Africa must Make its own Images
The Third CODESRIA-FESPACO Workshop on African Cinema

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The CODESRIA-FESPACO Work shop has become one of the major scientific rendez vous of the Pan-African Film and Television Festival in Ouagadougou. This CODESRIA event is now included in FESPACO's official agenda. During the 22nd meeting of FESPACO, African researchers and academics in the area of film studies joined in a workshop under the aegis of CODESRIA on the theme of 'African Cinema, and Markets'. The Festival offered a wide range of activities, including travelling exhibits on various years of FESPACO and African cinema, film showings, conferences, and so on. The researchers of the CODESRIA community, under the moderation of Professor Manthia Diawara, a US-based African film-maker, and Kofi Anyidoho from the University of Legon, Accra, chose to focus for two days on 'African film, video & the social impact of new technologies'. Initiated for the first time in 2007, it was the third meeting of its kind organized by the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa. This African campaign was also attended by the community of researchers from the Diaspora. The initiative was born of a will to contribute to capacity building and produce scientific research findings able to promote African film and the advancement of African societies.

At the latest edition of FESPACO, the goal of the workshop was to draw attention to the new creative visions and directions in contemporary African film. CODESRIA believes that in Africa today, critical positions and new cinematographic languages that oppose and often contradict each other have remained for the most part invisible due to the monolithic and politically correct definition of African cinema laid down by artistic firms and Western festivals. The focus was on discussing and analysing the economic, aesthetic and social impacts of the video film phenomenon in Africa, then examining the relationship between new technologies, contemporary African literature and film in order to determine what videomakers could learn from their predecessors in literature and film, and vice versa. Result of a study were on the reception of video films by African audiences as constituting new spaces for democracy, new subjective formations and social and economic desires that had thus far been absent from film and literature.

Several questions linked to the theme were addressed during the workshop, through various sub-themes, such as: (i) Video and film production and distribution in Africa including the issue of the formation of a new generation of videomakers, (ii) Aesthetic considerations in

African literature, film and video, presenting Teshome Gabriel and critical paradigms in African film and video as well as new theories of production, distribution and reception, and (iii) The story and popular culture: representations of religion, mythology and the star system in African film and video. In all, some twenty papers were presented over five working sessions. Certain questions relating to the image of women were the subject of a far-ranging debate that came up repeatedly in different sessions.

Africa faces many challenges, two of which are essential: the market issue, particularly in countries with low levels of literacy, and the problem of training. It is impossible to discuss film without referring to images and video. Making beautiful images requires expensive cameras, not to mention production equipment and the impressive number of technicians involved. Film, according to the experts, is a screenplay plus images. It is an art that touches people, that translates human feelings. The advent of digital technology was supposed to help reduce financial constraints, but this technology still poses enormous problems due to the specificities that characterize Africa. Despite its many successes, digital technology does not yet handle contrasts well enough, whereas Africa is a continent of contrasts. However, it remains obvious that the technology is a necessity, so thought needs to be given to its limitations.

Due to the poverty affecting African audiences, the market remains limited given the demands of production. Film, therefore, appears as a luxury in the light of the problems of education, health, and poverty in general. In Nigeria, for example, 180,000 people lack access to water and electricity, whilst others have access to the Internet and films on their laptop computers. A revolution in African cinema is imminent. The question that remains is how to reconcile the challenge and new technologies when we know that people are living in extreme poverty. How can we enter into competition with the West to meet these challenges? Africa needs to find a way to produce its own images, and the need to educate its youth through film is so obvious that its importance no longer needs to be demonstrated. Film and sports stars are models for African youth. The examples of African stars such as Cameroonian sportsman Samuel Eto'o, who plays in Europe, or Senegalese artist Akon in the USA, along with many others, demonstrate the influence and the image of these celebrities for our youth.

Several other issues also dominated the discussion, including the image of women in film, video as an alternative to film, women's exploitation, sex, the merchandizing of stars, sponsoring, ways of meeting the challenges of film and the huge gap between French-speaking and English-speaking countries where film is concerned. According to Idrissa Ouedraogo, an eminent film-maker from Burkina Faso, French-speaking and English-speaking Africans experienced two different types of colonization. English-speakers were fortunate in that the language of colonization undoubtedly promoted the development of their film industries. The refusal of French-speakers to go to Hollywood was due to the way French-speakers had been shaped and formatted since colonization by their heritage and the education they received.

The issue of means was brought up in a presentation by Judy Kibinge, a Kenyan film-maker, who took the opposite tack from the earlier presentations, stating that quality was not determined by budget alone, but also by the originality of the ideas, and the authenticity and originality of the approach and the screenplay. She added that it was also important to portray one's own vision, and to change what people thought about artists. Even though it was not yet possible to talk about a 'Kenyawood', numerous initiatives were being undertaken in Kenya, which showed that there was room for national training.

It is impossible to have a holistic understanding of African film without examining the problems of training. According to Prof Balufu B. Kanyinda, a Congolese film-maker, the issue of training was both ideological and pedagogical. Africans were not trained to be Africans. How, then, could African film-makers be trained? What tools could be used in their training? They could not be trained in technology alone. The new generation needed to be trained in cinephilia. This generation needed to learn how to read films. Many film-makers were trained by cinematic illiterates, and the audience liked them because it did not understand, was not cinematically literate, and because African film did not follow international standards. According to Prof Kanyinda, African film could be defined as a genre (like westerns, pornography, etc). It showed poverty because it wanted to show it. Whereas Africa had a beautiful history, the struggle for independence alone was a very rich story. *It was self-evident that no one could tell our story better than we Africans ourselves.*

Africa needs to create its own logic to take ownership of its own reality. Programmes need institutional coverage, but they should also be anchored in tradition. According to Fatoumata Kandé Senghor of Senegal, Africans are strongly rooted in their continent, their country, their family. However, even if our youth does not go out into the world, the world comes to it through information and communication technologies. The question is how to train that youth in technology while keeping it solidly grounded in its culture.

