

FIFAK 2013: Gendered and Generational Expressions of a Passion for Cinema in Tunisia

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First held in Tunisia in 1964, the Kelibia International Amateur Film Festival (Festival International du Film Amateur de Kélibia – FIFAK), at first run biannually and now run annually by the Tunisian Amateur Film-makers' Federation (Fédération Tunisienne des Cinéastes Amateurs, FTCA), is the longest-running film festival held in Tunisia since it gained its independence. Hédi Khélil opens his book *Abécédaire du Cinéma Tunisien* (2007: 25) with the 'A' of 'Amateur' and a reference to the central role of this 'non-professional cinema as a workshop of frustrations, experiences and trial and error experiments' and describes it as a masculine world. Closely associated with the creation of a national film industry in post-independence Tunisia, today FIFAK remains a significant event and the occasion on which the values of this cultural community of film-makers, who determinedly follow a political and non-commercial agenda, are ritually celebrated.

Profound changes in the production, distribution and management of the cinema industry, along with technological, economic and cultural changes, has meant that many films are excluded from commercial distribution. Film festivals have therefore become an essential means for the public to access the film cultures of other countries and the development of these cultures. There are more than 600 festivals of all sizes in France (Taillibert, 2009), more than 1,500 in Europe (de Valck, 2008) and more than 50 in Morocco alone. The number held in Morocco explains why these have been the subject of several studies since the mid-1990s (Nichols, 1994).¹ Research on film festivals (Iordanova, 2014), whether it is concerned with film production or film distribution, the type of audience or even new areas of research, tends to focus on the transnational aspects of cinema. In so doing it reduces the focus on 'national' film culture, which was until recently one of the essential elements of research into film. Researchers explore the interaction of the local with the global, that is to say the way in which festivals, in their role as a distribution network (de Valck, 2007; Iordanova and Rhyne, 2009; Frodon, 2014), become vital links in the distribution and viewing of films. Studies have focused mainly on the big international festivals, those taking place in big western or Asian cities (Dayan, 2000; Ethis, 2001; Thévenin, 2008; Wong, 2011) and those which are considered the events with the greatest symbolic value and with the most marketing potential. These events largely promote *films d'auteur*, independent films, films from smaller countries or world-cinema films (Petrie and Hjort, 2008). Researchers have also turned their attention to festivals held in Africa (Santaolalla and Simanowitz, 2010; Dovey, McNamara, and Olivieri, 2013) and in the Middle East (Iordanova and Van de Peer, 2014), particularly the Pan-African Film and Television Festival of

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Ouagadougou (Festival Panafricain du Cinéma de Ouagadougou, FESPACO), founded in 1969 (Bikales, 1997; Diawara, 1994 and 2010; Bisschoff, 2009; Dupré, 2012), and the Carthage Film Festival (Journées Cinématographiques de Carthage, JCC) which was first held in 1966.² Studies on more local festivals (Santaolalla and Simanowitz, 2010; Dovey et al., 2013) raise awareness of the diversity of the ambitions and local cultures which characterise these festivals. They question the traditional approaches and suggest that film festivals should be seen as ‘ethnographic events’ (Dovey et al., 2013). Some authors regard the portrayal of the construction of identity, which is usually of a diasporic or postcolonial nature (Iordanova and Cheung, 2010), of diversity and of multi-cultural society, as the fundamental driving force of these festivals. However, research into the local audiences of these festivals is still in its infancy and poses particular questions which we attempt to elucidate in this article. We have previously published two such studies into festivals held in France, one a small festival of Tunisian film held in Paris in 2008 (Caillé, 2010), the other the Panorama des cinémas du Maghreb held in Saint-Denis (Caillé, 2012). In these articles we examined how audiences of Maghrebi descent (first and second-generation sons and daughters of migrants), a sub-group within larger audiences, construct a nationally specific relationship with the films that can be extended via the debate to a more regional Maghrebi understanding of films.

This deterritorialization, i.e., the ways in which discussions taking place at a festival in France, even though participants intervene as though they were living in the Maghreb, contributes to the construction of national and regional cinemas (be they “Maghrebi” or “Arab”), the films operating them as vehicles of a culture they document (Martin 2012, Ulloa 2014). This phenomenon highlights the active participation of diasporic audiences in the paradoxical construction of cinemas from their country or region of “origin”, when most films are actually international coproductions with Europe. The concept of this regional dimension is the product of these new encounters since the very idea of ‘Maghrebian films’ is mainly a French construction (Caillé, 2013). On the other hand, there has been little discussion of the way in which western film festivals, the events most likely to show films from marginal, dominated film industries portraying the culture concerned, eclipse an opposite trend, i.e. how festivals which take place in Maghreb or Arab countries develop a local or national culture from a film culture based on the worldwide corpus of films. As for audience research studies, they most often focus on western festivals³ and don’t address the issues of gender and gender role differences in the relationship between film participants and audience members.

