

Memory and/in the Mirror: FESPACO, a platform for a Global Africa?

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Abstract:

The cinema as a medium and an art form, has been a major consideration in Africa's struggles against colonialism. These struggles, which encompass aspirations to establish Africa's cultural and political autonomy in the postcolonial era, are ongoing. Marking the twenty-sixth edition of the Pan-African Festival of Cinema and Television (FESPACO) therefore, was considered as an important opportunity for reflection. More so, the occasion was taken as a call to re-engage with the challenge of shaping and transforming 'the Continent's greatest cultural event' for the future. The 2019 festival was launched around the colloquium theme: 'Confronting our memory and shaping the future of a Pan-African cinema in its essence, economy and diversity.' This essay begins with an account of the colloquium; and reflects on the knowledge production dimension of the festival, which has been a core component of FESPACO's identity and existence. It also seeks to situate the event of the 50th anniversary in a continuum of critical discussions about the festival, its past, present and future, and in relation to the seminal aspirations of African filmmakers for an African cinema, its challenges and opportunities.

Keywords: FESPACO, FEPACI, JCC, Pan-African cinema, film archives, colloquium

Introduction

Film festivals are institutions, spheres within which knowledge is produced and identities are constructed. In this arena of interaction and exchange, the film festival exists 'as both a system and a dynamic process' (Wong 2011: 20) for the negotiation of various interests, including those of filmmakers, audiences and hosts. The particular identity of FESPACO along with its associated ideals and aspirations, are intrinsically interwoven with the globally determined history of the African continent. Hence, the ceremonies, the awards, the special events, the screenings, and the diversity of the audience, all in totality could be perceived to configure a certain presence, a coming into being of self-determined participants, shaping the geopolitical and sociocultural discourses of contemporary African life.

Considered in these terms, 'decolonialization' is revealed as a principal part of the momentum that brings African cinema into existence and recognition. With this emergence therefore, it was inevitable that the founding of FESPACO would take on its particular significance for the African world (Diawara 1992, Armes 2006, Diawara 2010, Dovey 2015). Informed by the ideology of Pan-Africanism, as well as radical anti-colonial analysis and strategies for national

liberation and African unity; those categorized as the pioneers of African cinema, set out to chart and to institute an intervention into the definitive discourses on Africa prevailing into the decades after 1945. Of primary relevance here, is what may be termed as a concern with the re-positioning of the African 'voice' in the cinema landscape, and the determined exposition of this voice as a presence within it.

These considerations directly link the *raison d'être* of FESPACO to the overarching aspiration of the Pan-African Federation of Filmmakers (FEPACI) 'for a unified and liberated African cinema' (Diawara 1992:81). The significance of this, encompassed as a foundational idea, remains a pertinent reference point in recalling the 'African experience of cinema', noting the critical importance of 'the pioneers', reflecting on the idea of a 'Pan African' vision as a defining aspect of the project of African cinema; and developing an institutional response in pursuance of a future for African cinema in the 21st century. This undoubtedly is at the core of the FESPACO theme, framed 'to look back over fifty years of progress and formulate visions, desires and objectives for the near and distant future'.

As Dupré (2014) has noted, the history of FESPACO could be understood in relation to three phases, which have been influenced in significant ways by the 'evolutions' of Burkina Faso as a nation-state. These phases roughly correlate with the period of 1969-83 when 'FESPACO progressively imposed itself in the 1970s as a major rendezvous for African film' (49); followed by the second phase, 1983-89, defined very much by the politics and idealism of President Thomas Sankara; and a third phase from about 1991 to 2014. Here, can be located culminative national and transnational shifts, and institutional fissures, which seemed to signify a critical need for change in order for the festival 'to evolve towards greater autonomy and independence' (49). The underlying issues undoubtedly contextualized the principal concerns of FESPACO 2019, in what could now be termed as a fourth phase.

Hence, the shared urgency of this critical reflection, 'Memory and/in the Mirror', in relation to FESPACO at its fiftieth anniversary. The intention is to engage with the colloquium's theme, with cognizance of the festival's established institutional objectives, noted as 'aiming principally to encourage the distribution of all African films, to facilitate contacts and exchanges between film and audiovisual professionals, and to contribute to the emergence, development, and safeguarding of African film as a means of expression, education, and consciousness raising' (47). In the contemporary reality of global film culture, these objectives implicate the relationship between FESPACO and FEPACI, and point towards the wider issues and challenges of charting 'the means for a viable existence for film festivals in Africa' (Bakari 2017: 202).

'Confronting our memory and shaping the future' – the Challenge of the Pioneers

The 2019 FESPACO colloquium, with the theme 'Confronting our memory and shaping the future of a Pan-African cinema in its essence, economy and diversity', was convened by Gaston Kabore as a centrepiece of the festival. The discussions began on Monday 25th February with a panel of 'pioneers' - Alimata Salembéré (Burkina Faso), Kwaw Ansah (Ghana), Sébastien Kamba (Congo-Brazzaville), Timité Bassori (Côte d'Ivoire) - bearing witness to 'the flame that FESPACO was able to ignite'. In so doing, the history and efficacy of FESPACO was recalled. The deliberations ended on Tuesday 26th February, with plenary session during which two robust statements were delivered by Aminata Dramane Traore (Mali) and Christiane Taubira (Guyane/France).

As a precursor to a brief reflection on the colloquium, it seems pertinent to note that this event was the twenty-third of its kind in FESPACO's history. The first one was organized in 1973 at the fourth festival. In view of the important role that this part of the programme has played in defining FESPACO, the themes of two previous years can be noted, as examples that should help to reinforce this importance; and to indicate an informing framework for the theme that marked '50 years of FESPACO'.

In 2013, at the 23rd FESPACO, the theme was 'African cinema and public policy in Africa'. In 2015, at the 24th FESPACO, the theme was 'African cinema: Production and distribution in the digital era'. As is clearly established in the information made available to the press, the festival's themes are 'a reflection around issues of the time and not criterion for competition' (FESPACO 2019, *Press Book: 32/Dossier de presse: 33*). It is in this regard that the reflection on fifty years of FESPACO should bring into critical focus an accumulation of insight and knowledge developed over the years, in shaping a 'Pan-African cinema' for the future. Both of the themes highlighted, point towards the scope of the urgent interventions that might be considered in fulfilling the festival's objectives.

Across the two-day event, discussions were consolidated around three workshop sessions: 1) Confronting our memory; 2) Shaping the future and sustaining FESPACO; and 3) New Economic Bases. My own contribution was scheduled for presentation during a scheduled plenary, 'How has FESPACO contributed to meeting the need for representation of the peoples of Africa and the Diasporas while helping shape the citizen filmmaker's image in their eyes?'. This was eventually revised, and the contribution found a place within the discussions taken up by a revised panel of the second workshop, 'Shaping the future and sustaining FESPACO'.

