



**COVID-19, Copyright and the Creative Economy**  
*Publishing's Global Leadership Takes on the Crisis*

with

- **Bodour Al Qasimi, Vice President, International Publisher Association; Founder and CEO, Kalimat Publishing Group**
- **Fathima Dada, Managing Director, Oxford Education, OUP**
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HEALY: Hello, everyone. I'd like to welcome you all to this discussion, which is presented as part of the Frankfurt Book Fair's 2020 Frankfurt conference. My name is Michael Healy, and I am the executive director for international relations at Copyright Clearance Center.

Most of you, like me, would have expected now to be walking the aisles of the Frankfurt Book Fair at this time, meeting old friends, making new ones, doing the business of publishing. The fact that we're not, the fact that we're having this conversation in this way, is another small example of the massive disruption we've seen to our world and to our industry in the past nine months.

So much has changed in that time, and so much has been lost. But it's one of the many paradoxes of this time that amid all this disruption and amid everything that's changed, one constant has been the essential value of publishing. It's publishing that supports creative expression. It's our industry that fights to protect that expression. It's publishing that puts information into the hands of teachers and students and that enables the sharing of essential research. It's hard to imagine a more important mission in these days.

COVID-19 is teaching us a lot, and it reminds us that what we do really matters. It may have exposed shortcomings and gaps in what we do, but it's also pointed us to opportunities. It's those gaps, those lessons, and those opportunities that I hope to



explore in today's short conversation with three highly respected, highly experienced publishing leaders.

The first of my guests today is my friend Bodour Al Qasimi. For those who don't know Bodour, and there can't be many of those, she is, among other things, vice president of the International Publishers Association and the chief executive and founder of Kalimat, a group of publishing companies based in her home, the United Arab Emirates. Welcome, Bodour, and thank you so much for joining us.

AL QASIMI: Thank you, Michael. And I'd like to also thank Copyright Clearance Center and Frankfurt Book Fair for putting together this event at a really critical time in our industry. So I'm looking forward to all the insights that come out.

HEALY: Well, thank you so much for that. Bodour, the IPA has organized quite an ambitious set of programs for this virtual Frankfurt Book Fair – great sessions on diversity, freedom of expression, and so on. From your vantage point – which is global, I suppose, because of your role with the IPA – how do you assess the state of international publishing in 2020 in the midst of this global pandemic?

AL QASIMI: We're really grateful for the opportunity to present so many different panels in Frankfurt Book Fair this year. We have 11 panel discussions, as you mentioned, Michael, and we're really so grateful for the opportunity that we're given – this huge platform to be able to showcase different voices within IPA.

In terms of my experience in IPA, post-COVID-19, I want to share a little secret with you, Michael. Before COVID-19 crisis came onto our radar, I was reflecting on my journey as VP of IPA, and I was trying to imagine the kind of challenges and the scenarios I could face as IPA president and how we could all collaborate together and turn them into opportunities. I never imagined a challenge in the magnitude of COVID-19, and I think I'm not the only one. I don't think any of us have ever imagined something like this in our wildest nightmare scenarios.

And where we are today, seven months into a history-making crisis that is changing and will continue changing the face of many industries, including the publishing industry, I think it's the right time to give an assessment, perhaps, after the last quarter of this year. As you know, a lot of sales happen around the Christmas period, where publishers get around 20% to 25% of their sales in December only. So we'll wait and see.

But overall, as I usher in the IPA presidency next year, we'll most likely be dealing with the ramifications of this pandemic on our industry and our business, and we'll



have to work closely together to make sure that we come out of this crisis with fresh, sustainable business models for the future.

HEALY: You mentioned becoming IPA president, Bodour. You'll be the first IPA president from the Middle East. I've had the great privilege of being in your home in Sharjah and working with you there, and I know how much the IPA has focused its efforts in places like Africa. Tell us a little bit about what perspectives you think you'll bring to that new role, which in some way might be different from past presidencies, and tell us a little bit how the Middle East and Africa is faring during the pandemic.

AL QASIMI: Sure. As you mentioned, Michael, yes, it is the first time somebody from the Middle East will be the president of IPA. It's a huge honor for me to be representing the Middle East and also to be a woman in this position. We've only had one other woman – as you know, Ana Maria Cabanellas – in the history of 125 years of IPA. So it's a huge honor and privilege for me to be in this position.

