitted for the exhibition reveal, he said, the "earnestness with which African scholars approach their continent's historiography," many of these historians having provided new insights into African history through the skillful combination of oral and written sources. Certainly the exhibition documented, as Said Mzee summed it up, "the remarkable progress the publishing indus-

try has made in the past ten years amid daunting problems." Looking to the future, he recommended greater attention to technical subjects, adult literacy material, children's literature, and literature in indigenous languages (although the last was better represented in the collection than I, at least, had expected).

Problems Facing African Publishers

The exhibition in Halle 7 not only recorded the impressive accomplishments of African publishing, it also revealed some of the continuing problems faced by indigenous firms. As Kwame Nyarko, head of Ghana Publishing Corporation, pointed out, experts concerned with book development in Africa pre-occupy themselves with authorship and manuscript development as "if the continent were destitute of writers"—yet, potential authors abound. Throughout Africa there is a "veritable hunger" for reading material. Speaking of Ghana, he recalled:

...the stampede to buy books when a ship called Lagos docked at Tema to sell books. For fourteen days there were long queues of people waiting to buy books.... The problems thus center around printing facilities and capacity. Printing technology has not matched other developments in the book trade in Ghana. As a result most Ghanaian printers who boldly advertise themselves are essentially jobbers. Text-book, general, and scholarly publishing is new to most of them and they have neither the right equipment nor skilled labor to undertake such jobs, and publishers therefore cannot place work with such printers. Even the few printing houses that have the necessary equipment and competent staff for book work are starved of inputs like paper, films, plates, and spare parts....¹⁰

All these materials, in addition to printing machinery, must be imported and paid for in hard currency, and the present economic plight of nearly all African economies means that the foreign exchange requirements of the publishing industry are not a high priority. (Nyarko is describing the situation in Ghana, but my own observations confirm reports from other African publishers that, with the possible exception of

Nigeria, these conditions occur throughout the continent, differing only in degree.)

Nyarko continued:

Ghana, a wit has observed, has become the headquarters of world inflation. Prices of all raw materials that printers need are soaring daily. There are chronic shortages of all items, and even ordinary newsprint recently became so scarce and so expensive that some newspapers ceased publication. The question of spare parts for the available printing equipment has also become intractable. At the present time all the machines in the lithographic section of the Tema Press have broken down lacking spare parts, and its web-offset machine has been standing idle for over a year for want of the necessary import license and accompanying letters of credit that would enable it to order a damper sleeve and some other minor spare parts, altogether not costing more than £1000.

The most serious and crippling problems result from the dependence on expensive imports. While many black African states possess the raw materials required for paper manufacture, for instance, all of them rely on imported paper. Moreover, the situation is not likely to change in the near future.

Nyarko reports on another ironical aspect of the economic problems facing publishers in Africa. The policy that books should be imported duty-free, introduced during the colonial period, remains the practice in most African countries. Yet, the paper that indigenous book production requires attracts "colossal" duty—in Ghana, 33.5 percent. If one of the results of African participation at the Frankfurt Book Fair is "a first step towards shattering the monopolist role of multinational publishing houses headquartered in Europe,"¹¹ then publishers in Africa are going to have to form a lobby powerful enough to convince their own governments to alter such self-defeating policies.

Another major problem facing African publishers is book distribution. The Frankfurt Book Fair was the culmination of a series of efforts made over the past ten years to improve the distribution of books printed and published in Africa.

Many African publishers are not, unfortunately, as publicity- and export-oriented as they might be, and relatively few African publications can be found on European or U.S. bookshelves. While the priorities for many African publishers must lie at home, an increasing number of their publications—on literary, cultural, and academic subjects—deserve wider promotion overseas.

In cooperation with African publishers, *ABPR* editor Hans Zell has been instrumental in the promotion of African publishing and has consistently called for a more aggressive marketing of African materials overseas. The *ABPR*, which serves as a buying and acquisitions guide for booksellers and librarians, provides bibliographic coverage of African publications in English and French as well as titles in African languages. Information on new and forthcoming publications is listed free of charge, and the journal also includes reviews of books and periodicals published in Africa. The journal is widely circulated to libraries, booksellers, and publishers within the African continent; it also goes outside Africa to libraries and research institutions with African studies interests or special collections on Africa, as well as to publishers and booksellers specializing in Africana and the Third World. The *ABPR* is thus a major source of communication and information for the African book trade.