In essence, my presentation was introduced by making the observation that the notion of Pan-Africanism demands that all who propagate a commitment to its ideals and its processes, must of necessity, think and act globally. The personas of Lionel Ngakane (South Africa) and Med

Hondo (Mauritania) were invoked to emphasise this perspective in terms of their influence on my own work. Both are indicative of an experience shared by other 'pioneers', Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, Ousmane Sembène et al, and others across the generations. Importantly, 'both (were) profoundly shaped by and through the unavoidable and simultaneous negotiation of diaspora realities and global forces impacting on the African continent in the twentieth century' (Bakari 2020: 290).

Within many of the films that constitute African cinema, there resides a diaspora discourse framed around experiences of migration, exile and alienation. In 'early' films, for example, such as *Afrique sur Seine / Africa on the Seine* (Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, 1955), *Jemima & Johnny* (Lionel Ngakane, 1966), Med Hondo's *Soleil O* (1967), *Les 'bicotés-Nègres' vos voisins / Arabs and Niggers, Your Neighbours* (1974) and *West Indies* (1979), and Ousmane Sembène's *La Noire de... / Black Girl* (1966) and *Mandabi* (1968), these themes resonate; and persist in various ways across the oeuvre of African cinema. The personal recall of Ngakane and Hondo, therefore, 'can be understood as being intrinsic to defining their individual work in African cinema' (290), and as being important to an understanding of African cinema as a body of diverse and transnational work. These seminal figures are among those who have made it possible for anyone, anywhere, to speak of an African or Pan-African cinema

As such the work of these two 'pioneers', through experiences of exile or migration, anchor two critical principles. The first is that within the history of 'African cinema', each individual and subsequent generation, will have to locate their individual and collective presence. Fanon's widely quoted statement from his essay 'On National Culture' (Fanon 1961), about 'each generation' taking the responsibility for finding its own historical role, for better or for worst, is one foundational point of departure. The other is around the question of 'the diaspora', and by extension, transnationalism; as a reality that continues to impact profoundly upon the African cultural economy. The position being taken here, is that 'Pan-Africanism' is the dynamic idea at the core African cinema. In its mission, there is an engagement with what Cheikh Anta Diop (1974) termed 'The Restoration of African Historical Consciousness', as a strategy for repositioning Africa within the contemporary world, by way of a conscious and determined revalidation of the continent's historical unity.

This directs our attention towards the widely shared philosophical focus of Diop's work, which in effect, is concerned with restoring a sense of African being in the 'modern world'. This is a world in which slavery, colonialism and imperialism, through the cinema apparatus on one level, has sought to erase the 'African'. The dynamic idea of Pan-Africanism cannot therefore be over-emphasised. It speaks directly to the issues of Africa as being 'global', and the reclaiming of the continent's history and knowledge, within the mainstream of humanity. It also

speaks directly to the processes of African identities, as being both dynamic and diverse, and shaped over the centuries through migrations and interactions. Pan-Africanism emphatically offers perspectives for engaging with the past and envisioning the future. This future, as a continuum of Africa in human history, essentially brings into focus the question of the 'diaspora'.

Across the twentieth century, the orthodoxy was to formulate the meaning and significance of 'the diaspora' in relation to the African peoples displaced by the experience of the European slave trade across the Atlantic Ocean, for whom 'Pan-Africanism' became a touchstone for resistance and restitution. The mark of diaspora within this discourse on 'Africa' has therefore, conveniently come to signify a certain alienation or loss associated with 'new world blacks'. It is however impossible to consider Pan-Africanism in isolation to the reciprocal movements for 'independence' on the continent of Africa. Centrally, there is the pivotal and defining role played by diaspora individuals and ideas. Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. Du Bois, George Padmore, C.L.R. James, Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire loom large in this regard. The ideas and legacy of these, along with other continental figures, including Cheikh Anta Diop and Kwame Nkrumah, demand that the notion of 'diaspora' be reconfigured within the stream of African historical consciousness, to account for and respond to the lived experience of the continent's people, both past and presently in the twenty-first century.

Here we find not only a dynamic diversity, but a global African history of identities and narratives of belonging, shaped by migrations and movement which make a nonsense of the rigour (and often destructive ideology), which the modern nation-state seeks to impose. As Hodgson and Byfield (2017) seem to suggest, there is an urgent need 'to disrupt narratives that frame the ways many people imagine Africa as both an idea and a place' (1). In so doing, and in defence of an expansive African history, there is the task of 'dispelling the geographical and political division of Africa into North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa'; and challenging the 'narratives that contain African history and cultures within the continent' (2). This of necessity, indicates underlying points of principle. In essence, these have long been established at the core of Pan-Africanism as a body of ideas for liberation, and as foundational pillars (among others) of 'unity' and 'diversity', along with the centrality of the discourse of 'diaspora'. These are all embedded in the significant elements and conditions that have motivated and energized the ideal and vision of African cinema, its emergence, and its persistence into the present.

The colloquium presentation, therefore, noted the significance of an accumulated personal experience in the arts and cinema. Among the ideas and influences generously engaged with over the years, the London conference, *Africa and the History of Cinematic Ideas* (1995), signalled a significant point in 'the continuum of debate and discussion' (Givanni 2000. xii) on

African filmmaking, its legacy, its future, and its sustainability. Informed in this manner, the presentation was concluded around three propositions (discussed below), distilled from the 10th FEPACI Congress on 20-22 February, which had preceded the festival.

Of critical significance the colloquium theme, however, the final plenary brought together Aminata Traore and Christiane Taubira, who both presented sharp reminders that the 50th anniversary moment was a paradoxical one of frustration and despondency, and equally of resolve and determination. Speaking first, was Aminata Traore, an author, 'socio-cultural activist', and former Minister of Culture and Tourism in Mali, who began by invoking Aimé Césaire's Lumumba in the theatre play *A Season in the Congo* (1966).

The chosen dialogue included the words,

'...Je parle et je rends l'Afrique à elle-même. Je parle et je rends l'Afrique au monde...' (Barlet 2019).

'...I speak and I give back Africa to herself! I speak and I give back Africa to the world! ...' (Spivak 2010: 123).

These words were part of the introduction to impassioned observations on the state of Africa in the world, 'the power of culture', and the importance of African cinema. As one who has had the responsibility of political office, Aminata Traore gave an account of what is no less than a cynical politics of global governance, which sets priorities for African development. As such, the influence of donors, international monetary organizations and former colonial powers, are all implicated in relation to the circumstances that have challenged the trajectory of African cinema over the decades. In concluding, the key objective seemed to be, to highlight the role that cinema should play in the production of culture, and by inference, the critical of function that should be fulfilled by FESPACO. It is a function that could no doubt be understood in the institutional sense, as helping to establish aesthetic and critical standards and benchmarks.