This study therefore takes an original viewpoint. Firstly, to study FIFAK necessarily implies focusing on its national character, an aspect of film studies that has fallen out of favour recently because it is thought to make it impossible to account for the hybrid nature of cultures (Bhabha, 1994) and the relationship between local and global which seems to characterise studies of film festivals. What is more, at a time when research focuses on the ways in which digital media affect audiences’ experience of films and social interactions, constructions of identities and invention of self, there is a need to step back. We therefore propose to examine attendees’ experience of attending a festival and the resulting communal experience, both of which are entirely dedicated to voicing, sharing and promoting a passion for cinema. We examine the types of venue and the nature and terms of audience attendance and their social interactions. We also examine the effect of gender and gender role on attendees’ expression of these commonly shared values, as influenced by their own personal conception of film culture.

The 28th FIFAK: an event set in a dual context

The timing of the 28th FIFAK (Kelibia, 25 Aug – 1 Sept 2013) was such that the event took place in a dual context. The first was the state of suspension of the Tunisian revolution at that time, during

which the country held its breath while searching for its new form of political representation and State organisation. In the days leading up to the festival, some of the Tunisian attendees had been present at demonstrations and sit-ins at the Bardo National Museum, demanding the resignation of the government close to the Ennahdha movement and the installation of a provisional government of technocrats.⁴ The participants, like people involved in film generally, were particularly upset at what they saw as growing pressure against artists. More particularly they protested against the arrest of a director, Nasreddine Shili, who had thrown an egg at the Minister for Culture, Mehdi Mabrouk, at a memorial ceremony. Above all they were fiercely opposed to the arrest of a cameraman, Mourad Meherzi, who worked for Astrolabe TV and who had filmed the incident. This spirit of protest was clearly expressed from the opening ceremony of the festival. The mayor of Kelibia, who was loudly booed, had to leave before delivering his speech, even though the council had subsidised the festival. Photographs of both the imprisoned men were shown in the form of a trailer before the films each evening. This collective political protest no doubt contributed to reinforcing the unity of the audience who, with their intense responses, expressed their support for the organisers' publicised wish to resist the sitting government.

The second context was that of the cultural history of Tunisia, which is tied in with the mobilising power of prestigious national associations: the Tunisian Federation of Ciné-Clubs – FTCC, founded in 1949, and the Tunisian Federation of Amateur Film-makers – FTCA, founded in 1962. They promoted the ideals of popular democracy through the making of protest films and are committed to the construction of an original film culture in Tunisia (Ammar, 1995; Khélil, 2007). Today they continue to resist authoritarian regimes. The film *Le Tunnel* (1983) by Ridha Ben Halima (Faucon d'or at FIFAK in 1983) is in some ways emblematic of this political engagement.

FIFAK: A festival tied to an inclusive, national film culture

The FTCA and its abiding quest for a film culture of protest

Tunisian film culture began well before independence with the development of the cinema as a form of leisure as well as with very active amateur film-makers' clubs under the French protectorate (Corriou, 2011).⁵ The FTCA, founded in 1962, is closely associated with the Tunisian Federation of Ciné-Clubs. The cinephilia fostered by such associations is built on Soviet cinema, neorealism and the French New Wave (Khélil, 2007: 27); Tunisian film culture has also generated a debate about the role of Arab and Egyptian cinema in national culture (Cheriaa, 2010: 168).⁶ The close relationship between the two federations has nurtured a culture of cinephilia very much focused on the skills of film-making and film directing and on their aspiration to construct a decolonized national film culture. The FTCA is a well-structured organisation; it is financed by the Ministry for Culture and Heritage through annual grants and acquisition of the films; numerous directors, including Ridha Ben Halima, Selma Baccar, Khaled Barsaoui, Kaouther Ben N'Hia and many others learnt their craft at the FTCA. In 2013 it gathered 17 clubs and 200 members (each club having between seven and 20 members).⁷ The clubs, which are formed and managed according to very specific rules in order to avoid any political or individual interference, hold regular meetings, two training sessions per year at club level and two five-day training events at national level, one of them being FIFAK. Since the introduction of training courses in film-making and related industries to schools and tertiary institutions, these federations have struggled to redefine their role; the popular movements of 2010 and 2011 gave them a new legitimacy and allowed them to redefine their activities, including FIFAK, with a resolutely political approach, re-establishing both their strength and their distance from the commercial film and audio-visual industries.

Specific features of FIFAK: A celebration of FTCA, short films and competitions

For 10 days, Kelibia, a small fishing port of 45,000 inhabitants, a reasonable distance away from popular beaches, hums to the rhythm of FIFAK. Very few casual audiences or tourists attend this festival. Any foreign attendees who come to the festival have generally been invited by the organisers or by other participants. Unlike most events and in spite of the sometimes arduous nature of the amateur short films shown, FIFAK is very well known and is widely covered in the press and national media. It is fully subscribed without any real publicity apart from the call for entries to the competitions. This demonstrates the strong support, the feeling of belonging and the commitment that it generates. It has the character of a privileged ritual where the values of the well-organised film society are communicated to its young audiences in a warm and relaxed, summer sea-side atmosphere of intense activity.