To return to the problem of colonial heritage and imperialism, Jihan El Tahri of Egypt viewed the issue of training as another way of regulating unemployment through European funding. The usual training through workshops was not productive; young people needed practical and complete support to help them produce films. In her view, colonization was not merely a matter of content; it was also a matter of mentalities. She preferred documentary films and wondered why that type of film did not attract many film-makers. We missed a lot by failing to commit ourselves, she added.

A panel focused on the work of a great promoter of African culture: Gabriel Teshome (1939-2010), founder of the Third Cinema aesthetic, theoretician, author, educator, Ethiopian but a citizen of the world, and a great humanist. The panellists had the opportunity to review his theories regarding Nollywood, or Third World cinema. Prof Onookome Okome of Nigeria tried to conceptualize Third Cinema by presenting it as film, imperfect cinema, African cinema. He perceived that form of cinema as a popular project rather than a political one. South African researcher Lindiwe Dovey also stressed that African cinema and Hollywood were two different things. Hollywood focused on aesthetics and not on the audience, like African cinema. Based on an excerpt from a film, she showed how a small neighbourhood movie theatre could become the lifeblood of a whole neighbour-

hood and, using other excerpts as examples, she showed that Hollywood, despite its aesthetics, could remain distant from its audience, with empty theatres.

Discussions of the image of women in Hollywood came up several times as a paradigm to be changed. According to Prof Manthia Diawara, this image could affect everyone, and it was wrong to leave the status quo in place because producers had the means. Contrary to the analysis presented by Okome, Prof Salem Mekuria said she could not imagine Nollywood without ideology or politics and that, in her view, such projects always existed one way or another. In the end, based on the different presentations and discussions, how could African cinema be defined and described today? The question remained open.

The final panel of the meeting focused on the impact of film on society. Various approaches to the analysis of films were presented by the participants in their presentations. These included reviews from the standpoint of producers, the 'intimist' approach, i.e. from the inside, and analysis from an outside viewpoint. Whatever the approach, criticism of Nollywood cinema obliges us to review African film production with a greater distance and clarity. As for the image of women in films, the responsibility lay in the hands of training institutions. It was well known that many people enjoyed films on sex in private but spoke out against them in public. The challenge was even greater in the light of the fact that, like music, film was an art form that knew no borders. What should be done in relation to the issue of the debate on images, of which we did not know all of the parameters, and what film model should Africa promote? What were the alternatives to Nollywood? The issue of audience reception of films remained equally important. For the time being, the important thing was not to adopt a pessimistic attitude. Nollywood's transnationality was undoubtedly due to the linearity of the language.

Today, FESPACO incontestably remains one of the most important cultural events in Africa. The research programme on African film developed by CODESRIA is an interesting initiative that ought to be encouraged by governments and stakeholders. The idea of owning our own history also remains fundamental. Despite their beauty, their colours and their splendour, images are highly complex. Europeans have their own ideologies and their own ways of perceiving things and seizing things which are sometimes surprising. Africans must also create their own logic to bring about real change. Africa's development will depend on the production of its own images. But this, in turn, implies that Africa has its own means. How can we tell our own story through cinema – taking account, of course, of the evolution of technology and the socioeconomic and cultural environment? In addition to the format, the authenticity and originality of African cinema, research should also consider the audience. The question of what sort of cinema we hope to achieve remains important: national or Pan-African?

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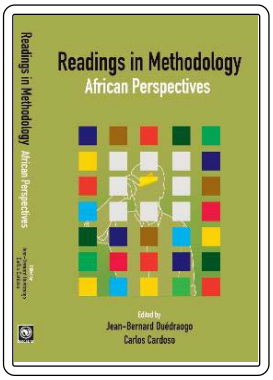

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One of the weaknesses of research in Africa is the little consideration that is given to questions of epistemology and methodology. What we see is the trivialization of research protocols which, consequently, are reduced to fantasy prescriptions that detach social studies from universal debates over the validity of science rather than an interrogation of research procedures induced by the complexity of social dynamics. As a result, social sciences have become an imitative discourse and a recital of exotic anecdotes without perspectives. Knowledge production therefore loses any heuristic bearing. It is on the basis of this reality that attempts to correct this tendency have been made in this book by discussing the methodological foundation of social science knowledge.

This volume is a collection of papers presented during methodological workshops organized by CODESRIA. Its objective is to revitalize theory and methodology in field work in Africa while contributing to the creation of a critical space hinged upon the mastery of epistemological bases which are indispensable to any scientific imagination.

Far from being a collection of technical certainties and certified methods, this book interrogates the uncertain itinerary of the process of social logics discovery. In that sense, it is a decisive step towards a critical systemization of ongoing theories and practices within the African scientific community. The reader can, therefore, identify the philosophical, historical, sociological and anthropological foundations of object construction, field data exploitation and research results delivery. This book explains the importance of the philosophical and social modalities of scientific practice, the influence of local historical contexts, the different usages of new investigative tools, including the audiovisual tools. Finally, the book, backed by classical theories, serves as an invitation toward considering scientific commitment to African field research from a reflective perspective.