Christiane Taubira (Guyane/France) followed, and spoke from an equally formidable background including, being a human rights campaigner, and a former French Minister of Justice. In opening, lines from *Qui ne réclame plus mais affirme* by the Guadeloupean poet Albert Béville, aka Paul Niger, were quoted; in essence signifying that *Africa no longer claims but asserts*. This was the underlying theme of the presentation, as Christiane Taubira considered the FESPACO she had learnt about and encountered. In doing so, the challenges of reconciling the needs of cinema, as industry and as art, with intuitional and cultural realities and aspirations were acknowledged.

The focus of the presentation was around two assertions. The first was that African cinema, like all cinemas, had a vital role in the contemporary course of human history. The second

assertion is definitively rooted in Christiane Taubira's diaspora experience. Here was identified, a demanding, severe, impatient, but optimistic temperament, shaped through the devastating trans-Atlantic experience of a people who refused to be defeated. This diasporic impulse was summarized by a sense of self-assurance encompassed in the words: *'humanité, sensibilité, créativité, inventivité'* (humanity, sensitivity, creativity, inventiveness).

In ending, another poet, Tchicaya U Tam'si, was called upon, to no doubt bring significance to a method that might be most productive for both reflection and for the task ahead. The chosen poetic lines, *'Parmi tout ce plus de choses bien faites, qu'on voit au meilleur monde, je me greffe aux rétines des fleurs d'oranger'* (Barlet 2019); in essence, speak of striving for perfection against the odds, towards renewal and regeneration. This indeed, situates the fiftieth anniversary colloquium and its importance within the festival programme, as an aspect that has historically functioned to provide an essential and ongoing platform for 'reflection, critique, and propagation, in relation to the foundation upon which the festival was established' (Bakari 2020: 292). Hence, the various critical responses to institutional inadequacies, and the initiatives aimed at meeting the challenges and fulfilling the aspirations of the 'pioneers' of African cinema, can be seen to have been shaped by an underlying impulse that fuels what Diawara (2010) has expressed as being a need to protect 'Ouaga... (...) ...to protect it from the predators of African culture – the hyenas' (70).

FESPACO: A Life in the Archive

Within the unavoidable politics that frames the discourse on or about Africa in the world, there is a distinct recognition that essentially, FESPACO for example, in view of its valued historical existence, is part of a '...redemptive project... (...) ...in which African cinema as a response to, and articulation of, African subjectivity inside/outside of modernity continues to define itself, and is distinguished in terms of the potential of its texts in the reordering of knowledge...' (Bakari 2000: 9). The realities in 2019, which framed the fiftieth anniversary of FESPACO, could therefore, be usefully approached through the prism of Sylvia Wynter's rhetorical question posed at the centenary of cinema. This was in 1995, during the influential London conference, *Africa and the History of Cinematic Ideas*. Here, Wynter (2000) sought to propose a 'function of the cinematic text in the twenty-first century' (25). In doing so, the 'paradox' that the 'widespread success of mass commercial cinema' posed for the idea and practice of 'African cinema' (32) was flagged as a preface to an elaboration of the perspective outlined in that conference's keynote address, 'Africa, the West and the Analogy of Culture: The Cinematic Text after Man'. Wynter asked: 'How, they ask, are the filmmakers of black Africa to confront and deal with the dichotomy which seems to definitively separate the possibilities

of a commercialised mass appreciation of African cinema, and of African cinema as a valued cultural art form?' (32).

An attempt to respond to this question emphatically resonates across FESPACO's history, particularly so since the mid-1980s. The situation has been compounded by Nollywood, easily termed as the 'pan-Africanism we have' (McCall 2007) though, a cinema that can be erroneously categorized as having 'no view, no agenda, no ideology'; thus, assumedly or innocently being nothing but 'a sprawling marketplace of representations' (96). Beyond this, the need for a comprehensive approach to 'African film studies' is an indicator of much that needs to be reconciled and achieved in 'shaping the future of a Pan-African cinema'. This should include the institutionalization of 'a more rigorous and widespread film (media) education... (...) ...in a way that values both technical skills training and critical knowledge' (Bakari 2018: 21). It is arguably a task that cannot be achieved without a recourse to cultural memory and archival knowledge. In moving to consider this further, the importance of curating and archival practices that took a prominent place at FESPACO 2019, seems to glare into significance.

Over the twenty-six editions of FESPACO, as with all film festivals, there has been a succession of curated programmes. The selected 'films', the celebrated list of Golden Stallion winners, the titled and themed programmes, all now stand as exemplars of the ideals and essence of the film culture that the festival seeks to celebrate. These texts, as part of the embodied archive of FESPACO, may be scrutinized as evidence of the continuum of the cultural economy from which they emerged. As the Nigerian publisher Bibi Bakare-Yusuf (2018) asserts, the archive is 'a reservoir of and for memory, is the place where ideas and material culture of historic interest or social relevance are stored and ordered. It is where society warehouses *what it wants to remember* and *what it sees as worthy of remembrance*, especially for the future.' At this juncture therefore, in the interest of an African film studies agenda, note is being made of how this intention is now evident in relation to FESPACO, contributing to what Bakare-Yusuf refers to as 'the African archival future'.

Most obvious during FESPACO 2019, was the photographic display of filmmakers who had won the 'festival's grand prize' since 1972. There is no doubt however, of the existence beyond these, of a substantial amount of documentation and artefacts accumulated across the years. As an indication of this, there are two initiatives that were featured among the festival's events, which merit some further recognition, principally because of the institutional importance that they signify. One is the African Film Heritage Project, one of FEPACI's achievements, led by Aboubakar Sanogo. The other is the June Givanni Pan-African Cinema Archive (JGPACA).