Because the organisers want to encourage participation, the festival has no official definition of 'amateur' film-making. The closest to a definition that can be found is the conditions for entry: 'Amateur films, independent films and films made by students, no matter from where, in any genre, in 16mm, MiniDV, DVCAM, Beta format', even though there are frequent heated discussions about the relevance of the term 'amateur'. In 2013 FIFAK included an international short film competition that attracted 23 entries. Most of these short films were from Arab countries, followed in number by films from Eastern Europe and the rest of Europe. An additional competition for Tunisian short films attracted 21 entries: amateur films and films made by students were judged in a single national competition; a small competition for mobile phone films was also in the programme. Unlike at other festivals, the short films were screened only by night, in an open air, 1,200-seat amphitheatre. This was always full to capacity. Daylight hours were dedicated to other activities: workshops, master classes, discussions about the films shown the previous evening etc.

FIFAK attracts several distinct audiences. Just as at other festivals, these audiences exist side by side, watch each other, congregate in different locations and, more rarely, interact with each other. One audience consists of invitees, jury members and speakers who attend the screenings and speak at the master classes, workshops and discussions. In 2013 the majority were French speaking. Another audience consists of members of FTCA and registered festival attendees: men and women, they are the most involved group, attending both the discussions and screenings but also the master classes and other sessions. Lastly there is the audience consisting of the public from Kelibia and around Tunisia, largely made up of young men but also including some women. Only a small number of this audience attend the discussions but large numbers attend the evening screenings where all the audiences converge after dark. It is the organisers, a large, mixed, experienced team, who form the link between these different audiences. The close relationship between the event organisers and Tunisian film professionals means that FIFAK can rely on a network of experienced and skilled people who attend many events and can mobilise volunteers: the inclusive atmosphere of the festival is in fact due to the 'team effort' and to the strong adherence to the Federation's values. What is more, the organising committee (12 men and six women) includes a significant number of long-term members, festival stalwarts who often attend with their partner and children; almost all of them participate in a range of activities, including the children who take part in the morning creative workshops and attend the evening screenings.

The location of the venues used during the festival encourages attendees to move between the different sites at different times. This movement between venues contributes to the make-up of the different audiences. The open-air amphitheatre is located in the town centre, next to the Maison

de la Culture which houses a photographic exhibition and a coffee shop. Young Kelibians, mainly young men, meet there before screenings. There are three venues on the coast. The Maritime Technical College (École de pêche) is where the young male members of the FTCA are accommodated and where the master classes and post-screening discussions are held. The young female members of the FTCA, who also attend the master classes, discussions and screenings, stay at the Maison des jeunes, the Youth Centre, which is more secluded. Two major hotels are reserved for those invited to the festival and for members of the organising committee. One, the Palmarina, where the post-screening evening gatherings are held, hosts the members of the jury; the other, the Belle Étoile, hosts the filmmakers and members of the FTCA.

Research methodology

The initial aim of this study was to understand the nature of the relationship between the different audiences and an event such as FIFAK, at the meeting point between the established traditional values of the Federation and the lived experience of one year's event, as well as to recover the understanding different audiences have of film and film culture. Our work is based on the analysis of responses to a questionnaire on (1) the definition of cinema, (2) attendees' reasons for attending FIFAK, (3) individuals' personal film culture (the films valued by the respondents) and (4) the means of access to films and to film-making practices. We asked open questions wherever possible in order to base our analysis on terms used by the respondents. We tried to put what the participants did and said into perspective in order to pinpoint the performative aspect of a relationship with an event as well as the terminology used to describe this collective or individual relationship with film.

Given this context, we did not include invited attendees, members of the jury or the presenters of master classes in the study as they represent a separate type of attendee. Instead, we focused on the organisers, FTCA members and the Kelibian public. We distributed 220 copies of the questionnaire in three specific locations: at the hotel Palmarina, which hosts the organisers and where a large group gathered every evening around the pool, at the École de pêche, where post-screening discussions were held, and at the café in the courtyard of the Maison de la Culture where we were able to hand them out to the local public. We received 137 completed questionnaires of which we were able to use 125.⁸ We think of this study into FIFAK as an account from several points of view thought of as "ethnographic moments" and as "a useful way of thinking beyond grand narratives in the context of film festival research" (Dovey et al. 2013). Such a perspective constitutes here a distilled form of momentary clarity, a freeze frame within a continuous and dynamic discourse. For the purposes of this study, we have used Okome's (2007: 9) definition of an audience, that is an audience which 'is not constituted as an a priori category but by the semantics of the peculiar needs of the moment, which are always but loosely inspired by social and economic contingencies. In other words, the newly constituted audience exists, as it were, in a flexible geography of desire.' If FIFAK is an annual event which attracts an audience from within the industry and also a loyal local audience, for whom the location, the layout of the venue (Goerg, 2009) and the timetable are paramount in the development of specific types of social interaction, the 2013 festival was also affected by a specific political context and by the opportunity it offered to the different audiences to meet in shared, or at least contagious, discontent! And so it seemed particularly interesting to us to record the ways in which these groups formed at the time of this ritualized and collective redefinition of film in Tunisia, and the ways in which different perspectives (affected by gendered conceptions of film) converge towards this shared understanding of film.

Five very active, involved audiences (three questionnaire distribution sites)

We identified five distinct audiences. The constitution of these groups was based on the age of the respondents, their roles in the festival, their positions in the federation and in the clubs, as well as the places where they stayed (that had an impact on their participation).