Working at the international publishing level has given me a deeper appreciation of the role that publishers play in developing the soul and the spirit of nations, so it's an enormous role and one that has a lot of challenges. And after working closely with colleagues from five continents for many years now, I realize that publishing has a significant role in building cultural bridges at a global level, upholding universal human values, such as freedom of expression, through publishing and supporting oppressed and voiceless minorities. My work in IPA has also allowed me to understand the publishing world's systemic challenges, while also appreciating the emergency – sorry, the tremendous opportunities that can emerge from global partnerships and the impact on the development of local publishing industries.

You mentioned my work in Africa and in the Middle East. One of my missions when I became VP of IPA was really to shed light on emerging markets, and the Middle East and Africa are emerging markets that have untapped potential. And I felt that it was important for us to showcase the untapped potential in both of these markets, so I organized seminars in Lagos and in Nairobi and in Jordan as well.

HEALY: Indeed. Just one final question in this segment, Bodour, if I may. You mentioned there in passing that you'll be the second only woman to lead the IPA. You've been a prime mover in this initiative called PublisHer. And I remember you talking about that last year as a call to action by female publishing leaders to address the industry's gender imbalances. Can you tell us what plans you have for that particular initiative going forward?



AL QASIMI: Sure. Thank you for that question, Michael. You know, I'm very passionate about PublisHer. I won't go into the details of the nature of struggles that women in publishing face based on their gender. I think we're all familiar with them, and they were the reasons why I founded PublisHer. PublisHer essentially is a global community initiative designed to support aspiring women publishers in their path to leadership positions in the publishing world.

I just want to highlight that when the crisis hits, usually the most vulnerable categories in society are the ones that are most affected. Although at the outset of the pandemic, some people said that this would be the great equalizer, in fact, I believe it's been anything but equal, especially if you're a woman, from a minority race, or someone with low literacy skills. The UN estimated that on a global level, women will disproportionately be affected by the pandemic, and this is true in the publishing industry as well, when we look at how people have had to work from home, and a lot of women suffered from these work structures and the commitments, especially if they had young children.

There's also the issue of diversity and inclusion, which has been simmering before COVID, but it's been magnified now. Many publishers – publishing companies started taking cost-cutting measures. And the ones who didn't really have any diversity and inclusion policy discriminated against women, people with disability, people of color, and other minorities. It's important for us to bring these issues to the forefront. So we've been very active in PublisHer. We've been organizing many virtual events. We've had a series of video interviews called Unmasked, which we've shown on our social medial channels and our YouTube channel. We've also launched a mentorship program, which I'm really proud of, because I believe so strongly that it'll create the right support network for female publishers wishing to go far in their careers. And we also launched a survey to assess the real pulse of the situation on the ground in many markets, and we launched a set of guidelines for gender equity at the workplace.

There is still more to come, and it's exciting to see a lot of changes happening. In the past few weeks, we've heard of new female executives leading globally known publishing houses. We've seen winners of the shortlist for the Booker Prize, where there are a lot of women who were shortlisted, and today's announcement of the Nobel Prize in Literature as well was a great achievement for women.

HEALY: Many thanks, Bodour, for those insights. I hope we'll be taking again towards the end of the broadcast. But now, our next guest today is Fathima Dada. Fathima is managing director of Oxford Education, which is part of Oxford University



Press, and Fathima has global responsibility for OUP's products and services for schools. Before that, she worked for many years at Pearson. She's been a successful author, a teacher, and an examiner, so she brings an extraordinarily wide perspective on all things educational. Welcome to the program, Fathima.

DADA: Thank you. Thank you, Michael.

HEALY: Let me begin, if I may, by asking you about the COVID-related disruption to traditional educational models. Can you tell us a little bit about the way, perhaps, it's changed Oxford University Press, and perhaps even other academic and educational publishers and how they see their roles?

DADA: Well, I can speak from more direct experience at the press. I think the change, in many ways, was unexpected and unprecedented. You can imagine 6,000 people who had previously largely worked office based, and we all had to be put on remote working within the space of two weeks. So it was rather dramatic at the beginning. I have worked remotely on and off for about 10 years, so I was one of the more experienced leaders in the organization and able to really support a lot of colleagues.