The bibliographical data from the journal also provide the base for *African Books in Print*, now in its second edition. Hans Zell also produces another important reference work, *The African Book World and Press: a Directory*. Now in its second revised and expanded edition, the directory provides information, unavailable elsewhere, on libraries, publishers, the retail book trade, research, institutions with publishing programs, popular magazines, scholarly periodicals, and major newspapers throughout Africa. The second edition has added details about the printing trade and allied industries in Africa. The directory has been widely praised as an indispensable tool to librarians, publishers, and booksellers.

Born in Switzerland, Zell first went to Africa in 1965 to manage a bookshop. Since then he has devoted his career to the development of African publishing. Ironically, the *ABPR* and his other publications are not produced in Africa, but in Oxford, England. Commenting on this, he says:

*In our very first issue published in January 1975 we posed ourselves the question why an African book trade journal should be published in Oxford, England...rather than in Africa itself. The answers then, were that problems of logistics, difficulties of communication, effective distribution, and high printing costs would make it impracticable to publish from Africa. The answers today are still the same to a large extent, and would make it difficult in practice to publish from Africa at the present time—never mind finding a publisher willing to take the risk—but surely this is a necessary transplant that will have to come some time in the years ahead.*¹²

Others have undertaken commercial ventures to promote the distribution of African books outside the continent. Allen Boyd, for example, founded the African Imprint Library Service in the United States. While writing a secondary-school textbook which required authentic details on life in Africa, Boyd discovered the problems of obtaining books written by Africans: "There were plenty of books on this subject written by non-Africans...but you can't rely on a non-African to see things from an African point of view. He could be right but one might very well not know if he was wrong. What I needed were books actually authored by Africans."¹³

Surveying the sources he eventually discovered, Boyd decided there was a wide market for such materials if buyers could obtain information on what is available (most publishers in Africa are not large enough to warrant the expense of printing catalogues) and then overcome the problems involved in ordering from overseas. Thus the imprint service was established. Boyd uses a variety of methods, including local agents, to collect information on what is published in Africa and to arrange purchasing for his clients outside the continent.

The problems of book promotion and distribution are not limited to those between Africa and the rest of the world: communication between African states themselves is equally problematic. The colonial period imposed artificial boundaries on the continent which were raised higher by the imposition of linguistic, political, and economic barriers. Shipping books from East to West Africa or vice versa is a nightmare, consignments taking a minimum of six months to reach their destination. Several African countries make even the importation of books difficult and foreign exchange regulations make collection nearly impossible. As Mzee noted, few books published in one African country have been translated and published in another. In most cases a writer from one African language area has become known in another only through the activities of multinationals, who buy the rights and distribute the books from Europe. Even in the case of Mariama Bâ's book, *Une si longue lettre*, which received so much publicity at the fair, all the translation rights were purchased by publishers *outside* Africa with one exception—the English edition—which will be co-published with a Nigerian house.

Awareness of the limited distribution capabilities of their own country's publishers has, understandably, tempted some African writers to accept contracts with publishers outside Africa. A few enterprising African publishers have managed to "capture" well-known writers who were previously published by one of the multinationals, but hitherto most important contracts have been signed with European publishing houses.¹⁴ Yet, there are good reasons why African writers, established outside the continent or not, should welcome increased opportunities to publish with indigenous firms. As Mariama Bâ put it in conversation with me in Frankfurt:

Before when we had to be published outside Africa there were some things which did not suit them. Someone does not easily give another human being the gun which is going to be used to shoot him in the head. We are more at ease to say what we have to say between Africans and even if it is a message

which is going to irritate those outside Africa, it does not matter. The African publisher will accept such material. As I said, outside Africa they are not going to put a gun in our hands so that we can massacre them. It is important to publish in Africa. Also because we are trying to develop. Development has become a reality in all sectors. It is hard to attack everything all at the same time, but we must begin with a little here and a little there. Development has to be harmonious. I believe that books are an instrument of that development. We cannot go forward without culture, without saying what we believe, without communicating with others, without making people think about things. Books are a weapon, a peaceful weapon perhaps, but they are a weapon. Publishing in Africa also allows for the reconstruction of our history. There are some written landmarks now, before there were only oral histories. Now books allow us to know what happened. For example, someone will be able to read my book and know what happened in 1980. We will be able to look and base ourselves on other witnesses and reconstitute the history of Africa that was.