- (a) The largest group was that of young male members of the FTCA and a new generation of male attendees who all consider FIFAK to be an event where they can improve their skills and advance their involvement in film-making. The average age of this group was 22. There were 44 in this group including seven secondary school students, 30 tertiary students, the majority of them studying the sciences or cinema and some the social sciences while a few were actively working film technicians.
- (b) The next group consisted of the young female members of the FTCA and a new generation of female attendees. There were 19 respondents in this group with an average age of 20 years and 5 months. Of these young women, 13 were tertiary students studying medicine, the arts or management; four were secondary school students.
- (c) The generation of older male members of the FTCA and other FIFAK supporters constituted a group of 21 respondents with an average age of 33 years and 6 months. The majority of them are teachers or work in the audio-visual industry.
- (d) The older women did not have such a formal affiliation with the FTCA, even though the 12 respondents from the group were very active participants. The average age of this group was 39 years and 7 months; the majority were teachers with a wide range of roles.
- (e) Lastly, 29 respondents were from the wider public of Kelibia – young people from the area and a few visitors from further afield. Because of the difficulty in contacting the women of Kelibia, both young and not so young, even though they did attend the screenings, we decided to include this audience group only very marginally, except when it allowed us to define more clearly the specific details of the other groups. Even if this group was less versed in the world of Tunisian cinema, the respondents reported strong support for this cultural event, the most important of its kind in Kelibia.

The distinctive conditions under which our research into FIFAK took place.⁹

FIFAK is aimed primarily at members of the FTCA. From these members a core group is formed of about 200 to 250 members who are simultaneously organisers, volunteers, participants and spectators – roles which are often fluid during festivals, but rarely to the point at which we need to refer to them as participants rather than spectators.

Moreover, FIFAK's focus on short films, both commissioned and made by the clubs, requires a certain familiarity with a format which is non-commercial and aimed at a limited audience. This also helps to foster a sense of community among the members, who share a strong attachment to the films. Many young people first come into contact with FIFAK as members of a club, thus forming a view of FIFAK which is linked to their own club.

The FTCA is associated with an oral film culture in various forms: formal speeches and personal expressions of a strong emotional attachment to and attendance at films (in general) and FIFAK (in particular). In practice, FIFAK is a forum for the learning of debating skills and arguing one's point of view during the quite intense discussion sessions. More men than women attend these sessions, although the women do not hesitate to join in the discussions. Similarly, the young male festival

attendees were more easily persuaded to fill in a questionnaire while the young women were, generally speaking, more reserved and hesitant. One point to note is the growing use of Arabic by the younger attendees who are less comfortable using French. This sometimes complicated our dealings with them, to the extent that the young women could use it as an excuse to avoid answering questions.

The questions of audience gender and age were never raised by the men or the women. These characteristics are not considered relevant to people's relationships with films. Nevertheless their effect was apparent to us in the opinions expressed about the master classes: the young men criticised these quite aggressively as being too abstract and not practical enough while the young women found them interesting. The older festival attendees regarded such different views only as a continuing sterile debate between theory and practice.

Results

Analysis of the questionnaire allowed us to put into perspective the opinions of festival attendees on four points:

- (a) their definition of film;
- (b) their stated reasons for participation in FIFAK;
- (c) which films they consider important in a film culture and which films they had seen recently;
- (d) their ways of watching films.

We were then able to distinguish the clearly different ways in which men and women expressed the same ideas about cinema culture and the same reasons for their support of FIFAK, while revealing clear differences in their views of film and film culture based on their gender and preferred film genres.

(a) Male and female respondents define cinema in the same way, but with differences depending on the age of the respondent

The younger and older festival attendees of both genders clearly share the same definition of cinema in terms of its content and values. Above all, cinema is seen as a means to express ideas, including in the vital conflict between film as art which is obviously valorized at the FIFAK and film as commercial entertainment which isn't. According to a 25-year-old male respondent cinema should be 'non-commercial, involve participation and be revolutionary as it is not bound by any form nor law'. But cinema has more than just artistic value. It is also seen as educational, emancipatory and as a means of resistance. These aspects were referred to more frequently by the young female respondents – 'a way to express oneself, to resist, to exist' (young female respondent, 24), a 'weapon against those in power', a 'weapon in the struggle for emancipation and freedom' (young female respondent, 20), even as a possible medium for a 'cultural revolution especially in the countries involved in the Arab Spring' (young female respondent, 17). The young female respondents also view cinema as a way to view the world through others' eyes – 'a chance to get to know other spheres, dimensions and worlds' (young female respondent, 23), 'the film industry stops you from closing in on yourself and allows you to look outwards' (female respondent, 30), and to change oneself – 'The best way to look at things differently, from another point of view' (young female respondent, 20). They also mention that involvement in film provides a way to socialise with others.

