



• Storytelling is well-loved practice around the world.

Storytelling confab ends in Accra

Story: Kofi Akpabli

A THREE-DAY international conference on the various forms of storytelling has taken place in Accra.

Dubbed "Narrating (Hi) stories" the workshop saw experts from West Africa and other parts of the world lecturing and debating on the dynamics of the story narration process.

"The conference provided a rare opportunity for people studying mainly West African narratives from various perspectives to come together and learn about each other's work," said Professor Esi Sutherland of the Institute of African Studies who presented a paper on "Saga of an Archive of Storytelling."

Conference participants were treated to

excerpts of traditional storytelling from Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroun, Togo and Benin, as well as contemporary adaptations of both African and European narrative to film, poetry and books.

The story conference has its roots in an event that took place in Europe a long time ago. The year 2012 marks the 200th anniversary of the first printed edition of the Grimm brothers' famous "Fairy Tales." The two brothers, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, came up with children's and household tales in German. The first volume got translated and that inspired numerous similar collections in other European countries.

Jacob and Wilhelm's highly influential collection also gave rise to the discipline of historical and comparative folk narrative

research, a discipline that presently enjoys a truly worldwide appreciation.

According to Robert Sobotta, Director of Goethe-Institut of Accra, "All over the world, this landmark cultural legacy is being celebrated with different kinds of activities."

Linking up with Flensburg Universität, Germany, Goethe-Institut decided to go for a conference that would link the different oral traditions of Europe and Africa and establish the common grounds.

The Ghana conference was premised on the reality that in Africa, oral tradition is still very much alive. In West African traditions, one finds residues of old African kingdoms mingled with those imported from the Arab world and Europe.

In Africa, storytelling and history are

closely related to each other. By relating history, African storytelling also contributes decisively to the construction and appreciation of modernity, since both storytelling and history are rooted in ancient tradition, as well as constituting part of modern reality.

In their submissions, participants assessed this particular situation from various angles. Presenting their research, discussing current research topics and reflecting new perspectives on narratives in and about West Africa, scholars related their work to different genres. One of the presentations that thrilled the audience was a narrative of the hiplife journey in Ghana.

Dr Mabel Mliwomor Komasi, Department of English Studies, Methodist University College Accra, dwelt on 'Narrating as a Means of Preserving Tradition and Adapting it to Modernity.' Mercy Adzo Klugah, Department of Languages and Linguistics, University of Cape Coast, treated the "Migration Narrative of the Ho-Asogli State: The Role of Storytelling in Assessing Local History" and Adeline Ama Buabeng, a professional storyteller, did her presentation on "Kodzi- the Dying Story-Telling Art of the Fante."

Other presenters were Patricia Enimien. Ofili, University of Lagos; Dr. Sinseingnon G. Sagbo, University of Abomey-Calavi, Benin and Lena Siemers, M. A., Ethnology, Munich, whose topic was "Mami Wata Tales in West Africa and in the International Context."

In her closing remarks, Conference coordinator Prof. Dr Bea Lundt said: 'Storytelling is an international phenomenon. There are no borders for stories but there is little international cooperation between Europe and West Africa in this field. I want to establish networks between scholars from Europe and West Africa. It helps to understand the different cultures.'

Goethe-Institut boss Robert Sobotta also pointed out that he was pleased with the outcome of the conference. "Considering it being a rather intellectual conference, we were very happy about the participation, both from the side of the official guests and the general audience," he said and stated further that his outfit intended to put on more programmes that dealt with education and social issues and placed less emphasis on concerts.

The West African scholars who participated agreed to form an online network to promote the study of oral narratives.