In spite of monumental challenges (Sanogo 2018), since the establishment of Cinémathèque africaine de Ouagadougou (CAO)/African Cinematheque of Ouagadougou in 1989, hosting the 'The African Film Library of Ouagadougou'; a momentum has been maintained, which has seen the realization of the African Film Heritage Project launched in 2017. As a highlight at FESPACO 2019, an impressive programme of twenty-three restored films were screened. Appropriately, the opening day's programme comprised of three of these films, *Muna Moto*, Jean-Pierre Dikongué-Pipa (1975), *Les Ecuelles/The Platters*, Idrissa Ouedraogo (1983), and *Soleil O/Oh, Sun*, Med Hondo (1970). These were followed over four days by: Ousmane Sembene's *Borom Sarret* (1963) and *La Nore de./Black Girl* (1966); *La Femme au Couteau/The Woman with the Knife*, Timité Bassori (1969); *Chroniques des années de braise/Chronicle of the Years of Fire*, Mohamed Lakhdar Hamina (1975); Ahmed El-Maanouni's *Trances* (1981) and *Alyam Alyam/O les jours/Oh the Days!*, (1978); Djibril Diop Mambety's *Touki Bouki/The Journey of the Hyena* (1973), *Parlons Grand-mère/Let's talk Grandmother* (1989), *Hyenes* (1992), *Le Franc* (1994), and *La Petite Vendeuse de Soleil/The Little Girl who Sold the Sun* (1999); *Yaaba*, Idrissa Ouedraogo (1989); *Le Retour d'un Aventurier/The Return of an Adventurer*, Moustapha Alassane (1966); *Cabascabo*, Oumarou Ganda (1969); Shadi Abdel Salam's *Al-Momia/The Mummy/The Night of Counting the Years* (1970) and *Al Fallah al Fasih/The Eloquent Peasant* (1970); *Wend Kuuni*, Gaston Kabore (1982); *Afrique-sur-seine/Africa on the Seine* (1955) and *Lamb* (1963) by Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, and *Les Baliseurs du Desert/ Wanderers of the Desert*, Nacer Khemir (1984).

At FESPACO, these films took on a powerfully symbolic meaning, as part of the work in progress to rehabilitate, create, and support moving-image-archival institutions across Africa. During the accompanying discussions, it was in contrast, not possible to be unaware of the derelict state of much of the continent's audio-visual heritage. As Sanogo notes, confronting the challenge of this predicament 'requires input from the citizenry, from private individuals, individual states, regional bodies, continental institutions, and has global implications. It requires a combination of projects, programs, policies, partnerships, collaboration, sharing, research and innovation. It is a question of a public responsibility or "duty to archive"' (14).

JGPACA is the work of curator and film programmer, June Givanni. The collection housed in London, represents over four decades of work. During this time, documents and artefacts related to festivals and cinema events around the world, featuring work by African and diaspora filmmakers, have been collected. A large portion of this material is related to FESPACO, which June Givanni first attended in 1985. Supported by the journal *Black Camera*, an installation, 'Filming FESPACO', was mounted at the MICA pavilion. The main feature of the installation was five films made about FESPACO: *Ouaga: African Cinema Now* by Kwate Nii Owoo and Kwesi Owusu (1988, UK/Ghana), *Dix mille ans du cinema/Ten Thousand Years*

of *Cinema* by Balufu Bakupa-Kanyinda (1991, DRC), *FESPACO 1995* by Aboubakar Sanogo (1996, Burkina Faso), *Africa on Film* by Nick Freand Jones (1992, UK), and *FESPACO '87* by Carolyn Sides (1987, USA/Jamaica); and a selection of FESPACO newsreels made by students from the Imagine Institute in Ouagadougou during the years 2009-2013. This sample of films from the JGPACA collection was complimented by lunch-time talks with some of the filmmakers who were present in Ouagadougou.

Importantly, along with *Ouaga Capitale du Cinema* (Mohamed Challouf, 2000, Burkina Faso/Italy/Tunisia), which was also screened in festival programme, visitors were able to get a glimpse of past festivals and to encounter some of the witnessing voices and views, as well as their responses to the experience of FESPACO. In *Ouaga: African Cinema Now and Ten Thousand Years of Cinema*, for example, the importance of African cinema was explored with poetic flare, very much in the idiom of a personal passion inspired by FSPACO. *FESPACO '87* recorded the major 'diaspora' presence at FESPACO in 1987, and the significant effort to reinvigorate this presence within the festival. This was the year when the first Paul Robeson prize was awarded. It was also year that Thomas Sankara was assassinated, in October, a few months after the festival had ended on 28 February. *Ouaga Capitale du Cinema* celebrates the Sankara years, using a wealth of archive material from the period, and resonates with the idea of how institutions tend to mirror the society within which they exist.

These audio-visual records among others, along with all the materials that bear witness to Africa's experience in and of cinema, must become the treasured furnishings of what is signified in the phrase adopted by Sanogo (2018) from the African tradition of Egypt, 'houses of life or *Per Ankh*, i.e., places where culture itself was kept alive' (15). In so doing, the value and necessity for this work in archiving, preserving, and making accessible the historical legacy and its cultural memory, indeed becomes an undeniable 'duty' in securing a future for both FESPACO and FEPACI, and their interlinked histories.

FESPACO/FEPACI: a historical perspective

The indelible connection between FESPACO and FEPACI, underlines the wider issues of the role of African filmmakers, and by inference, the activity of film production and its industrial dimensions, which should be regarded as being critical to a film festival's existence. Fundamentally, the strategic solutions towards which all current economic and political debates on African cinema seem to gravitate, suggests an urgent need to consider the rationale for the infrastructure of 'a formal and institutionalised film industry at the national, regional and Pan-African levels' (Bakari 2017: 202). This understanding arises firstly, from an awareness of the colonial impositions (Rice 2019, Burns 2013, Grieveson and MacCabe 2011a and 2011b, Tomaselli 1988) that determined the use and seminal experiences of film

in Africa. Secondly, there is the converse, the responses which have been developed around the precipitated conflicts and contentions evident across the history of African cinemas (Dovey 2015, Krings and Okome 2013, Diawara 2010, Şaul and Austen 2010, Armes 2006, Balseiro and Masilela 2003, Ukadike 2002, Givanni 2000, Barlet 1996, Sherzer 1996). As such, the core issues to be addressed at the rendezvous of the fiftieth anniversary, have been imbued with an urgency that, for example, suggests a range of questions, from the relevance of the 'festival films' screened over the decades, to the wider issues of the festival's 'strategic place within the global economy' (Bakari 2017: 202) of culture and creativity.

Within a discursive framework whereby Pan-Africanism emphatically offers perspectives for engaging with the past and envisioning the future, there is the inescapable encounter with a history that establishes FEPACI as an entity formed in 1969 at the Pan African Cultural Festival held in Algiers. Inspired by deliberations at the World Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar, Senegal (1966) and the pioneering work of 'The African Cinema Group' (Le Group Africain du Cinema) led by the Beninese/Senegalese film director and historian Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, and other filmmakers during in the 1950s and 60s (Diawara 1992: 35-50); the organization was inaugurated in 1970 at the Carthage Film Festival, *Journées Cinématographiques de Carthage* (JCC), as the Pan African Federation of Film-Makers (FEPACI), *Le Federation Panafricaine des Cineastes*.