Serious efforts have been made within the African book trade to improve distribution across national boundaries. A book fair for French-speaking Africa is held annually in Bamako, Mali; for English-speaking countries, there is the much larger, more important fair in Ife, Nigeria. The latter is an international gathering: both the Russians and the Americans participated in 1979 and the Chinese in 1980. The second presentation of the Noma Award will be made in 1981 at the seventh annual Ife Book Fair. The Regional Centre for Book Development in Africa, in Yaounde, Cameroon, has extended its activities to all African states south of the Sahara. The center resulted from an International Co-operation Agreement between the government of Cameroon and UNESCO and is to become a coordinating body which, in cooperation with the National Book Committees of its member countries, will encourage the promotion and use of books in the region. The center will also conduct research, and gather and circulate information and documentation. It will also concern itself

with professional training and aims to stimulate development of the book market in Africa. Such efforts have not yet overcome the problems described in this Report, but an encouraging and significant development was the successful launching by NEA, a very new publishing house, of the new Senegalese writer, Mariama Bâ.

The Problem of Language

One of the greatest problems of the book trade in Africa may, ironically enough, be the best means for transcending national boundaries on the continent in the future. The enormous number of languages spoken on the continent (estimated at about 1,000) has been one of the main reasons for adopting the language of the colonial power as the official language in most independent African states. At the same time, as Davidson Nicol pointed out in his speech at the presentation of the Shanga Award (described below): "The fact is that more people in the world speak Hausa than all the Scandinavian languages combined; more people speak Swahili than Dutch; more people speak Yoruba and Ibo than Italian. Yet we do not hear of difficulties in publishing books in Sweden, Holland, and Italy."

Moreover, many an African language group extends over more than one country. Above all, most Africans are multilingual. In my travels across West Africa I have observed that most Africans suffer no problems in verbal communication even when traveling among several African states. Unfortunately, it is taking a long time to produce orthographies in these languages, and there is insufficient coordination between individual projects dealing with the same language in different countries.¹⁶ In a paper read to the African Studies Association meeting in 1979, Hans Zell considered the role of African languages and the problems they pose for publishers:

That the future of African literature belongs to literature in the African languages is a view that has been voiced by many African writers. It is also the opinion of the Union of Writers of African Peoples, the organization set up in 1975, whose stated policy is "to give special encouragement to the literature of

*Africa in the indigenous languages and at the same time promote the adoption of a single language for the continent of Africa, as an instrument and symbol of the unity of African peoples everywhere."*¹⁷

Many African writers are now urging their colleagues to curb their tendencies to write for an overseas market and address themselves to a home audience.

That there is an enormous market for publishing in African languages has already been shown, as Zell reports, by the success of the multinationals: Longman, for example, publishes in no less than 17 main languages, 15 or so Kenyan languages, and at least 7 Ugandan languages. Macmillan's affiliate, the Northern Nigerian Publishing Company in Zaria, has a particularly strong Hausa list, and Oxford University Press, Heinemann's, and Thomas Nelson have also published widely in the African languages.

These publishers have mainly been tapping the schoolbook market, however. Attempts to publish creative writing in African languages have not been commercially successful. Most people in Africa are too poor to buy books. Then there is the question of literacy: language policies have varied widely, but in the main, only a minority of children on the continent are being taught African languages in school and in very few countries has this been a priority. Yet, unknown numbers of people in Africa who are usually defined as "illiterates" do read their own languages—but in Arabic script.¹⁸ The overwhelming dominance of Western culture, however, has thus far meant that no major effort has been made to tap this "hidden literacy."

There are other, more subtle reasons why authors should write in their own languages. Kenyan playwright Ngugi wa Thiong'o, in an interview on the BBC African Service, put it this way:

Literature, as a process of linking images, utilizes language and grows upon the collective experience, that is history, embodied in that language. In writing one should hear all the whisperings, all the shouting, all the crying, all the loving and all the hating of the many voices in the past, and those voices will never



The fair provided many African writers with their first opportunity to meet other authors from Africa. Ousmane Sembene (with pipe) chatting with new friends.

speak to a writer in a foreign language.¹⁹

There is considerable evidence that vernacular publishing may be used as a powerful political weapon. (Although I was unable to confirm it, it was said that opposition groups in Gambia were, over the past few months, circulating political tracts in the rural areas using the two main indigenous languages, Wolof and Mandinka, printed in Arabic script.²⁰) Hans Zell gives some other examples:

One aspect that seems to favor increased African language publishing is the fact that there is ample evidence that plays presented in the African languages can enjoy huge popularity, as was clearly demonstrated by the phenomenal success of Ngugi wa Thiongo's Ngahiika Ndende. So successful in fact that the government was prompted to revoke its performing license. Written in Kikuyu, the content of this Ngugi play reflects the lives and aspirations of ordinary peasants and workers, and was performed by actors and actresses from a Kenyan urban community.... In Sierra Leone, dramatists such as Dele Charley and especially Pat Maddy now write their plays in Krio, Maddy also developing a socially-committed theater aiming to raise the people's consciousness.²¹

(Recently in Sierra Leone several plays were censored by the government and some were banned.)