There were obvious differences in the attitude of the young male respondents from those expressed by the young female respondents. For the young men, it was primarily a question of

voicing the intensity of a passion. They were a lot more emphatic in the way they demanded that film should be art and in expressing the values with which they associate it. The Federation, defined by Hédi Khélil's noted history (2007: 25–47) as a hatchery of film-making talent, still encourages even very recently engaged young members to identify themselves vigorously with the ethos of a young director completely committed to his art. The young male respondents speak of film in terms of the *film d'auteur* – 'Film is consciousness portrayed visually through image and sound. Film portrays us and shows us life, an experience, a sentiment via the consciousness of the director' (young male respondent, 25, who calls himself an independent director). These young men describe a relationship with the world of film-making based on an imagined role for themselves as directors, one respondent even going so far as to say that the world of film is his 'only reason for living'. They also referred more frequently than the young women to a passionate love of film and more of them also deplore or criticise any commercial dimension of film, – 'an empty form with no depth' –, and its reliance on 'money'. However, these strong statements of a relationship with film as art are in stark contrast to the films they listed in their personal pantheon of films. The young male respondents were the greatest consumers of commercial, mostly American, films: thus the quite striking mismatch between their definition of film, their stated position on it and their own habits.

The older respondents, both male and female, expressed similar views on the educational impact of cinema, – 'A total social phenomenon: the cinema is the main school for citizenship' (male respondent, 67). 'A weapon in the struggle against the government's keeping the people in the dark' (male respondent, 54), it allows us to 'contribute to keeping people informed' (female respondent, 25), and to 'speak of taboo subjects' (male respondent, 34). Respondents of both sexes also expressed a real belief in the value of cinema – 'cinema is truth' (male respondent, 33), in its power to transform society – 'the ultimate art ... and indispensable in influencing society' (male respondent, 26) – at once a weapon of struggle, resistance and rebellion. In this they identify with the notion of a passion for film as a vocation to inform the audience. This concurs with Laurent Jullier and Jean-Marc Leveratto's description of the French passion for film in the post-war period (2010: 111). This definition is not only that of the most ardent festival goers: it is shared by most of the local audience who stress the educational dimension of cinema as being capable of adding to the 'message on the rights of man' (young male respondent, 21).

(b) Reasons for attending FIFAK

A little more than a third of the young female respondents stated that they were attending for the first time, compared with slightly more than a quarter of young male respondents. The rest had been attending for several years, some even declaring that they come every year; in this too, the young male respondents were more emphatic – 'It's like a drug, everyone knows it's dangerous but we can't resist coming' (young male respondent, 26). The number of repeat attendees is indicative of the strong ongoing support for the event. This event seems to be one where the 17 clubs get together and the members from around the country form close relationships with other members of the same gender. The men as well as the women stress their willingness to learn, their desire to profit from the knowledge that the speakers and the attendees can share during FIFAK and the opportunity to attend screenings of international and rarely screened films. The reasons given for attending FIFAK are at once cinematographic, political and social. However, what fits into each of these categories varies from person to person. The women are looking for a 'different, alternative culture and new experiences and experiments' (young female respondent, 24), while their male counterparts, for whom the cinematographic and social aspects are on a par, are there primarily to learn skills that will lead to a role in directing films – 'The most important thing for me here is to

learn new things and to get better, to develop my skills' (young male respondent, 22) – which they achieve through meeting other amateur and professional film-makers. From another point of view, if these meetings are what count the most for the younger attendees/respondents, they are seen by the older men as a means to get to know others and to develop a network within film-making. This is much less the case for the young female respondents, who are much less precise about their ambitions. For the young female respondents, who are equally committed and speak of the importance of undertaking tasks involved in directing when they have the opportunity,¹⁰ this networking with cinephiles and directors, as well as the film screenings, is seen as a chance to learn about the political situation globally through interaction and discussion. In other words, these young women view film from the point of view of what it can contribute to the world they live in while the young men view it from the point of view of their own personal and professional advancement in film-making through the acquisition of technical skills. This explains the young men's frustration in the 'too theoretical' nature of the master classes in which they feel they do not learn anything. There were also some young female respondents who said that they wanted to 'make the most of the opportunity to enjoy the golden sand beaches' (young female respondent, 19) and one even indicated that she did not have any great expectations of the festival – 'it's mostly just something entertaining' (young female respondent, 18). On the other hand, none of the young men mentioned the beach, although this does not mean that they didn't go there.

(c) *Films which form the film culture of the FIFAK audiences*

This research shows the extent to which a shared national conception of cinema is shaped by diverse and global film cultures. The male and female respondents listed very different films in the corpus of films they considered essential to their concept of film culture. There were gender and generational differences, in the corpus of preferred films, in the way they described these films and in their film-watching habits. The male respondents, the younger ones in particular, used a director's name to refer to a body of work much more frequently than female respondents. The directors most frequently referred to by name were Quentin Tarantino (cited nine times), Stanley Kubrick (eight times) and David Lynch (seven times). The most frequently cited films were *Pulp Fiction* (Tarantino, 1994), *Fight Club* (Fincher, 1999) and *A Clockwork Orange* (Kubrick, 1972). The vast majority of films referred to by male respondents were American genre films released between 1998 and 2002: action movies, thrillers, fantasy films, epic movies and also a few coming-of-age films. European films were mentioned only half as many times, even though the names of the directors Tony Gatlif and Emir Kusturica, both important in Tunisian film culture, were mentioned seven and four times respectively. French films were almost totally absent from those mentioned by young male respondents, apart from several references to recent films such as *Enter the Void* (Gaspard Noé, 2009) and *Wrong* (Quentin Dupieux, 2012). One respondent also mentioned Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962).

