



Harare City Library Newsletter: July 2018

Pinokiyo Book Launch Event Report

The 13th of July 2018 marked a milestone in both Zimbabwean and Italian literature, *in particular the functional purpose of Harare City Library as a hub of literary and cultural events*, as well as in the bilateral relations between the two countries. To Zimbabwe, among other things, the day granted Zimbabweans the privilege to read the proverbial Pinocchio in their main language Shona, of which about 70% of Zimbabweans are literate. Actually, for decades and counting, Pinocchio and its numerous adaptations have been some of the Zimbabwean child's favorite for many reasons including the simplicity and wealth in its teachings, the obvious ingenuity in its storyline and the humor that laces it. Even the elderly know about the timeless wooden guy with the naughty nose; in Zimbabwe, he goes as way back as television.

Thanks partly to the translators (**Elvas Mari** who is former director of the National Arts Council of Zimbabwe, and the renowned author **Ignatius Mabasa**) the fairytale is now available to a wider audience. The two worked with the Italian Embassy in Zimbabwe to translate Pinocchio with fidelity, retaining its iconic elements, and, at the same time, to promoting and celebrating Zimbabwean languages. Equally noteworthy, **Antonella Bargione**, an Italian prolific artist who has lived in Zimbabwe for about a decade, worked on the illustrations, design, and formatting of the book. Aptly descriptive, enticingly vivid to children, and expertly curated for the Zimbabwean audience e.g. typical African facial bone structure of the corresponding Shona characters and even dreadlocks on one of the main characters named VaGopito, the illustrations couldn't be any better. Also, it would be bad to not mention that **Graniteside Chemicals**, **Enbee Store**, and **Lotus Stationary Manufacturers** sponsored the book-printing.

To Italy, Pinokiyo (the Shona adaptation) piles on to the translation achievements of the iconic children's book which is now available in more than two hundred languages worldwide. Speaking at the book launch at the **Harare City Library** - flaunting a little Shona himself - the Italian Ambassador to Zimbabwe, **Enrico de Agostini**, rightfully emphasized the importance of promoting local languages. He took defined time for this message because there has been an increasing shift in focus to other languages in the country, noteworthy among them English. The

permanent secretary in the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, Dr. **Sylvia Masango-Utete**, echoed Ambassador Agostini's sentiments; she invited plans for the translation of *Pinocchio* to the other official languages of Zimbabwe including Sign Language.

The event opened with the singing of the national anthem. Primary School pupils, technically the most esteemed guests comprising three schools of contrasting geographic locations, wowed the guests by proudly singing the national anthem in three languages. They then sat keenly to hear ambassador **Agostini** briefly introduce the book. After other pleasantries, the pupils then assembled in the Petina Gappah Children's Library where they listened with enjoyment to the fluent reading of an excerpt from *Pinokiyo*.

Him being a household name in Zimbabwe, one would think that all there is to be known about the archetypal fictional character 'Pinocchio' has been covered in the numerous adaptations including Disney's 1940 movie (which has a rare 100% rating on the critical movie-rating site Rotten Tomatoes), but pleasant surprises still exist around the fictional character, even more than a century after his creation in the hands of the Italian prolific writer and journalist **Carlo Collodi**. Nevertheless, although generally understood to be a children's book, *Pinocchio* as an archetype has moral relevance across all age groups. To speak to this, ambassador **Agostini** explained the meaning of the *Pinocchio*'s elongating nose as symbolic of lies eventually catch up to the teller—something both adults and children can appreciate, and Dr. **Sylvia Masango-Utete** referenced telling children that sitting on roads causes boils: a similar use of helpful superstition and symbolism in the Shona culture.

Furthermore, now aware that *Pinocchio* is actually an Italian fairytale—although the name attempts at a dead give-away—and with a definite promise by the ambassador to have the book available in their schools and public libraries, the school pupils were noticeably interested.

In the big picture, the takeaway from the commendable collaboration is that there is just as much nobility in the Shona language as in any other and that, as the Italians just arranged a translation for us, we will, hopefully, soon arrange the translation of Shona fairytales to other languages—Italian among them, for the embassy has led by example. After all, unity in diversity of cultures, as opposed to uniformity in a few, is the real meaning of integration to the tenets of globalization.