But I have to say it went very successfully. And maybe that encapsulates the general experience when it comes to technology. I think the world just changed between March and April in terms of our use of technology, how dependent we became on that, and how it managed to give us the flexibility that had been spoken about for quite a long time. So I think physically Oxford University Press changed very dramatically, and our UK business offices are still not open, and that's where I'm based. I haven't been at the office for seven months.

We found similar trends across the globe. And as we know, it comes and goes in waves now, so it's something that I think we're going to have to live with for a long time. For that reason, I think it's changed the way we do business and the way we work forever.

If I think about it from our product and market perspective, it's changed a lot as well. We found that teachers who had never really had to work remotely – there have always been the teachers who took up technology with relative ease and managed to adapt and really enjoy digital and blended products and services. They took to the changed atmosphere and circumstances quite easily. But there were a large number of teachers, particularly in emerging markets, where they had never really been called to work in that way – had to make quite rapid changes.



Well, I can speak about this for a long time, but in essence, OUP responded really quickly. Our teams put together enhanced digital propositions for places like Pakistan and Kenya, where there was very little in the market from competitors or ourselves. We offered a lot of online. We literally trained hundreds of thousands of teachers over the last seven months on teaching remotely, using digital products and services, but also just general pedagogy.

And then finally, something that changed very quickly as well was that hundreds of millions of parents found themselves with their children at home – Bodour mentioned this earlier – where they had to really teach their children, keep down their own work, and cope with managing a household. So we provided a lot of support for parents. And a lot of what I'm describing we have been providing free to help everyone. This is a crisis that I think has brought us together collectively. And I think there's been a lot of goodwill, not only from Oxford University Press, but also from competitors and other players, like digital startups.

HEALY: You're very clear, Fathima, that the COVID-related changes are most likely permanent. And you know, Oxford University Press is one of the world's oldest – one of the great ancient publishing houses of the world, and it's seen a lot happen in its history. So do you sense, in any way, that you will ever go back to business as normal or business as it used to be?

DADA: Yeah, really great question, and one that the executive team at Oxford University Press discusses every week on a Monday morning. I do not believe the world will go back to the way it was. And I think it came as quite a shock to OUP in particular. It's an institution in the industry – been there for over 500 years, planning to be there for another 500 – very office-based.

However, that's the external view of OUP, perhaps, and that's our superficial history. In reality, we're quite a diverse business. We have a very, very balanced portfolio. We're the world's leading academic publisher, and 70% of our academic business is digital. So I think internally, we have a lot of best practice to learn from, and the balanced portfolio has given us a lot of stability, and we're very grateful for that.

However, it has also given us the opportunity to make innovation embed itself in the organization more quickly, particularly in the two education businesses. So in my business in particular, which is very spread out – I have large branches in India, Pakistan, mainland China, Hong Kong, Australia, parts of Africa, etc. – they were all at different points on the digital continuum, so we've had to think long and hard about how we accelerate everyone.





The technique I used to really get a grip on what was going on – because I’m making it sound as though we got on top of it quite easily, but it was extremely challenging and continues to be so for a lot of people – is that the leadership team and I got together very early on and conducted a lot of strategy work, scenario planning, and building innovation. So we’ve built a whole lot of accelerators in every aspect of our business – sales, marketing, product – and we continue to do a lot of work there.

We also looked at more rapid development approaches. The publishing industry, as I’m sure my two colleagues here on the team will attest, can be a slow industry in terms of our cycles – our product lifecycles. I’ve really forced myself and my team to learn to work much more quickly to put in minimum viable products into the market, to think about prototypes, and to deliver really quickly for teachers, learners, parents, and schools.

HEALY: You mentioned a moment ago, Fathima, that your responsibilities are global, but anyone listening to your accent knows that you’re a native of South Africa. I know you’ve taught there. I know you’ve developed curricula there. It’s a place very dear to my heart as well. This pandemic has affected the world quite unevenly in some respects. How are things in southern Africa, and how are they responding to the impact of the coronavirus there?

DADA: Many parts of Africa – and I hope it would remain like this – have been less hard hit by the pandemic than maybe the rest of the world, although South Africa was relatively hard hit. So in the regional countries outside South Africa, they’ve had minimal numbers.

