



2019 Year-in-Review: A tour of the book world

with

- **Olivia Snaije, Publishing Perspectives**
 - **Fabrice Piault, Livres Hebdo**
- **Michiel Kolman, International Publishers Association**
- **Lawrence Ngaji, National Book Development Council of Kenya**
 - **Javier Celaya, dosdoce.com**

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KENNEALLY: Welcome to Copyright Clearance Center's podcast series. I'm Christopher Kenneally for Beyond the Book.

As the year nears its end, Beyond the Book is looking back at the last twelve months of our programs.

In this edition of our three-part review for 2019, we embark on a tour of the book world.

After the occupation by Islamic State in 2014 of the Iraqi city of Mosul, the university there immediately closed. When classes resumed, the study of literature and philosophy was banned, and many feared the chemistry laboratories would be used to develop weapons. The university library lay in ruins.

Iraqis, with volunteers from Europe and North America, have begun to restore the devastated book collection. At the London Book Fair in March, leaders of that effort shared an update of progress. Olivia Snaije, a contributing editor to *Publishing Perspectives*, covered the program and told me why the Mosul university library means so much to its community.

SNAIJE: Mosul has an incredibly rich history, and it is a city that's on the Silk Road, so it was a place where Muslims, Christians, and Jews from many ethnic



communities lived together for centuries. So it was an incredibly cosmopolitan city.

The library was relatively modern. It was built in 1967. It was the largest in northern Iraq and one of the largest in the greater Middle East. I think they had 1 million or so books, and over 50% of them were in Arabic, and then there were other languages – books in English and other languages. In the 1970s, it was a modern, flourishing library, and definitely one of the most significant academic libraries in the region. I know they had something like 150 departments, so you can imagine the need for the huge diversity of books. They also had government publications that dated back to the founding of the Iraqi state after the Ottoman Empire, and they had ancient manuscripts and so on.

KENNEALLY: During the ISIS occupation of the city, historian Omar Mohammed blogged as the anonymous Mogul Eye. Since the liberation, he has spearheaded an effort to restore the library's book collection.

SNAIJE: Yeah, they need everything. I looked at the Excel sheet that Omar Mohammed published, and I think he had asked students to tell people the books they needed. When you look at the list, they really need everything. It's very wide-ranging, from books on veterinary science to management, electronics, history, pharmacology, and even Japanese. So they really need new, current books.

A person there had visited Mosul, and he said that having the physical books was so important, because the internet was really still spotty. He also emphasized the value of having new and current books, because while he was there, he saw that someone had donated a book, for example, on electronics that was from the 1980s. (laughter) So this is really something that can't be emphasized enough, that they need current books.

In France this spring, a literary giant unexpectedly stepped out of the 19th century and into our own.

As Fabrice Piault, the editor-in-chief of *Livres Hebdo*, a Paris-based weekly that covers books and bookselling, explained for me at BookExpo panel in May, the catastrophic fire at Notre Dame cathedral revived sales for the classic Victor Hugo novel set there.



PIAULT: The next day after the fire, the sales of *Notre Dame de Paris* from Victor Hugo went up and it was difficult to find some in bookshops, actually. So they have to do some reprints very quickly. In *Livres Hebdo*, we were not so surprised because we had seen the same phenomena in 2015 after all the tourist attacks against *Charlie*.

KENNEALLY: Immediately after those terrorist attacks, people's concern for Paris and their love for Paris drove them to want to read *A Moveable Feast*.

PIAULT: Yeah, that's right. But the difference with Victor Hugo is Notre Dame, actually, is that it's not only the book of Victor Hugo, who was in the bestseller list, but several other books about Notre Dame. I think it's very interesting, but it shows that the publishers have to react very fast and to take all opportunities to get some success and some sales.

KENNEALLY: In Nairobi in June, the International Publishers Association welcomed hundreds of delegates for a seminar program hoping to advance development of African publishing and to highlight achievements in literature, education, and freedom of expression.

Program chair Lawrence Njagi, who is Managing Director of Mountaintop Publishers and Director of the National Book Development Council of Kenya, told me that his hopes for African publishing can be found in its classrooms.

NJAGI: The statistics are very clear that the African continent is the new marketplace, and this is appointed by the fact that there's a steady growth in the population, especially youth and young working class, and therefore making Africa in every industry, not just publishing industry the really place to invest. Looking at textbooks and the generating material, obviously where we have a young population, we get demand.