The film culture of the young male respondents is also very male dominated: apart from Sofia Coppola's *Virgin Suicides* (1999), not a single film directed by a woman appears in the list of essential films. There were also very few films with female characters apart from *Melancholia* (von Trier, 2011). They mentioned films directed by women slightly more frequently in their lists of recently seen films: *Et maintenant, on va où?* (Labaki, 2012), which had been shown in Tunisia just before the festival and *El Gusto* (Bousbia, 2010), a documentary about a group of chaâbi musicians¹¹ were both mentioned.

Only four films from North Africa were mentioned by the young male respondents. Surprisingly, these included only two Tunisian films, considering that FIFAK is such a strong expression of the Tunisian national film culture. With the exception of Naceur Khémir's *Bab' Aziz* (2005) and the

name of the director Jilani Saadi, Tunisian films were not mentioned at all in the young male respondents' lists of personal favourite films. They did appear more in the lists of recently seen films, almost certainly because two of them had been released in Tunisia during the summer. On the other hand, they consider Tunisian cinema to be very important as soon as this is brought up in conversation. This discrepancy is an indication that the formation of a national film culture is not necessarily based on films produced in that country. Such a culture is conceived in a fairly abstract way as something that is yet to form rather than something that is based on a corpus of classics that informs contemporary cinema. There was no mention of the films of Ridha Béhi, *Seuils Interdits* (1972) and *Soleils des hyènes* (1976) and even the first films by Nouri Bouzid, *Man of Ashes* [*L'Homme de cendres*] (1986) and *Golden Horseshoes* [*Sabots en or*] (1988), often described as the foundation of the golden age of Tunisian film in Tunisia and elsewhere (Chamkhi, 2002; Ismaël, 2008). Only one young male respondent mentions having recently seen Nouri Bouzid's *Clay dolls* [*Poupées d'argile*] (2003) on television.

Even if some titles, such as *A Clockwork Orange* (cited three times), *Fight Club* and *Django* (referred to in a reference to *Django Unchained*, Tarantino, 2010) (each cited twice, as were the names of Kubrick and Kusturica), lead us to conclude that the young female respondents share, in part, the culture of the young male respondents, in fact they base their passion for cinema on a noticeably different corpus of films. Tarantino is barely mentioned while the films these respondents cite are from a more classic film culture, anchored in the concept of the *films d'auteur* of the French New Wave: *Citizen Kane* (Welles, 1941), *Blow Up* (Antonioni, 1966), *La Chinoise* (Godard, 1967), *À nos amours* (Pialat, 1983). The films referred to by the young female respondents are a lot more eclectic in terms of genre, nationality and period. It is notable that European and Canadian films are mentioned more frequently, almost equalling the number of American films mentioned in other genres. Films about love and couples, with female heroines, such as *In the Mood for Love* (Wong Kar Wai, 2000), cited several times, or *Casablanca* (Curtiz, 1942) feature in these lists. Films by women directors feature more in the lists of recently seen films than they do in the male respondents' corresponding lists. As well as *Where do we go now?* (Labaki, 2012), Baccar's *Flower of Oblivion* (*Khochkhach*, 2005) and Barbeau-Lavalette's *Inch Allah* (2012) are also mentioned. Nevertheless, respondents did not mention 'films directed by a woman' as a category in the understanding they have of film and film culture.

Arab cinema, political films linked to the Arab world or to the Middle East and also films featuring ethnic minorities in Europe are mentioned much more frequently by the young female respondents than their male counterparts. These include *Incendies* (Villeneuve, 2011), *The Stoning of Souraya M.* (Nowrasteh, 2008), *My Brother the Devil* (El Hosaini, 2012) and also *The Time that Remains* [*Le Temps qu'il reste*] (Suleiman, 2009). One young female respondent even reports watching films which deal with issues of sexuality or openly discuss sexuality: For example, she describes *The Dreamers* (Bertolucci, 2003) as 'my first taste of freedom' (young female respondent, 17). In other words, the culture of film as it is expressed by young women is anchored in a body of more classic films, while the films they have seen most recently reveal more diverse tastes, activities and habits, both revealing their desire to understand the world from a political point of view and, from a more personal point of view, their willingness to transgress society's mores and to use 'braconnage' (bending of the rules to survive) (de Certeau, 1990). This relationship with cinema also fits with the young women's definition of it, in the sense that it is a means to access the experience of others and to understand the world, while also allowing them some personal freedom.

The older male and female respondents also have a very eclectic view of film culture. The women do not refer to a particular *auteur* or body of work by naming the director. Rather they concentrate on a country – 'Tunisian or Egyptian films', on themes – a film 'about Nelson Mandela'

or ‘another film about Algerian immigrants returning to Algeria’ – (female respondent, aged 55), or on a genre. For example, three of them said they enjoy documentaries. What constitutes their understanding of film culture is anchored in European films, which are referred to three times more often than American films, whether they were talking about recently seen films or films in their personal pantheon. There are very few references to the *films d’auteur* of the French New Wave, apart from references to *Pierrot le Fou* (1965) and to *In Praise of Love* [Éloge de l’amour] (2000), both directed by Godard, seen by one respondent a short time before FIFAK at a Maison de la Culture screening. The older female respondents refer to Italian films of the 1950s, to Danish-Swedish co-productions, to more historical or political films such as *The Confession* [L’Aveu] (Costa-Gavras, 1970) or *Downfall* [La Chute] (Hirschbiegel, 2004). Members of this older audience see many more Arab and Tunisian films than the younger audiences, either in the cinema or at cinematographic events and they refer to them almost as much as to European films. Films of a political nature are mentioned very often in this audience’s view of what constitutes film culture.