JCC conceived by Tahar Chériaa and launched in 1966, can be noted as offering the first opportunity to bring African cinema home. Prior to this, as Sheila Petty (1996) writes, 'European festivals served primarily to launch African films' (5). JCC therefore, served as the first platform on the African continent for 'African cinema'. It facilitated a new presence in world cinema, which was symbolically incubated in the friendship between Tahar Cheriaa and Ousmane Sembene. In its essence, the collaborative engagement between these two iconic figures, encompasses the underlining purpose and focus, which went on to help energize the foundation of FEPACI.

As the first article of the current constitution of FEPACI states, it is an organization,

'...constituted among all African film makers and of Diaspora, an association in conformity with article 2 of the O.A.U charter of 25 of May 1963, reconstituted in the constitutive act of the African Union on the 11 of July 2000.

This association is named Pan African Federation of Filmmakers.'

Across its history, FEPACI can undisputedly claim a number of significant achievements, including the establishment of FESPACO. The influence of the organization may also be considered in relation to, for example, a list of well-documented statements and declarations (Bakari and Cham 1996: 17-36), its role in establishing film festival events such as the

Mogadishu Pan-African Film Symposium (MOGPAFIS) in 1981; the First Frontline Film Festival in Harare in 1990; SITHENGI in Cape Town, South Africa in 1997; and the Zanzibar International Film Festival (ZIFF) in 1998. From its inception, FEPACI has also been aligned with the OAU/AU, where it has had observer status, making it a unique organization of its kind worldwide. In another peculiar way, there is a historical responsibility to emphasise that at its core, FESPACO and the idea of a 'Pan-African' cinema were established without the complement of a formal film industry. This reality and its consequences are critically discussed among the seminal assessments of the conditions that contextualized the emergence of African filmmaking during what has been referred to as the 'second period (...) framed between 1955 – 1995' (Bakari 2018: 9) in the history of Africa's experience in and with cinema.

With specific reference to the first two decades after 1955, Tahar Chériaa (1978) famously highlighted that what could be identified as the African cinemas of the time, could be described,

'...as structurally, and therefore economically and politically, a kind of monster, or a biological anomaly. They consist of heads (the authors and their films) without bodies (no markets in which to make the films pay), and no audiences because there are no normal distribution and exhibition structures' (Chériaa in Bakari and Cham 1996: 42).

As Diawara notes, in the early 1960s, Timité Bassori in Côte d'Ivoire 'argued that African film could not grow when its future depended upon such organisms as African ministries of Information' (37). This general position could be elaborated in reference to the widespread conditions that called for a transformation of the colonial apparatus co-opted across Africa for national, post-independence objectives. In 'Anglophone Africa' for example, observations on the experience in Ghana and Nigeria (Diawara 1992), are indicative of significant strategies developed to establish state-agencies that would 'encourage film production by nationalizing distribution', and thus mobilizing funds that would 'finance national productions' (116). In the wake of a few 'red herring' initiatives in Nigeria, Ola Balogun (1985), sought to address the 'the inability of our various national leaderships to grasp the crucial role of mass media in the modern era' (183).

In posing the question of why Nigeria needed a film industry, long before the advent of Nollywood, Balogun developed a cultural and economic argument to substantiate a number of 'basic steps' and to dispel critical misconceptions about the prevailing realities film production and industry models. The assessment was made that 'the relative paucity of technical infrastructure for film making in Nigeria at the moment is by no means an insurmountable obstacle to film production, even though it may constitute a relatively annoying

handicap' (186). What seemed more daunting, was the spectre of 'bureaucratic management' (187). In contrast, the exemplary approach of National Cinema Institute (Instituto Nacional de Cinema) in Mozambique (Diawara 1992: 88-103) remains instructive. Here, as a matter of national policy, there was a commitment towards 'regional efforts to establish not only a festival, but also co-operation that would facilitate film distribution linked to regional economic structures' (Bakari 2017: 197).

The filmmakers, therefore, were always very much aware of contradictory and contentious circumstances of African cinema. Not only were foreign interests a threat, but the inherited colonial apparatus remained an imposing obstacle, in need of fundamental and urgent restructuring. As part of the founding agenda of FEPACI, therefore, in 1970, a distinct objective was to engage African governments with the concerns that filmmakers, individually and as small national organizations (Diawara 1992: 36-39), had been mobilizing around since the 1950s. For example, while lobbying governments around the 'unchallenged' cultural impact of films from outside of the continent, a case for African cinema was being developed to counter the strategies of international monopolies, and to promote possibilities for 'private investment in the production of African films' (36). In this regard, FEPACI was placed in the vanguard of efforts to establish 'national and international industries that include the structures of production, distribution, and exhibition' (35).

During the early 1970s, the organization had 'achieved significant progress' (41) in shifting the institutional politics of cinema in Africa. The complexity of prevailing socio-economic realities, however, could be seen to give rise to 'contradictions' between the 'national interest' as prioritized by governments, and the 'radical liberationists interest' as articulated by FEPACI (48). In the rhetoric of the time, FEPACI positioned itself at the core of 'the liberation of Africa' (40). For example, the organization principally set out 'to fight against the Franco-American monopoly of the film industry in Africa' (40); and to inspire the development of 'national cinemas', and nurture film cultures within their national contexts. Of no less importance, was the expression solidarity with, and the promotion of the causes represented by the 'liberation organizations such as the ANC (African National Congress) and SWAPO (South West Africa People's Organization)' (Dovey 2015: 102-3), both of which achieved a noted presence at FESPACO during the era of Thomas Sankara's presidency in Burkina Faso, 1983-87.

By 1985, as Diawara (1992: 132-39) has indicated, FESPACO's achievements were considerable. Underpinned by the persistent effort of African filmmakers, an improvement in the quality of films was discernible, along with vibrant debates within the forum of the colloquium, and a significant and diverse diaspora presence. Hence, by that time, the festival had become, 'not only a platform for the dissemination of a pan-African spirit, but also a place

to assert national identities' (137). Equally, the Paul Robeson Award established in 1987, underlined a new and significant engagement with the 'diaspora', potent with potential. The overall impact by the end of the mid-1980s, is summed up by Diawara, in asserting that 'the strength of FESPACO has been gradually to dismantle French hegemony in Ouagadougou and to replace it with a pan-African hegemony' (137-8). In view of its origins and socio-historical context, this was of great significance. The immediate effect was a curtailment of the 'Francophone bias' (138), and a shift towards making the festival more accommodating to the participation of a wider representative spectrum of the African world.