While some African writers now refuse to write in anything but African

languages (for example, Ngugi wa Thiongo writes only in Kikuyu) and try to persuade others to do the same, probably most authors are like Mariama Bâ, who writes in French because it is the only written language she knows. Although as she pointed out in our discussion, communication with "the masses" will depend on the use of national languages, she is equally concerned with the need to communicate in European languages:

I believe very deeply that to reach the masses we must write. When one writes, it is for everyone. Of course, first of all, it is for oneself, to see where we are at, for our own development. But the masses have to be educated. We must write so that all of the masses are able to read the message. The writer records his ideas so that the masses are able to read and to reflect. It is vital that the masses be able to read. Thus the importance of our own national languages. But if our ideas for change are to reach outside Africa, we must also express ourselves in international languages. In this way we can be heard outside, we will not isolate ourselves. Even here in Senegal, Wolof is not the only language which is spoken. In every African state there is this problem of many languages. But in French African countries we were all under the same colonial rule, we communicated in the French language. Thus we must not deny the importance of this language as a means of communication with others.

Germany's African Dialogue

The Frankfurt Book Fair's emphasis on Africa was designed to have a cultural as well as a commercial impact on Europe, particularly Germany, whose historical links with Africa have not been as close as elsewhere in Europe or in the United States. As fair spokesman Al Imfeld explained, "up to now almost only churches or solidarity groups such as "issa" or Amnesty International have provided a forum for African writings.... What is new is that African organizations and exile groups in the Federal Republic of Germany and Europe also will receive a place of honor. The management would like to go a step farther than the printed page, to make Africa appear alive and real."

A number of German organizations formed activities around the focal theme. Dieter Riemenschneider, Professor of English and American Literature at the University of Frankfurt, held a three-day seminar preceding the fair. Many of the African writers who were guests of the German government participated in the seminar discussion on the functions of African literature. Interviews with African writers were broadcast on German television and, in a unique experiment, African journalists were asked to write about the Frankfurt Fair for German newspapers.

Much of the credit for extending the cultural impact of the African theme belongs to the Afrika Forum. This association of African writers, artists, and scholars living in the Federal Republic of Germany was established about a year ago to promote and develop better understanding of Africa in Germany. To coincide with the fair, the group launched a new periodical, the *Afrika Journal*, which seeks to extend contact and dialogue between men and women from the world of "business, politics, and culture." Complementing this initiative, the Forum instituted the Shango Prize, awarded annually to a leading statesman who promotes such dialogue. This year it went to Willy

Brandt for his work as chairman of the North-South Commission. A Sierra Leonean, Dr. Davidson Nicol, Executive Director of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, was invited to Frankfurt to present the award. The Afrika Forum also helped to organize an exhibition of African art at Halle 7 and at the Deutsche Genossenschaftsbank in Frankfurt. In his speech formally opening the latter exhibition, His Excellency Dr. Gustav H.K. Deveneaux, Ambassador of Sierra Leone to the Federal Republic of Germany, reminded the distinguished audience of two main reasons for the great need to promote African culture in Germany and Europe:

The first is that the African continent over the last three to four hundred years has experienced a history of disasters ranging from the transatlantic slave trade and internal confusion to colonialism and neo-colonialism from which she can extricate herself only with the support of the West and justifiably so. The second, emanating from the first, is that to accomplish this, there must be an acceptance of the common humanity of the African, the surest foundation for peace and understanding between Africa and the rest of the world. Unfortunately, our history of the last few centuries has left many outsiders with the erroneous impression that we have neither been part of the march of civilization nor can we now make our own positive contributions to the world...relations between peoples cannot only hinge on economics but must incorporate culture as well to promote mutual understanding.

The range of exhibits, he said, revealed that "African culture, in spite of the battering and shocks it has taken, is remarkably durable, vibrant, and varied."