Two of OUP’s large markets in Africa where I work quite significantly are Kenya – east Africa, but mostly Kenya – and then South Africa. Well, in Kenya, because of the large degree of poverty, because so many people live in slums, government took a decision very early on to go into a very hard lockdown that they still haven’t really emerged from. And then several months ago, a decision was made by the ministry of education to stop the school year in its entirety. Now, they’re speaking of maybe opening earlier than they had originally thought, but that sets an economy back significantly. And they did it, really, to protect people. So I think what the virus has really highlighted is one can’t be judgmental about actions around how to cope with it, because perhaps that was the best thing they could do.

Now, fortunately, east Africa, and Kenya in particular, put a lot of value in education, so I’m sure they will make a good recovery. Also, last year, Kenya put



a lot of learning material into schools. I think they had universal provision for most grades. And I think one of the things we can learn is that it's important for education systems to keep well informed, to be current in terms of curriculum policy, access to resources, so when a crisis like this hits of such gigantic proportions, one is more ready for learners and teachers and parents to support.

South Africa – I think it's difficult. South Africa tried to open schools relatively early on and had to close again, but we're slowly getting back to normal. The high-stakes grade 12 exams will proceed just a couple of weeks late, and we wish the students there well. South Africa has excellent education policies. I think it's about provision and quality in the system that now needs to be addressed, and the virus will have set us back from that point of view. But I'm hopeful for the future.

HEALY: Thanks so much, Fathima. Looking forward to catching up on some of those themes towards the end of the broadcast. Our final guest today is Tracey Armstrong. Tracey is president and chief executive officer of Copyright Clearance Center. As well as leading a global licensing, content, software, and professional services business, Tracey plays a major role in the International Federation of Reproduction Rights Organizations. It's that combination of roles and her experience that gives Tracey a global vantage point from which to look at developments not just in the content industry, but in the wider world of research and development. Welcome, Tracey. It's great you can join us today.

ARMSTRONG: Thank you very much. Pleasure to be here.

HEALY: Thanks, Tracey. If it's reasonable at all to talk about this pandemic having a silver lining, it's possibly the opportunity to provoke far-reaching change in our industry. I've heard you say to me privately and to others that these times we're living in, these strange times, call for new ways of looking at the world, new ways of working, new ways of learning, new ways of interacting with people. Could you say a little bit more about that for this audience?

ARMSTRONG: Absolutely. Silver lining? Tough to say. But has it created these new ways of working, learning, and interacting? I think it certainly has. One thing I would say, which I think echoes some of the comments made previously in this program, is that this is a time – I would call this a radically human moment. At the essence of this crisis, this coronavirus crisis, is we're all people, no matter what we do, no matter where we live. And I think for CEOs and for leaders, we find ourselves now – and where we, I think, are coping well – coping better – leading communities, not just companies. I think that that is really one of the essential tenets of where we find ourselves today.





I think that this disruption has provided an opportunity for transformation and reinvention, redefining things like, for example, how we cooperate, how we compete. And I think that there is – as has been already mentioned, as leaders, I don't think we foresaw that we would be facing – nobody foresaw that we would be facing this global pandemic or the resurgence in the movement globally for racial diversity and equity and justice.

I think from a publishing perspective, we find ourselves – really, this is our moment. This is our moment in the information industry. This is our moment in publishing. Never has authoritative content been more essential. Never has fake information been more potentially harmful and disruptive. And I think what we see happening in our social media platforms and in our news outlets, in books, in all forms of publishing, the volume and speed at which content is being created – it's truly unprecedented.

And I think what is happening in education, how we're all transitioning either to a – we're living where we learn, we're living where we work and working where we live and all of this. All of this transition – the business process transformation, the digital transformation, things that we have been talking about for more than a decade – it's all coming home to roost. I think that we are seeing really epic challenges being met with, in some cases, true humility and grace in the publishing industry in ways that really only a crisis could spur on. And I hope we take lasting lessons away from this and come out with more sustainable models going forward.

One thing is for sure. There's no going back to normal. There's no going back to the way it was before. We are where we are. And from here, we will redefine what normal is.