A critical factor impacting on this particular moment was the charismatic influence exerted by Thomas Sankara, who gained the reputation of being the only African leader of his time 'who was wholeheartedly committed to the development of African cinema' (Ukadike 1994: 199). This commitment was definitely translated into a momentum that distinctly invigorated FESPACO. Sankara's era during the 1980s, and its impact on FESPACO, could be characterized by the renewed optimism it brought towards confronting the prevailing conditions of African filmmaking, defined in general terms by 'almost three decades of a dearth of facilities' (200). Sankara was assassinated on 15 October 1987 during a *coup d'état* staged by his some of his former colleagues. This was the year of the 10th FESPACO, when *Sarraounia* (Med Hondo, Mauritania) won the *Étalon d'or de Yennenga* (Golden Stallion of Yennenga). Notwithstanding the unpredictability of political currents, as Dovey (2015) notes, 'We can only conjecture the height to which FESPACO may have grown had Sankara lived' (103). As the years have passed, this reflexivity should also be critically placed in relation to the fact that, along with the engendered optimism of the Sankara years, a range of new contradictions and debates were soon precipitated within FESPACO by the end of the 1980s, as a new culture of cinema was dawning.

Arguably, however, around the decade spanning the seventies and the eighties, FEPACI found its unique role as a 'politico-economic movement committed to the total liberation of Africa' (Diawara 1992: 45). The commitment that underlines the idealism of this role remains a motivation, which has undoubtedly inspired initiatives, including the establishment of the (now defunct) quarterly journal *Ecrans d'Afrique* (African Screens) in collaboration with the Centro Oriamento Educativo (COE) in Milan, Italy (1992-98); and the publication of the book in celebration of a centenary African Cinema, *L'Afrique et le Centenaire du Cinéma - Africa and the Centenary of Cinema* (1995). More recently also, there have been instances that suggests pragmatism and perceptive thinking in relation to the concrete challenges of African cinema in the contemporary post-colonial and globalised world. Hence, the intrinsic value of the FEPACI Curriculum Symposium, Windhoek, Namibia, 2008, convened as a response to resolutions taken by Congress in Tshwane, South Africa, in April 2006, to interrogate and

research the current state of the curriculum within the audio-visual cinema educational systems. This, along with the establishment of The African Audio-visual and Cinema Commission (AACC) in Addis Ababa in 2016; and The African Film Heritage Project (2017), a joint initiative with Martin Scorsese's The Film Foundation's World Cinema Project and UNESCO, to preserve African cinema classics; cannot be underestimated.

Along with these achievements, however, FEPACI was itself being engaged with issues of its own function, its operation, and its ability to respond to a diversity of challenges, including its capacity to intervene on a range of filmmaker-related matters. As Diawara (1992: 39-50) has indicated, these institutional issues had been simmering for quite some time. In effect, increasingly, the role that the organization was expected to play in support of filmmakers in the climate of optimism and idealism that its work had inspired, opened up critical institutional challenges that would become amplified in later years. Nowhere has this been more evident than in the underlying oppositions that have seemed to polarize, what may be perceived as being three waves of African filmmakers, since the 1990s. Here, are signified those referred to as 'the pioneers', 'the new African film wave' (Diawara 2010), and prolific practitioners of 'Nollywood', indicative of film culture in the new century of transnational cinema.

In relation to both FESPACO and FEPACI, and within the parameters of this new emergence, Africans were, and could be perceived with some assurance, as becoming more enabled to be the principal determinants of their images and narratives in cinema. This is distinctly an age defined greatly by the impact of digital technology and 'Nollywood' optimism since the 1990s. Heralded by *Living in Bondage* (Kenneth Nnebue, 1992), Nollywood marked the start of the 'video boom', which has since become a defining factor in the contemporary African presence in cinema. Nollywood opened up new possibilities to become the influential 'wonder cinema from Africa's most populous nation' (Okome 2010: 26). It is a phenomenon of the age of video and digital technology, which also facilitated the new wave of filmmakers noted by Diawara (2010) as 'a small group of formerly Paris-based African directors' (100). This group includes filmmakers such as Abderrahmane Sissako, Mahamat-Saleh Haroun, Jean-Marie Teno, Jihan el-Tahri, Balufu Bakupa-Kanyinda and Jean-Pierre Bekelo, who formalized their presence at FESPACO as an organization, *La Guilde Africaine des Réalisateurs et Producteurs* (The Guild), founded 1997. Among others, their presence signified a new generation of filmmakers, inspired by FESPACO and FEPACI, but significantly shaped by a new diasporic experience.

Both Nollywood and 'the Guild', symbolized at the time of their emergence, new and in their individual ways, radical constituencies. Each brought to the fore a range of related issues indicative of circumstances that were exacerbating weaknesses discerned during the 1980s,

but which had not been adequately addressed within either FEPACI or at FESPACO. These new presences, therefore, helped to define the 21st FESPACO of 2009, as an important moment for reflection on ‘the pioneers’ (Diawara 2010), and symbolically, ‘Sembene’s legacy’ (45). The tendencies in contention, were distinctly amplified within the institutional fabric of FESPACO, and precipitated new debates about the strategic position of this film festival and African cinema in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

It can be argued that emanating from the underlying sentiments of discontent that fuelled these debates, was an increasing volume of robust and widespread critical observations. While recognizing the unquestionable merits of FESPACO, contentions gained intensity around a distinct number of persistent matters, all of which, were clearly obvious in 2019. As a point of reference, for example, it can be recalled that in a review of the 2013 festival, the year that *Tey* (Alain Gomis, Senegal) won the Golden Stallion of Yennenga, Barlet (2013) critically observed that,

‘To combat the marginalization of African cinema in the world it is important (...) that FESPACO meets high enough standards to provide an impeccable showcase and to attract an international professional network that goes beyond the close-knit circles of African film backers’ (255).

In Barlet’s review of the festival’s programme, its organization and its management, was a grave cause for concern. The ‘overall weakness’ (251) of the selection of film in competition, and the need for film programming, which was more inclusive of the ‘diaspora’, were highlighted, and could be read as being among the principal challenges to be overcome, if FESPACO was ‘to survive the various threats that undermine it’ (262). The impression was also conveyed that even though the symposium on ‘African Cinema and Public Policy in Africa’ produced a ‘solemn’ (255) and no doubt committed declaration, the wider political reality across the continent, left much to be desired. As was pertinently observed, ‘Without public backing (...) cinema will never become a job-creating industry’ (255).

In subsequent years, it is evident that not much had changed for the better, and by 2017, a distinct decline in the overall festival experience for filmmakers and the general public alike, was evident. Critiquing the festival’s relationship to donors and state agents, a witness to the 2019 event, noted the marginalization of filmmakers, in preference to political dignitaries and representatives from international aid/donor organizations, which marked a lamentable awards ceremony occasion at the fiftieth anniversary rendezvous. A similar observation about the 2009 festival, is recorded by Diawara (2010) as signifying a ‘disdain for African filmmakers and critics in favor of European tourist and small bureaucrats’ (70).