Dialog Afrika was another important cultural initiative given further impetus by the 1980 Fair. Hammer, an old German publishing house with links to the Protestant church and the German trade union movement, has been promoting Latin American literature for several years. About three years ago a group of journalists who write on Africa approached Hermann Schultz, Hammer's director, and pointed out that he had

"forgotten about Africa." As journalist Gerd Meuer put it, "We knew it would be difficult [to motivate Germans to read literature written by Africans]." Together, they came up with the idea of financing the project, *Dialog Afrika*, through subscriptions to 16 African novels co-published by Hammer and Walter. Each subscriber paid DM250 and the Protestant churches of Switzerland gave DM100,000 to launch the series. So far the group has translated and published 14 titles and has plans for 2 more. Nor are the publishing activities of this group limited to literature: it has translated a history of Africa of which 5,000 copies have been sold already in Germany. More recently, Gerd Meuer has translated *Apartheid: Power and Historical Falsification* by Marianne Cornevin, and it will soon be published for German readers. In 1981-82 *Dialog Afrika* will expand its interests to include the rest of the Third World and its name will be changed to *Dialog*.

Gerd Meuer, who also works for the Africa Service of the Voice of Germany, has been involved in another effort to give Africa opportunity to speak. Fifty-two programs of 20 minutes each on African literature have been produced. These programs feature portraits of African authors and include interviews with many writers and recordings of them reading their work.

In April 1980, a Society for the Promotion of African, Asian, and Latin American Literature was formed by a group of 20 publishers, journalists, literary critics, and university teachers in Frankfurt. In its press release the society explained its *raison d'être*.

We are acting against the background of the following situation. There is virtually no exchange of information between publishers and media in Europe on the one hand and authors and publishers in the countries of the so-called Third World on the other. The existing structures of information transmission function between the industrial countries only, or along a one-way street from north to south. There is scarcely any reaction in the north to the needs of the nations of the so-called Third World, apart from the few and limited opportunities

offered by church and state institutions in the industrial countries.

The society noted there were scarcely any translations from African languages into German, despite the existence of a substantial literature in, for example, Swahili, Kikuyu, Hausa, Duala, Wolof, and Yoruba. They found, moreover, that "apart from the most recent publishing initiatives, only about 30 novels by some 20 authors have been published in the Federal Republic since 1945."

Realizing that this situation could be improved only gradually, the society decided to take some "small, practical, and concrete steps." One step was to produce a brochure containing reviews of 102 books by African authors which had not yet been translated into German. Each review gave details about the author, information as to who held translation rights, and where the relevant African representative could be found at the fair. The society also offered its assistance in introducing publishers to these representatives. Initially, the society decided to concentrate on black African belles-lettres because this form of literature could be easily integrated into the German market. However, it also selected light reading and spy novels from Africa. Out of these activities has grown the Third World Book Agency which will, in future, act free of charge as a go-between in negotiating rights on behalf of African publishers.

South Africa Divides the Fair

A demonstration against the participation of publishers from South Africa took place on the first full day of the fair, although protests against their presence began much earlier and were first made public at the University of Frankfurt three-day seminar. Halle 7 was closed on the following day as a further expression of the position taken by African writers, publishers, and friends of Africa against the white-ruled regime, and petitions were circulated demanding that South African publishers be banned from attendance next year.

This complicated situation reflected the dilemma of those who believe that economics cannot be separated from moral issues. Said Mzee, who coordinated the African exhibition

African writers and publishers together with other friends of Africa occupying the South African stalls in Halle 5.

at Frankfurt, noted that the Africans, both writers and publishers, were guests at the fair and had come at the expense of the German government; only a few publishers (mostly Nigerians) had paid their own way. South African publishers had always attended the fair. German government and commercial involvement in South Africa was also widely known—at least outside Germany. (One had the feeling that for many members of the German public the demonstration and other activities surrounding it provided their first opportunity to learn about the evils of apartheid and their own government's complicity in it.)

Mzee shared the belief that the African book trade must take a stand against South African participation. Together with a Tanzanian publisher and a Kenyan writer, he had worked behind the scenes to try to make the fair a platform from which Africans could address this problem. Coordinating these activities among many African groups was difficult, however, and initiatives for action against South Africa came from several sources. One petition, circulated on the first day, claimed that if the South African exhibition were not immediately closed, all African writers and publishers would go home.

The issues, however, were not so clearly cut. Raven Press, a South African publishing company with a difference, was also exhibiting in Halle 7. The company is headed by Peter Randall who, as *West Africa* magazine reports, "has been harassed and banned by the South African government largely because his Raven Press published anti-apartheid black writers. The Frankfurt Fair authorities, and the German government, had exerted pressure on the South African government to allow him, in spite of his ban, to come to Frankfurt for the fair and the symposium. He was a little dazed, suddenly being allowed to go to meetings and talk to people after three years of imposed silence. He was in favor of the boycott: it was necessary that the evil of apartheid be publicized." 22



James Matthews (below), a South African poet who was allowed to attend the fair by the South African government, reading his poetry in Halle 7.