These responses suggest that the personal understanding of film culture of these men and women differs from the view they express on films directed by these same people in the context of FTCA and FIFAK. The films they cite are not always as political as *Wall Asks: Okay?* [Le mur vous demande ... ça va?] (Ahmed Hermassi, 2012), a short film which recounts Tunisians’ attempts at political expression through a series of graffiti on a wall, or as some other documentaries. While the young male respondents hold to their view that cinema has a political and non-commercial value and that this festival is part of their training, the short films shown in the national competition deal with other preoccupations, such as the aesthetics of a silent film, *Des couleurs chez les nuances* (Mohamed Hammami, 2013) or even the humorous anecdote in *V* (Fares Ben Khalifa, 2013). Relatively speaking, there were more films that could be described as political in the international competition and the quality of these was often higher which meant that their message was clearer and more memorable. By comparison, two big budget productions, the Iranian film *Sous le drapeau* (2013) directed by Ismaël Moncef and the Kosovan film *Beyond/Au-delà* (2012) directed by Ujkan Hysaj, caused a sensation and their status as ‘amateur’ film productions was the subject of much debate.

(d) *The film watching habits of respondents*

We tried to ascertain the format of and type of media used to view films by FIFAK participants and the relative role of cinemas, festivals, television, DVDs etc. as well as the circumstances in which films were watched, individually or in groups, with family or with friends. This aspect was the weakest in the study. More detailed research is needed into film-watching habits, the terms used to describe viewing behaviour, the social aspect of viewing films, the commitment and risk involved in attending various cinematographic events as well as the participants’ use of digital media to watch films.

On the whole, FIFAK attendees describe having a real passion for cinema. Most respondents say they attended other cinematographic or cultural events – the Carthage Film Festival, the Festival of European Film, Doc à Tunis, the Human Rights Film Festival etc. This is particularly the case for older participants. Even though three quarters of the young male respondents reported having attended another festival during the year, this was not the venue where they had seen the films they reported having seen. Unfortunately, in this early stage of our research we were not able to establish exactly what constitutes attendance at such a festival, what social interactions take place and which activities are most popular at such events. Furthermore, the number of young female respondents who reported having attended another festival is much smaller, in fact less than half, than the number of young male respondents who did so. Some of them explained that this is because they attend an educational institution in another country.

The venue for watching films differs between the generations. The older respondents, especially the women, more often report seeing films in the cinema, at a film society, on DVD or even on television. The younger respondents never mention film societies and only mention television half as frequently, relatively speaking, as the older respondents. On the other hand, three quarters of the younger respondents, male and female, report watching films on a computer, over the internet or via a streaming service in comparison with only one in four of the older respondents. However, watching films on a computer as a collective activity is much more common among the young male respondents than the young female respondents, twice as many of whom, according to our survey, watch films on their own.

In this regard, terms such as ‘watching on a computer’, ‘via the internet’, ‘by download’ or ‘via streaming’ are very often interchangeable and indicate access to free services. Pirating and illegal downloading are rarely mentioned, and when they are there is no reference to legal, economic or political, such as ‘resistance’, considerations and certainly not to moral ones (Lobato, 2007).

Conclusion

FIFAK is still an occasion for members of FTCA and their associates to gather together. Attendees meet at a variety of activities, all of which give the attendees the chance to reconfirm their passion for non-commercial and political film. The respondents meet with a shared outlook on cinema but the event in 2013 also gave them the chance to express publicly and collectively their opposition to the current government’s policy on cultural matters. By and large, all the respondents have the same understanding of film culture and its values. However, a respondent’s standpoint towards film and film is clearly influenced by their gender and their age. The young male respondents assert that they ‘live for the cinema’ while the young female respondents see film as a way to further their political education and thus widen their understanding of others.

The feelings of belonging and attachment to FTCA expressed by respondents show that the sessions dedicated to the different stages of film production are important to both young men’s and young women’s relationship with film-making activities. However, the ‘reserve’ of the latter can be attributed to their greater realism of their chances of taking part in a production. The different feelings experienced by the respondents of each gender are never discussed because neither the feeling of belonging to FTCA nor participation in FIFAK is construed in terms of gender nor gender dictated role.

The most notable characteristic of the relationship to FIFAK of the different audience groups is the discrepancy between the young men’s stated political values of film and their film-viewing habits which remain very oriented towards American films and entertainment films. In contrast, the young women view cinema as a means to access education and to political resistance. Their film-viewing habits are much more varied and include watching films for entertainment while their understanding and experience of film is based much more in European film and *films d’auteur* from the European new waves. Their understanding of film and of their personal film culture is also much closer to that of the preceding generation, who see film, above all, as an educational tool and are more directly interested in the issues raised by the films featuring postcolonial identity and geopolitical conflicts.

