

Kitabu

The bi-monthly newsletter of the African School Mobile Library
"African Studies by bicycle"

Issue 7: December 2020

Dear Reader. Welcome to Kitabu. This month Burkina Faso commemorates the 1958 Proclamation of the Republic – full independence came two years later – so this issue is dedicated to a unique library located in that country.

A Song for Sembene

In the capital city of the Land of Honourable Men, there is a street called Filmmakers Avenue. Along that avenue, there is a statue to the one known as the "Father." In the city that loves him, women, as they do elsewhere, sing of him, because he gave them a gift called *Moolade*: they sing of Ousmane Sembene.

As well as being the city that hosts FESPACO – The Pan-African Film and Television Festival – every two years, Ouagadougou is also home to the African Film Library. Founded in 1989, it is the jewellery box of African Cinema. For the seeker after treasure, I suggest that he or she place Ouagadougou on their itinerary. Nearly two thousand films are stored there: cataloguing the filmography of a continent. In the rooms of clean and repair, in the rooms of monitored temperature and humidity, the reels are restored and recorded. And just as the manuscripts of medieval erudition, in the Ahmed Baba Institute in Mali are being digitized, so the modern and contemporary films, housed in Burkina Faso, are available online; but that part of the library – and other similar endeavours - will have the spotlight placed on them, in another issue of Kitabu.

This library is a joint venture between the Burkina Faso government and FESPACO, which has French backing. The festival celebrated its fiftieth anniversary last year. As well as films, the collection also features film posters, press clippings and photos: offering the fortunate student or researcher, a wonderful insight into the African Screen, past and present.

Mentioning the past, I wonder what the hero of this piece thought of another, earlier trail-blazing figure; I wonder what he thought of the works of Oscar Micheaux, the first Black filmmaker, who in 1925, gave us the cinematic debut of Paul Robeson.

In 1963, a novelist, the one known as the "Father of African Cinema" made the first film by a sub-Saharan African, entitled *Borot Sarat*, the Wagoner. Now, at some point, we shall compose stanzas for some of those featured in the African Film Library, telling the sagas of a continent; such as Mahmet Saleh Haroun, the Chadian director, who gave us *Abouna* ("Our Father"), with that soundtrack by Ali Farke Toure; but first of all, we shall raise our voices for a great Pan-Africanist, a man from Senegal: we shall sing a song for Sembene.

Sources – FESPACO - Africultures

Formerly called Upper Volta, in 1983, it was renamed by the president Thomas Sankara: Burkina Faso. These words have been variously translated as 'Land of the Honourable Men;' 'Land of the Right-Living People;' 'Land of the Honest Men;' and 'Land of the Incorruptible Men.'

Amongst other films and documentaries, the ASML has the following...

MOOLADE - Ousmane Sembene
ABOUNA ("Our Father") - Mahmet Saleh Haroun
YAA ASANTEWAA: The Heroism of An African Queen - Igor Agyeman-Duah
500 YEARS LATER – Owen 'Alik' Shahadah
QUEEN YAA ASANTEWAA AND THE GOLDEN STOOL - Akua Ofosuhene/Jacob Webb
RED TAILS – Anthony Hemingway

HEAD OF AN IFE KING – Fulmar Television and Film Ltd
NELSON MANDELA – (Discovery Channel) - Nadine Pequenean
DR MARTIN LUTHER KING JNR: A Historical Perspective – Thomas Friedman
AFRICA'S FORGOTTEN KINGDOM – (National Geographic)
Patrick Fleming
CRY FREEDOM – Richard Attenborough
A PRINCE AMONG SLAVES – Andrea Kalin
THE BLACK AMERICAN EXPERIENCE – Ida B Wells and Fannie Lou Hamer
TMV Media Group
THE BLACK AMERICAN EXPERIENCE – Paul Robeson and Richard Wright
TMV Media Group
BOB MARLEY: Freedom Road – Merlin Communications
THE DOCTRESS: Mary Seacole of Jamaica – Cynthia Wilmot
AMISTAD – Steven Spielberg
RAY – Taylor Hackford
A SON OF AFRICA: Equiano Vol.1 – Aimimage Productions
GOODBYE BAFANA: Based On The Memoirs of Nelson Mandela's Prison Guard
Billie August
PRINCE AMONG SLAVES – Andrea Kalin
HIDDEN FIGURES – Theodore Melfi
TSOTSI – Gavin Hood
LIFE AND DEBT – Stephanie Black

Our governments are not committed to distributing our cinema. I can give you *Faat Kine* if you want, on the condition that you screen it! It isn't the filmmakers who hold back the films. It's the governments who don't show them! There is a film library here where we depose a copy of our films for free. When are they seen?

Ousmane Sembene, Press conference, FESPACO, 2001

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An African School Production

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