Peter Weidhaas's position on the demonstration and the continued debate is also reported in the same editorial:

"If you invite writers to come and express their thoughts, you have to listen to what they say," he said. But there was no question of excluding South Africa, he said. The Frankfurt Book Fair could not by law exercise any sort of censorship or exclude anyone. As a passionate anti-Fascist, he himself had been involved in an attempt some years ago to exclude German Fascist publishers; a court order had prevented this...he exerted pressure on the South African government to ensure that Peter Randall and two writers, James Matthews and Sipho Sepamla, could leave the country and come to Frankfurt.

Said Mzee took issue on this alleged absence of censorship. As he explained in an interview with me:

The Book Fair is unhappy about some of these statements I have made on TV.... I must repeat here, I think one must agitate against the principle of [South African] participation. It is just no good to say that because this year there is focus on Africa, the South Africans should have been got out of the way and brought back next year when the Africans are not here. I mean that is not good enough. I think I have made myself fairly clear. [The writers and publishers who appeared at the press conference] were told that the Book Fair knows no censorship and this forced me to make a statement that there is censorship.... I quoted the example of people who would like to come here and participate in the fair and who were kept out...a political sort of solution has been found.... Taiwan is not in the catalogue.... If you say that the Book Fair cannot afford to apply censorship, then my reply to that is that in one instance they must apply censorship and this is in the case of South Africa.... Disagreeing about Russia is not the same thing as disagreeing about racism. We can argue about socialism, some people will say it is good, some will say it is bad, but we cannot argue about racism. If you are saying that the South Africans must come, then what you are saying, in fact, is that maybe racism is good.

Another person, overhearing this interview, interjected the "liberal" position: "So you would put racism on the top of your list, never mind political ideologies, political repression, and brutality of certain regimes around the world? How are you going to pinpoint these?" Mzee replied that the basic difference between such regimes and South Africa is the "question of institutionalizing and condemning people in view of the race to which they belong.... We know that there are some countries where human rights are violated daily, but there is no other country which says, 'If you are born black, you are born inferior.' That is the crux of the matter.... If South Africa set up a dictatorship that was not based on race, what I would do there is to demonstrate against the violation of human rights, but I would not agitate for their exclusion from the fair."

Although the hypocrisy of excluding Taiwan because of German economic interests which are best served by their exclusion did not get wide publicity in the press, it was taken up by radio and television. It will be difficult for the organizers to appeal to the notion of "no censorship" at another Book Fair.

Gerd Meuer analyzed the attitude of the press:

As far as learning about apartheid, they had had a unique opportunity, [the German] people running this hall in hearing about it. But the newspapers have not really given much attention to the demonstration or the statements. You must not forget, business-wise, commerce-wise, and trade-wise, Germany is top, top, top, as far as good relations with South Africa. So it is very difficult to break into the big German newspapers with anti-apartheid information. It is a very tough job. Even in the so-called left-wing liberal daily for which this fellow [referring to someone standing by] and I sometimes work, even there. You know we might do an article once in a while but it is very often being contradicted in the commentary. It is not contradicted really, just [made] wishy-washy.

Referring to left-wing activist groups in Germany, he said:

For them this was just one occasion to use the platform.... This has

been going on in small groups for years. We have a very small anti-apartheid movement of which I am a member. The forum where we can carry this regularly is the Protestant Academies. We have a very highly developed system of what you [in the UK] call an open university kind of academy all over the country. Very plush, well-equipped academies, both Catholic and Protestant churches. They have seminars almost every two weeks on South Africa and apartheid.... The intense link between Germany and South Africa is always mentioned. That and in the evening high schools, this is where it is happening.

The demonstration involved at least 300 people who marched to Halle 5 and occupied the 10 South African stands. The occupation was orderly and participants were reminded not to touch any of the books. Television cameras from many European countries covered the event at which several writers spoke. Some of the South Africans slipped away; others busily collected names from the badges worn by demonstrators—presumably for immigration authorities to store in their computers. Still others stayed and listened. Some excerpts will give the flavor of the event.²³ One speaker:

I believe that the solidarity we need to show with Africans the world over must come together in concrete form now on behalf of our oppressed brothers in Namibia and so-called South Africa. Action can be taken. It is wrong for us to eat at the same table with the devils who shoot our brothers. Therefore, let us take it as a resolution of this sympathetic gathering that if South Africa is allowed to come here... next year, no African, no friend of Africa, no son of Africa will appear in the Frankfurt Book Fair.