HEALY: You talked, Tracey, there for a second about the importance of community. And you and all of us at CCC – we're deeply immersed in a couple of communities particularly, especially the research community right now. The global research community has never, perhaps, been in the spotlight more than it is right now. And you talked about some of the challenges that community's facing as it really drives forward to fight COVID-19 and find a cure and so on.

We've looked at things like this huge increase in submission of articles to journals and challenges of identifying quickly the appropriate peer reviewers and so on. Perhaps you could say something about your experience of watching publishing interact with the research community in the last few months and what that's been like.



ARMSTRONG: Absolutely. Hearing from editors at journals who have been working 15-hour days for six, seven months now nonstop and reviewing these enormous amounts of manuscripts that are coming in, and reading, even in the general press, in the media, about the differences in determinations on what's submitted for peer review, how that's done, etc. – at Copyright Clearance Center, we are an industry partner of these institutions and multiple stakeholders in the scholarly review process. We do have some workflow services and support transformative agreements. We have rules engines that help support those types of things.

But beyond that, one thing that we did at Copyright Clearance Center in response to the COVID-19 crisis was to develop an author graph in response to the increase in manuscripts submitted to peer-reviewed journals. This graph enables examination of a collection of authors and analysis of the interconnections between them and their publications and areas of interest, and it aids in identification of peer reviewers, which is essential right now, since there are an unprecedented number of manuscripts to review. And it helps in the understanding of the landscape of coronavirus-related – it's much broader than just this novel disease – coronavirus-related research.

We've offered this as a pilot. We've received very positive feedback from the publisher partners that we've been working with so far, and we're rolling it out into the research partner community. This is an example of the importance, I think, of having a very, very strong, robust data pipelines, so that your data is clean, it's semantically enriched, and it's structured in a way that you can receive this kind of value from it. In other words, if you are trying to formulate using any type of technology like this graph on data that is not well cared for and curated, the results will be lacking. So we were very fortunate to have quite a robust data pipeline, and this is an area where I think as an industry, there's a lot of opportunity for cooperation and collaboration with publisher partners.

HEALY: Tracey, it would be unforgivable, I suppose, to interview the president of Copyright Clearance Center publicly and not talk about copyright. One thing that people talk about a lot is whether there's any risk that changes in the way that we're all sharing information now, the shift to more digital exchanges of information – all of that positive stuff will or might give rise to demands to weaken copyright protections traditionally that we've had. How do you see that? Do you see that there might be a move towards weakening copyright in this pandemic?

ARMSTRONG: Actually, I think what we've seen with some of the large tech platforms are partnerships with publishers so that they can ensure that the content is accurate.



And I do think with the – oh, how do we even say – the rampant presence of misinformation on these platforms, that is a real challenge for these players in the market. So I actually think that as far as curated content, we see a very strong future.

I think as far as educational content, this is essential and is very, very important. One of the things that we're seeing now is the challenge in reaching communities where there isn't Wi-Fi in the home, or there perhaps isn't a home, and we have students trying to learn in less-than-ideal circumstances, and these cavernous issues – societal issues – are magnified by this crisis. In response to that, organizations and nonprofits, such as EL Education, which CCC recently partnered with and publishers are partnering with – these organizations are providing schools language arts curriculum and other curriculum. We need to foster permissions and copyright licenses so that these organizations can easily get the permission to use the grade-level texts for distance learning during the pandemic. That's something that we and others are focused on.

I would also point out that we have run several programs, as everyone is running virtual programs, on the effects of the pandemic on education and other sectors of the copyright industries. I think there is a lot that can be done there to facilitate access to content at this time. Certainly, we see a lot of partners doing that. We are collaborating with a lot of institutions to do this as well. And I think publishers have done a remarkable job – for example, in the research community – of making the COVID-19 and coronavirus-related research accessible and open to everyone.

HEALY: Well, thank you so much, Tracey, for that feedback you've just given us and those insights. We're now at that stage of the broadcast when we're going to move into a short group discussion, and I've prepared a couple of questions that I'd like the entire group to respond to. The first is about optimism – namely, how optimistic do you all feel that publishing will emerge from this pandemic stronger and better equipped than it was to respond to this changed world? Maybe we could start with you, Bodour.