Diawara (2010) also recalled a 2008 panel discussion, 'African Film – New Forms of Aesthetics and Politics' at the *African Screens* festival in Germany, where views were exchanged on 'the question of what African film is, or what it could be' (196). Across the responses, well-rehearsed perspectives were offered covering aspects of Negritude, Pan-Africanism, as well as film history, theory and criticism. The Nigerian 'film activist', Jahman Anikulapo, contributed a commentary (250-6) on Nollywood, which celebrated the Nollywood success story. Even as certain paradoxes of the unique Nigerian industry were acknowledged across the panel, a point of convergence of interests for African filmmakers could be seen to be established. Zola Maseko of South Africa emphasised the need for filmmakers to think strategically, but added that, 'South Africa and its government have identified film as one of the seven pillars of economic growth' (249). Anikulapo stressed that, 'funding is indeed a major challenge. When we contemplate the future we need to look at how filmmakers can access funds to do what they want to do without conditions' (255). Together, these sentiments beckon a return to a critical review of the institutional foundation of FESPACO that reside in the seminal ideas that brought FEPACI into existence. An updating of these ideas, along with a forensic assessment of the current state of FEPACI, and particularly the organization's role in the future of FESPACO, seems to be an action that could now be most productively taken.

Surrounding the moment of a fiftieth anniversary of FESPACO, is an unavoidable convergence of ideas and artistic expressions that articulate Africa's existence in cinema. Today, in a global world saturated with 'new' technology, the phenomenon of Nollywood has marked a significant transformation in cinema culture. This now exists alongside other differentiated tendencies in African cinema culture, which in totality are indicative of 'the ongoing process of establishing national cinemas and a viable Pan-African film economy' (Bakari 2017: 201). Devoid of a Pan-African perspective, it is quite convenient to regard and to categorize this diversity as evidence of antithetical or competing practices across generations or styles. This ignores the historically determined factors such as 'available technology and their respective cinema economies and institutions' (201), for example, which predicates the work of differentiated generations of African filmmakers towards the mutually shared intentions that 'were and are to make films for African audiences with the greatest possible autonomy' (201).

FEPACI – 10th Congress, 20-22 February 2019: its context and significance

The critical issues of the moment undoubtedly brought a sense of urgency to the 10th FEPACI Congress as scheduled, immediately before the start of the FESPACO programme. As an occasion, the problematic journey that the organization had made following a decision in 2006 to locate the Secretariat away from Ouagadougou, was recognized. This was then, the first congress convened in Burkina Faso since the 7th Congress in 2001, and the 10th in its fifty

years of formal existence. In preceding years, the 8th FEPACI Congress had been held at an African Film Summit hosted by the Department of Arts and Culture of South Africa, and the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF) in Tshwane (Pretoria), South Africa from the 3-6 April 2006. On this occasion over 350 filmmakers from 37 African countries and the Diaspora deliberated on a range of topics addressing the historical challenges of Africa Cinema, the role of the African Union and NEPAD in the development of African audio-visual industries, the role of the State in the development of the African film/audio-visual industries, and the role of broadcasters in the development of the African cinema industries. There was a consensus among the participants around the importance of building stronger national organizations that would take a lead role in the development of national industries. However, the overriding business of the Congress entailed a need for a constitutional review.

The document produced from the proceedings, 'The Tshwane Declaration', is notable for the recommendations under the section heading, 'Facilitating Unity Among African Filmmakers - Towards a Common vision and Common Voice'. Here, following a number of observations, seven recommendations were outlined. For brevity, and in highlighting part of the framework that shaped the 10th Congress, three will be noted:

- That there should be a constitutional review and that the vision of FEPACI must be defined in the context of challenges and opportunities facing African filmmaking in the 21st century.
- That the Head Office remains in Ouagadougou and that the Secretariat of FEPACI should be accommodated wherever it is possible every four years in order to facilitate both the activities and needs of its members.
- That all national and regional organizations of filmmakers from the African States and the Diaspora should be recognized by FEPACI.

These in my assessment, were among the principal considerations that guided the work of the FEPACI secretariat, which was located in Johannesburg between 2006 and 2013. During this period, important constitutional reform had been carried out, and significant progress was made at African Union level, in lobbying support for the setting up a 'Support Fund to African Cinema and Audiovisual Industries'.

At the 9th Congress held in Sandton, Johannesburg in 2013, and in spite of invaluable work done towards institutional reform; significant fissures had opened up as FEPACI struggled to shape its Pan-African vision as an institution. Hence, as recorded in the minutes of a meeting (FEPACI-DAC-NFVF meeting, 12 February 2013) prior to the congress, between FEPACI and the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) and the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF) of South Africa; it was noted that in effect, FEPACI had not been able to function for most of

its seven-year period in South Africa. The organization had found itself in a 'moribund state'; and was therefore seeking assistance in support of managing its 'fiduciary duties', particularly in organizing the 9th Congress, and securing its future. South Africa had undoubtedly invested much, politically and financially, into the Secretariat. It was thus, not only in the interest of FEPACI to carry out its mandate, but also for South Africa to dispel any misconceptions about the quality of its support. The DAC, through the involvement of the Minister, Paul Mashatile, who hosted the meeting, gave assurances of conditional support, insisting on 'a conclusive report that charts solutions on the way forward'. Within a wider commitment of South Africa towards 'building the creative industries', the sentiment was also conveyed that FEPACI could be a strategic partner.

The 9th Congress of FEPACI was subsequently convened on 3rd – 5th May 2013, with the support of the DAC, the NFVF and the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), in partnership with African Union and FESPACO. In recognition of the African Union's 2013 theme 'Pan- Africanism and African Renaissance', and 23rd FESPACO theme 'African Cinema and Public Policies', the agenda of the Congress was broadly focused on the considerations of transforming the organization in order to meet the needs of the African Film Makers of the 21st Century and contributing to the boosting of the African creative economy. The thematic focus of the Congress was stated as: 'Institutional Transformation of FEPACI with Aligned Policies, Strategies and Programmes for Filmmaking in the 21st Century'. Among a number of documents, the 9th Congress received and approved a revised and amended FEPACI constitution, and guidelines for developing institutional policies and procedures. Also presented for discussion was a proposal to relocate the Secretariat to Nairobi, Kenya, which was also agreed. Sadly, and confirming the apprehension of many attending the 9th Congress, the idea of FEPACI moving the Secretariat from Johannesburg to Nairobi proved to be both unmanageable and detrimental to the organization.