Another speaker:

Can I say a few words here? I think that it would be failing as a Black South African writer not to say a few words. I come from a country which does a whole number of things in the name of culture. I come from a country which prevents writers, black and white.... If they are white and they express solidarity with the oppressed people of South Africa, they are either arrested, put in gaol, or they live in exile. Therefore, we should take into account

that in this supermarket of books, the true people of South Africa are ill-represented because the government prevents them from even leaving the country. I have lived abroad for twenty years, not because I choose to live abroad, but because the South African government made it impossible for me to return to my country. I cannot even be quoted, even if I express a sympathy with another human being... a South African newspaper has to ask for permission to quote me.... That is not a country which should come here and pretend it has a sense of community with people who use the words to liberate other human beings. The people who come here in the name of South Africa are the kind of people we should not have anything to do with. This is all I wish to say in the name of South African writers—the true South African writers.

And another speaker:

Can I say a few words? My statement is simple. I am not really taking part in this demonstration to talk to South Africa. I do not want to talk

to South Africa. South Africa in my view is nonexistent. I am talking rather to those who claim to be our friends and invite to their table, to their countries, the greatest enemy of mankind. Some people talk about communism being the great evil. Communism is not an evil. Racism is the worst evil. It is immoral, it is cruel, it is inhuman. Here we have a country which is based, which bases its thinking, its philosophy, on hatred. And here we have it exhibiting the artifacts of culture. This is ridiculous. Therefore, we are giving notice to those who call themselves our friends, in the West, if they insist in cooperating with South Africa, the day will come very quickly when they will not cooperate with us. Thank you very much.

Said Mzee joined the speakers:

I am the coordinator of this event and I wish to make a few things clear. First of all, I would have been very unhappy indeed if the action that has been taken today by the Africans had not been taken. You see, it is not enough to speak about rules, it is not enough to say that our

rules do not allow us to exclude South Africa from the fair when people are dying in South Africa. South Africa is the one country in the world which has consistently refused to have dialogue with the Africans and with the other races, with the other people, ethnic groups, that live in that country. I am probably going to be a very controversial person from now on because I allowed all the Africans to come here in the first place. But let me say when I was asked to accept the job, I thought that the Frankfurt Book Fair would provide the Africans with a forum...which we could use to make our grievances, the grievances of our brothers in South Africa, known. I am leaving it to you, the Africans who are here, to judge me. That is all I wish to say.

"A Liberating Experience of Western Man"

While the theme of the 1980 fair was "Africa—a continent asserts its identity," the irony, according to Peter Weidhaas, is that "today it is the Germans, possibly more than any other people, that suffer from an acute lack of identity."²³ He went on to say that, rather than Africans learning from Europeans, "We can learn from Africa.... The discovery of the African personality, as it emerges from its literature, should be liberating experience of Western man living in an inhuman world lacking in communication."

Quoting the Nigerian sociologist, J.A. Sofala, he said that Africans were "rich in humanity and unspoiled morality." The African personality was "spontaneous friendliness" as well as "moral reservations towards the exploitation of others."

Weidhaas said that, leaving regional, linguistic, and ideological differences aside, all African authors share the same basic theme: the search for their own identity as a means of overcoming alienation and repression.

One wonders how long it will be before there is a general recognition in the West of the enrichment which would come to our culture through the knowledge which is, in part at least, available through books "Printed and Published in Africa." As Tchicaye U Tam'si, a Congolese



Tchicaye U Tam'si.

writer, pointed out in his address at the opening of the fair:

Inviting Africa to play a full part in this year's proceedings can be considered without any doubt as an historical event. That this fair is of cultural significance goes without saying. Africa's presence here has widened its scope considerably. I would like to think that we are in the middle of an intercultural dialogue, the aim of which is to redress the balance between two continents and to establish new relationships between them.... In a word: you have invited the poorest of the Third-World countries to this meeting in Frankfurt. They have brought books over with them.... Only a few

books from only a small number of publishers in relation to the number of books published by an industrialized country.... The reasons for our small output are various. I don't want to go into any of them. Instead I would like to assert that in spite of our extreme poverty we are fully aware of being the hope of tomorrow's world. Underdeveloped or lacking the necessary means does not signify uncultured...even if our voice is weak and the number of books we produce is small, you must nevertheless listen to what we have to say. We have played and still play a supporting role in the drawing up of strategies by the leading nations of the world and in doing so have acquired a firm belief

in the need to see world development take on a more human form. And in order to achieve that we must communicate with one another. We would like to see the peoples, the economies and cultures of the world become more liberated; we would like them to show a greater respect for the dignity of the individual, for his life and his death. The handful of books that you will find...will tell you this, not just this, but this is the essence of what they have to say.... Africa—the cradle of humanity—might one day be the cradle of a more human age to come.