80% of all books that are used that are published in most African countries are textbooks. So, again, driven by demand for rising number of kids in schools, and there is not enough interest for publishers to venture into general or trade materials because the market size is small. But, again, with encouragement of a good book policy, then that will be able to encourage publishers to invest in that directions.



KENNEALLY: In September, the annual Nairobi International Book Fair includes presentation of the Jomo Kenyatta Prize for Literature, a \$12,000 award for the year's best Kenyan-published textbook. Publishers also make literary excursions into the countryside.

NJAGI: instead of waiting for them here in Nairobi, we take the books to where they are. We find that very encouraging and we feel very fulfilled because we see real, genuine interest. Chris, you'd be amazed at how long children will take at one book, both just sitting there and just going through the book and taking it and sitting on the seat and going through and getting the writer, and sometimes asking the writer, why did you write the book this way? Why couldn't you have written this way? So when we have that kind of engagement, we are quite happy. I feel that we are nurturing the next generation.

KENNEALLY: In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly enumerated Sustainable Development Goals, known as SDGs, for the year 2030 that begin with no poverty and include gender equality, clean water and sanitation, and affordable and clean energy.

Quality education is an important SDG, one that the International Publishers Association is supporting with creation of a global children's book club, according to Michiel Kolman, IPA presidential envoy for diversity and inclusion.

KOLMAN: The IPA – the International Publishers Association – and the UN has had a pretty good relationship for many, many years. So we came together, thought, what could we do together? And the best thing we thought of was a book club around the SDGs for children – so for kids around the age of six to 12. You can imagine you're a young boy in Peru, and you can read in your own language – in Spanish, for instance – about clean water and sanitation. Or you're a young girl in China, and you can read in Chinese about gender equality. So that's what we'd like to achieve.

And the book club will be – every month, we announce books around one specific SDG. There are 17. So we started in April, and we will finish next year in September of 2020, which is actually the fifth anniversary of the SDGs. The launch took place at Bologna Children's Book Fair, and there we announced the selected



books in English, in Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian, and Spanish – so the UN languages. And it was around SDG number one, no poverty.

What I did not anticipate, but I find really an interesting concept ... is that people come to us and said, well, I'm an author. I would like to publish something around the SDGs. Are there any publishers that can help me? So if publishers would embrace this, develop in house their own editorial approach to the SDGs, and also support authors in publishing more around the SDGs, that will be great.

KENNEALLY: What does it mean to publishers and to publisher organizations like the IPA to be partnering with the United Nations and other international organizations?

KOLMAN: I think it's a beautiful way where publishers can show that they are engaged in what I would call the big issues that affect the planet. You could see the SDGs as a bit like a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people on the planet, and I think publishers have to play a role in that as well.

KENNEALLY: As we listen to compelling global voices, it is essential we remain attentive to local voices, too, especially those who may be struggling to be heard.

For BookExpo, Spanish publishing analyst Javier Celaya traveled from Madrid to New York City, where he had once studied. At the US's largest publishing trade show – and in lower Manhattan nonetheless – Celaya found Spanish-language voices surprisingly muted.

CELAYA: I'm still very surprised the lack of representation of Hispanics in Book Expo because they are 57 million Americans that are first and second generation Latinos that were born in this country that work in English and study in English, but they go back home, and they want to keep their Latino roots. They watch the news in Spanish, actually the Spanish news channels like Univision and Telemundo. They have bigger audiences than CBS or NBC. They are the biggest media conglomerates in the US. And they listen to music in Spanish, and now they read also in Spanish, in print and E-book, and listen to audio book.

So I think the sooner the US publishers understand that they have another market next door in their domestic market, and they can start exploiting those rights in Spanish and producing their books in print, E-books, and audio. Most likely print



is going to be very difficult. Barnes & Noble used to have a very good section of Spanish, but that's been diminished as a whole, as Barnes & Noble as a whole. But in E-book and audio book where you can really take those products anywhere in the US, and also export it to Mexico, other Latin American countries could be a source of profit, of revenue to many publishers in this country that are not exploiting properly.

KENNEALLY: Digital publishing is able to elevate every voice and to celebrate the creativity in all of us. In the media environment of 2019, the world becomes a crowded place. We can speak our minds. We should also stop to listen.

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