

**FIAF CONGRESS****Tuesday April 9, 2019****Session 1: Geopolitical Considerations**

Socio-political Diversity of Film Archives: Transitions from the Past to the Future - ROUND TABLE moderated by Maral Mohsenin, with the participation of Iris Elezi (Central State's Film Archive of Albania), Rashad Qasimov (Azerbaijan State Film Fund) and Vladimir Angelov (Cinematheque of North Macedonia)

***INTRODUCTION (by Maral Mohsenin)***

Film archives were conceived in different contexts and to fulfill different missions. Each archive, according to its country, also lived through its own history, before evolving into its current shape. The conception, evolution and current identity and status of the archives is therefore closely related to its country's geo-political context. Yesterday, many presenters talked about the birth of archives, their missions, and their political context. Today, we would like to approach this from another angle.

In most countries, archives are, in one way or another, tied to their national-political framework: be it for the funding they receive, the definition of their missions, their collecting of national film heritage, or the role they play in the film culture of their country. For some, the national-political framework may be tighter, imposing more limits and bringing about more changes on the archive.

This round-table is an effort to put light on the function of national film archives in smaller countries with a considerable film culture, which have known more political hardship during their recent history – compared to Western film archives. They have been in situations that are, to say the least, complicated, and sometimes even extreme such as: change of political regime and political instability, economic crisis, independence and war. We would like to talk about how these archives started, in what framework they function, how they manage national film heritage and how their geo-political history affects their missions, structure and activities. At the level of archival routine activities, this phenomenon may be visible, for example, in the building of the collections: which films are being sought after and held in the archive, or in the choice of films that are being restored or digitized.

In this moment of “transition” in film archives, I think this would be a good idea to broaden the film archival rhetoric in order to include more the small-nation film archives and film heritage.

The first flame of a geo-political transition was ignited in 1995: when there was a discussion in the FIAF community on how the future of the organization and worldwide film archiving was going to be. This discussion covered subjects such as FIAF’s identity and its membership requirements. FIAF being created by a coalition of European and American film archives, it had remained quite Eurocentric for a long time, although archives from other regions were also accepted. That year, many archivists and FIAF members, such as Wolfgang Klaue, Hoos Blotkamp and Roger Smither were promoting a more open strategy for FIAF, with more focus on “other types” of film archives (geographically or thematically). This discussion was nurtured, on one hand, by the creation of newer film archives in the world, and on the other hand, by a new-born interest for “world cinemas” (Cinématographies étrangères), coming notably from the expansion of film festivals and transnational film cultures. World cinemas such as China and Iran had their first big retrospectives in the West during the 80s and 90s. The same goes for Azerbaijan, which had a retrospective in the Three-Continents Film Festival in Nantes in 1995, of musical comedies, from 1960s to 1980s.

Despite this promising debut, and a few initiatives that followed, the film archival rhetoric has remained somehow still limited to only a few Western countries. There may be, from time to time, an interest for World Cinemas, in the form of a tiny retrospective or by undertaking the restoration of a declared world cinema masterpiece – which is, by the way, taken out of its socio-political and historical context, and is restored mostly, with very limited collaboration with the national film archive in charge of its preservation.

I hope that this roundtable will be an initiative to talk about the geo-politics of smaller-nation film archives, their historical evolution and their work.

We have the honor of having with us today, representatives of 3 FIAF archives:

- Mr. Vladimir Angelov from Cinematheque of Macedonia
- Ms. Iris Elezi from Central State’s Film Archive of Albania
- And Mr. Rashad Qasimov from Azerbaijan State Film Fund.

As Rashad was not feeling at ease to speak in English, and as Russian is not one of the official FIAF languages, I contacted the Embassy of Azerbaijan in Switzerland, and they were extremely helpful, so we have the chance to welcome Ms. Sara Abbasova, the 2<sup>nd</sup>

Secretary, in charge of cultural affairs of the Embassy, who has kindly accepted to assist us with translations.

A representative from the National Film Archive of Iran was also supposed to participate, but the same “geo-political” situation that we are talking about here prevented them to do so. Actually, between the time I invited them for the roundtable and now, something happened: the US withdrew from the Iran Nuclear Deal; this threw the country into a severe economic crisis. The NFAI is a national institution, part of the Ministry of Culture, although it was created as an independent “cinophile cinematheque” during the 1950s. As it’s the case in most countries, whenever there is a crisis, the cultural sector is of course the first to suffer from huge budget cuts and re-organizations. This is why they cannot be with us here today.

### ***THE QUESTIONS***

First question: a short presentation of these three film archives.

*In this part, the idea is to follow*

- *how and in which political situation they were conceived*
- *how they evolved*
- *how these national institutions are related to their respective governments... which means how they act within the political framework of their country.*

Second question: presentation of specific projects and international collaborations

- *Albania: augmenting access to Albanian films, by programming in festivals, cinematheques, etc. To know a Nation’s 60 years of cinema tradition thanks to its film archive.*
- *Macedonia: national funding for the digitization project and the choices made by them*
- *Azerbaijan: access to Azerbaijani films whose negative is not held by the Film fund*

Third question: the importance of national cinemas

*What does a national cinema represent for the image of a country in the bigger geo-political context? (their importance in the current geo-political situation) How is this landscape of national cinemas changing, and what is the role of film archives in this changing situation? How can the national cinema change the image of a country, especially for a smaller nation?*

Fourth question: Upcoming perspectives

*What they are planning for the future: expansion, new projects, new status.*

***SHORT CONCLUSION (by Maral Mohsenin):***

Today, but also yesterday, we have heard about different archives' work and histories, and how they plan their future. To wrap up, I would like to add a few words. I think we can all agree that we are past the debate of Lindgren vs. Langlois. Archives have different missions and identities – shaped by their national-political frameworks as well as their own histories and experiences. Not “one” strategy is the good one. As archives, we all have one goal, and that's to preserve the world's moving image heritage. Of whatever origin it may be. It is not possible to achieve this goal if we do not open up to different types of film archives, and consider their inclusion in our debates... Some archives may be left on the sidelines if we don't open up... their needs, but also their good work, may be forgotten. Some national cinemas may be lost. And it's the whole FIAF community that suffers from the exclusion of these archives, by not hearing their side of the story, not learning from their strengths and their best practices, and most importantly, by ignoring their national cinema.

The openness means discarding political oppositions and enhancing international collaborations with smaller-nation archives regarding their national heritage. Diversity should be an advantage, not an obstacle. The geo-political affinities, and language barriers should not limit the film archival rhetoric, because if they do, we, as archives, have failed in achieving our global goal of safeguarding the world's film heritage.