(January 1981)

NOTES

1. Mario de Andrade, *Reflexoes Sobre A Politica Nacional De Informacao*, 1979, translated into English from the Portuguese by Carlos Nogueira.

2. For a discussion of the development of racism as an ideology and its employment by the imperial powers, see Philip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action, 1780-1850* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), and Marvin Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory* (1968), esp. chapters 2-4.

3. Said Mzee in his "Introduction" to *Printed and Published in Africa*, catalogue of the exhibit in Halle 7 of the Frankfurt Book Fair.

4. From an interview distributed to the press by the organizers of the fair.

5. In 1978 the theme was the child and the book. A seminar on racism was part of this "focus program" and a book was published exposing the distorted manner in which children's literature depicts the non-European world. For similar insights based upon work done at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, African Studies Program, see Evelyn Jones Rich, "Mark my word!" *Africa Report* (November-December 1976), and Susan J. Hall, "Tarzan Lives—What do Textbooks Teach our Children About Africa?" *Interracial Books for Children Bulletin*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (1978).

6. Chinua Achebe, "Why Afro-European dialogue fails," *West Africa*, February 25, 1980.

7. Ibid.

8. The publicity about the presence of South Africans at the fair will doubtless influence some African governments to refuse permission for their representatives to participate in future Frankfurt Book Fairs. While some may continue to doubt the ability of Africans to present a united front against those whose commercial interests continue to flourish because of apartheid, the complacency of many must have been shaken by the events in Halle 7. The challenge was unambiguous: "You are either with us or against us."

9. *African Book Publishing Record (ABPR)*, Vol. VI, Nos. 3 & 4, 1980.

10. "Some aspects of the book trade in Ghana," *ABPR*, op. cit. A great deal of printing of African publications must still be carried out elsewhere. Of the books listed in the catalogue *Printed and Published in Africa*, it is estimated that about 40 percent were actually printed outside Africa.

11. As expressed in an editorial in the Nigerian newspaper, *Punch*, May 29, 1980.

12. *African Book Publishing Record*, op. cit.

13. Ibid.

14. In Nigeria many universities have been attempting to impose "international standards" on faculty as far as publishing for tenure is concerned. While lecturers are urged to support the many indigenous scholarly journals that are emerging, the publications that "count" for tenure must be in "internationally recognized" journals.

15. Because *Une si longue lettre* has not yet appeared in English, and few readers of *AUFS Reports* will be aware of the significance of the novel, Part II of this *Report* concentrates on the author's ideas and background.

16. For example, work on the Wolof language is taking place in the Gambia, Senegal, and Mali, with potential usefulness for several other countries where Wolof is spoken. Limited financial resources, compounded by old colonial language and political barriers, make it difficult for interested individuals and groups to coordinate such activities. See "The Demb Ak Tay Resource Centre for Children," *AUFS Report*, forthcoming.

17. "Problems of Publishing in African Languages," *West Africa*, June 16, 1980.

18. See "Local Languages and Literacy in West Africa" [BHB-2-'77], *AUFS*

Reports, West Africa Series, Vol. XVII, No. 2 (1977).

19. Quoted by Hans Zell, *West Africa*, June 16, 1980.

20. Arabic script has been used extensively for indigenous languages in the Gambia. Money is printed in English, the official language, but the amounts are

also printed in Wolof and Mandinka, written in Arabic script. Signs at the Ministry of Works are written in these two languages as well as in English. Such official recognition suggests there is greater literacy in this script here than elsewhere.

21. Zell, *West Africa*, June 16, 1980.

22. *West Africa*, October 20, 1980.

23. In quoting from the speeches presented at the demonstration, I do not give names. When writing about African politics, one is always aware that one's readership is likely to include those who are unsympathetic to African liberation struggles and who search such literature to identify individuals for their own ulterior motives.

24. *Guardian*, October 8, 1980.