Young male respondents’ political engagement is expressed more through their affiliation to FIFAK, attendance at the festival and their role ‘in film’ than through the films they watch or are involved in making. This leads to an ambiguous relationship with FIFAK and with film: their enjoyment of FIFAK seems to be associated principally with their active and social participation in an event which allows them to reaffirm the value of that association. However these values include a tradition of political resistance to the government in power, a stance that is very far removed from the ideological standpoint of American entertainment productions they watch, which are

overwhelmingly much less valued by the other audience groups. We can only speculate on the reasons for this paradox.

The appeal of genre films, in particular comedy, among young male respondents may be examined in relation to a new trend in contemporary Tunisian cinema. Some recent Tunisian feature films strive to stay away from an international auteur cinema relying on social and political realism. Among the *auteur* film-makers representative of this new trend are Ibrahim Letaïef, who attempts to introduce the Italian-inspired comedy style in *Cinecittà* (2008) and *Hizz Ya Wizz* [Affreux, Cupides et Stupides!] (2013), and Nejib Belkadhi, *auteur* director of *VHS Kahloucha* (2006), an ambiguously very political, comic documentary, and of *Bastardo* (2013), even if none of these films are listed among their most preferred films by FIFAK participants. Be that as it may, we are a long way from the concept of a national film culture that is the expression of a political revolution.

In the course of this research we could (just) discern a very ambivalent attitude to Arab cinema, a genre which was valued mostly by the older generation of men and women participants and which was experienced most regularly by Tunisians who had access to festivals and urban cinemas. While Arabic is gaining ground among the younger generation, there is, for this generation, and especially for young men, a discrepancy between the importance given to national cinema in their stated values and their actual viewing of Tunisian and Arab films generally. There was no reference to Tahar Cheriaa's conception of decolonized cinema that owed much to Third Cinema and that could be spread through the development of an Arab film culture (Tahar Cheriaa was a founding figure of FTCC and Tunisian cinema).

More disturbing in the context of promoting a political conception of film is the lack of interest in the distribution of films presented at such a festival and then lost to view like so many other productions in the sea of audio-visual material and legal constraints. At no point was the question of the valorisation of the films that best encapsulate the principles of the FTCA ever broached. It is as if FIFAK is the occasion for the ritual but ephemeral reconfirmation of Tunisian film culture. Even if the young male participants see themselves as the spokespersons of this heritage, their film-viewing habits reveal a barely reconcilable conflict between these habits and the continued existence of the values they defend. On the other hand, the self-effacement of the young female participants, who are more articulate in their defence of other political, educational and revolutionary aspects, prevents them from asserting their ways of seeing film. In this respect, FIFAK 2013 could be considered the event where a relationship with film culture has become outdated except for the, mainly male, social interaction which it fosters within its community. Paradoxically, women were present in greater numbers at the 2014 event, at which the 50th anniversary of the festival was celebrated, with two women presidents, of the FTCA and the FTCC, and with a visible increase in the number of young female directors. This difference shows the variable nature of each event, as it draws selectively from its traditional values to express the current relationship of the festival to film-making.

Translated from the French by Mandy Hewett

Notes

1. See the bibliography in Iordanova and Rhyne (2009) as well as the regular updates by the Film Festival Research Network website: filmfestivalresearch.org/index.php/ffrn-bibliography.
2. See the Film Festival Research Network's bibliography dedicated to African film festivals.
3. The Film Festival Research Network bibliography lists a growing number of articles on festivals in the Western world: see filmfestivalresearch.org/index.php/ffrn-bibliography/8-reception-audiences-communities-and-cinephiles.

4. Several festival participants and members of the public sported the orange t-shirt of the Mouvement Culturel Révolutionnaire (MCR), a recently created movement in favour of new forms of popular culture and against the repeated attacks to which artists were subjected.
5. See also the paper 'Cinéphilie et Tiers Mondisme' (Cinephilia and the Third World) given by Morgan Corriou at the MENA seminar, held on 23 November 2013 at Paris III University.
6. In this interview with Morgan Corriou, Tahar Cheriaa refers to the issue of language and the initial resistance of ciné-club members towards Arabic language films. This was linked to the undervalued position of Egyptian film-making, the change from French to Arabic in discussions, as much as to the need to escape from the ideological framework offered in Western cinema.
7. We have not been able to obtain a full list of members for each club; it was therefore impossible to calculate the percentage of women. They were estimated around 20% by Naceur Sardi, film technician, director and press officer for FIFAK 2013.
8. We were only able to survey a limited number of young women and women from Kelibia. Very few of them visited the coffee shop; they were in part intimidated; and many of them did not want to voice their views in French. This led us to exclude the Kelibian public from this analysis.
9. During our research we were in regular contact with members of the Tunisian film industry, of the FTCC and of the FTCA, and also met up with them at other events such as the Journées Cinématographiques de Carthage. This familiarity with the culture of the different groups allowed us to hold numerous conversations with the respondents.
10. For example, one 24-year-old female respondent reported that the milestones in her relationship with cinema are 'shootings, sleepless nights of editing, overnight film projections, and so on'.
11. See Florence Martin's article in this volume.

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