AL QASIMI: Thank you, Michael. I think I'm quite an optimistic person in general. But when the pandemic hit, my first reaction as a publisher – when we were dealing with lockdowns, closures, restrictions, I was deeply concerned about the future of our business. And I was worried about distribution channels and all of that chaos. But my concern faded. Despite the challenges, I know that we're a resilient industry. We've been around for centuries. We're resilient. We're adaptable. Not to mention we're very economically, culturally, and politically and socially important.



However, we have to focus right now maybe not on expansion and development but focus more on survival. And I think we have to take an honest look at our existing business models and decide whether they are good enough or they need to be transformed completely to catch up with this changing world.

HEALY: Thank you so much for that, Bodour. Tracey, if I can put you on the spot next, optimistic or not?

ARMSTRONG: Generally, it's hard to be optimistic beyond publishing with everything that's happening in 2020, so I'll be optimistic to be having this conversation with you a year from now. I do think publishing is a people business, and I think this has been very challenging for us to transform how we do business and finding new ways to connect with people. I do think that the long-term outlook from these changes that we've been forced to undergo is quite positive, and I do think it has compelled meaningful and sustainable – what can transition to be meaningful and sustainable change in how we do business. I think that's quite important.

The other thing I would say is I do see publishing companies in a more essential role from a social responsibility perspective, and I think that that is hugely important and powerful.

HEALY: Thanks for that so much. Fathima, how about you?

DADA: So I think I'm broadly optimistic, but like Bodour said, the industry has been through a lot of pain and will continue to be. So if I have to project myself into the future two or three years down the line, I think we'll be a smaller industry. I do think, however, we'll be more modernized. We'll have more modern ways of working. I think we'll be far more digitized than we have been.

And I think we have a critical role to play. If I think about information and the way it's been going with social media, fake news – and, you know, we are all about those – I think we have a really important curatorship to play, and I think we have a very, very important future.

HEALY: Final question, and the most unfair one, probably. I'm sure all of you, like me, miss the opportunities to meet face to face in places like Frankfurt. And I hope we could regroup – do this again in 12 months' time, if they'll have us. But if we do that, quickly, where do you think we'll all be at that point in this journey that we're all on? Tracey, what do you think?



ARMSTRONG: You mean physically, where will we be?

HEALY: Yeah, yeah.

ARMSTRONG: OK, here I'm probably not – I might be accused of being not too optimistic and more pragmatic and realistic. But I think next year, we'll be doing this the same way we're doing it now. One of the things that I do think is hugely valuable about this format is it levels the playing field for everyone. And for those that are able to – or have, in the past, been able to hop on a plane and go wherever you need to go and be with whoever you want to be with, those resources are not available to everyone. And in that way, this is a great equalizer. I think we should take advantage of that and leverage that and bring more voices into the foreground. So I hope next year, we'll be able to see each other in person. But if we can't, then I hope our discussion next year can raise up even more important voices that aren't being heard as often as our own.

HEALY: Thank you. Fathima, in 12 months' time, will we be sitting around the table at the beautiful Printers House in Clarendon Street?

DADA: (laughter) Well, I would love to be in Printers House right now. Like Tracey, I think that the pandemic is still here for a while, so I wonder whether we will have something like the Frankfurt Book Fair in person next year. However, I do think that we will have learnt a lot, and there'll be a semblance of normality. I also agree that it's a great opportunity for global talent to work more closely together and for mobility, because it is a leveling of the playing field. I've already seen that. So I'm hoping that by next year, we'll have a stronger organization and more kind of adjusted to the new normal.

HEALY: And final word to you, Bodour.

AL QASIMI: I also agree with both Tracey and Fathima. I think we have definitely learned some lessons. We've picked up some new skills during this pandemic. We've all adapted, and we've all tried to be innovative in our own way. I love what Tracey said about it being an equalizer. Also, we're able to connect with colleagues from around the world and see their faces and have discussions with them that perhaps would have been harder in the past, so it's opened up new opportunities.

I think next year in Frankfurt, if things clear up, we might see a hybrid model, which I like, because we get the best of both worlds. We get to have face-to-face



interactions, but we also have the tools and the skills to be able to connect and get work done remotely.

HEALY: As we approach the end of the program, I just want to thank Fathima, Tracey, and Bodour for their contributions today and to say on behalf of the Frankfurt Book Fair a huge thank you to them all for contributing to this year's Frankfurt conference. Thanks so much.

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