As is now quite obvious, each location that has hosted the FEPACI Secretariat, has indeed presented its own complications, and these will no doubt be the subject of a much-needed comprehensive history of the organization. What became clear at the 10th Congress in Ouagadougou, however, is a critical dislocation within the organization, between its institutional structure and capability, and its historical role and current functional needs. Within a pervasive atmosphere of institutional amnesia, three critical issues could be extrapolated from the deliberations: 1) the link between FESPACO and FEPACI; 2) FEPACI's presence and role across the continent and in the Diaspora; and 3) the need to enhance the 'visibility' of FEPACI with a view towards making a greater impact on FESPACO.

In summary, my propositions outlined during the FESPACO symposium (discussed above) were that, firstly, the sustainability of FESPACO could only be realized within the existence of a more dynamic film culture. This includes the development of audiences, as well as academic and critical knowledge. This consideration underlines the urgent need to recuperate the relationship between FESPACO and FEPACI. Secondly, the presence of FEPACI, and its role across the continent and in the Diaspora is therefore crucial to FESPACO in ensuring diversity and quality in film selection and programming, and importantly, the engagement of filmmakers with the festival. Central to this should be an essential effort to address the lack of visibility of female directors and to improve the diversity of diaspora films being programmed. Thirdly, it is of critical importance that FEPACI and FESPACO become more efficient in their communication processes, and in the management of the festival, towards achieving greater and more mutually beneficial visibility and relevance.

In concluding the 10th Congress, Secretary General Cheick Oumar Sissoko was re-elected, and a new Secretariat was appointed, to be located once again in Ouagadougou. While there is no guarantee that the critical issues highlighted by the Congress will be adequately addressed, an opportunity does seem to exist for urgent action that would reinvigorate the relationship between FEPACI and FESPACO. This work, according to priorities presented by Secretary General, includes many ideas and actions of the past, which are being brought forward; along with more recent and timely initiatives that are to be continued, for example, around the FEPACI Archive Project (discussed above) for the restoration of significant films screened at FESPACO over the years, which would go towards constituting the legacy of African cinema.

FESPACO and FEPACI, and the future

The fiftieth anniversary of FESPACO was indeed a critical and iconic moment. It was one for reflection and re-visioning the future, a Pan-African future. This by implication, suggests a need to consider new efforts to transform the ways in which the film industry is valued across most of Africa, as a precondition for appropriate policies that would facilitate investment in essential infrastructure and institutions. Without this investment, no viable economy would be possible, and no real future for African cinema can be secured. This includes the nurturing of future filmmakers and other professionals necessary for a dynamic cinema culture.

Recalling this broad history of African cinema, takes into account the need to unravel, at least, some of the myths and illusions that continue to intervene in contemporary debates, and which can be identified as factors inhibiting 'the ongoing process of establishing national cinemas and a viable Pan-African film economy' (Bakari 2017: 201). Thus, FEPACI's current role within FESPACO, and its status within African film culture, is brought into focus. Within the underlying

principles of this position, FEPACI is not only crucial to the future of FESPACO, but also of critical importance to an 'understanding of the development of African film production in general' (Diawara 1992:35), its institutional needs and its structural challenges, in the context of shaping the future of a Pan-African cinema in its essence, economy and diversity.

Post/Preface: Voices in the Mirror

As it is widely recognized, FESPACO and Ouagadougou are synonymous with the idea and aspirations of African cinema. At the opening of FESPACO 2019 on the 24th of February, filmmakers and other festival attendees had gathered at *la Place des cinéastes*, as they have done since 1987, for the 'traditional' libation ceremony. This event is designed to honour the filmmakers who have made the idea of an African cinema possible. It was an occasion for paying homage to those acknowledged as being the 'pioneers' of African cinema and those who in their lifetime, had contributed to the legacy that defines much of the unique identity of Ouagadougou as the capital city of African cinema. *La Place des cinéastes* is not in fact a 'filmmakers' square' as it is often rendered in the English translation. It is in fact, a roundabout at one of the major intersections in the city. As such, it is symbolically a circle. With its intersecting roads, including the boulevard where a row of statues memorializes the pioneers of African cinema, it suggests something more akin to an Egyptian *ankh* or a Ghanaian *akwaaba* doll. In other words, as a central location in the plan of the city and as a space in the festival's programme, *La Place des cinéastes* conjures a symbolic meaning that has helped to bring the particular aura to FESPACO.

Among those in attendance at the libation ceremony were some who could still be counted among the pioneers; Alimata Salembéré (Burkina Faso), Timité Bassori (Côte d'Ivoire), Souleymane Cissé (Mali), and Jean-Pierre Dikongué-Pipa (Cameroon) who was honoured with the unveiling of his statue on the famed 'Filmmakers' Avenue'. Dikongué-Pipa now joins Ousmane Sembene (Senegal), Souleymane Cisse (Mali), Lancine Kramo Fadiga (Cote d'Ivoire), Idrissa Ouedraogo and Gaston Kabore, both of Burkina Faso, as the latest addition among the iconic figures of African cinema celebrated in the city. In 1976 his first feature film *Muna Moto* won FESPACO's grand prize, the *Etalon d'or de Yennenga*. Like most of his generation, Dikongué-Pipa's career sadly does not reflect his expressed aspirations or the optimism of his formative years. As the Cameroonian spoke at the unveiling of his commemorative image, a paradoxical sense of sadness undoubtedly underpinned the occasion. In spite of noted moments of celebration and achievement, these underlying sentiments persisted into the colloquium and across the festival period, demanding adequate responses.

The mood on this morning, in this city on the edge of a creeping desert also provided a reality check, following the well-choreographed pageantry of the opening ceremony on the previous evening at National Stadium. Here, the programme began with the grand entrance of a cavalry of horse riders, male and female, ushering the President of Burkina Faso, Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, into the stadium. The National Ballet of Rwanda took pride of place in the programme that followed. This programme included tributes to the pioneers of African cinema, the 'founders' of the festival, and the winners of the festival's grand prize over the years. Notably, the first Golden Stallion of Yennenga was awarded in 1972 to *Le Wazzou polygame* by Oumarou Ganda (1935-81) of Niger, a seminal figure in the history of African cinema.

Even more iconic, the paradoxical events of the festival's closing day on 2nd March, will also live on in whatever 'houses of life' (Sanogo 2018: 15) are built for posterity in honour of FESPACO's legacy. On this day, in the dry mid-afternoon heat, as many were being transported to the national stadium in Ouagadougou, news filtered through that Med Hondo had passed away. The information sent a tremor through the humid chaos of the closing ceremony. Later into the night, a fraternity of filmmakers made an impromptu gathering at restaurant *La Forêt*. The figurative circle recalled Med Hondo, a patient and committed baobab of African cinema, as uncompromising in his Pan-African stance as he was in his pursuit of creative excellence. At that moment, FESPACO 2019 became a poignant watershed.

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