30th Écrans Noirs International Scientific Conference
Under the Scientific Direction of CERDOTOLA
Yaoundé, 24–25 November 2026

CALL FOR PAPERS

THEME

"Looking Back and Ahead on African Cinema, Our Arm of Meaning, Peace and Prosperity"

Scholarly Tribute to Bassek Ba Kobhio

1. Context and Rationale

From its inaugural edition in 1997 to its thirtieth edition in 2026, the Écrans Noirs Festival has built an enduring space for the visibility, circulation and critical discussion of African cinemas. Founded on the ambition to enable Africa to better produce, showcase and interpret its own images, the Festival has brought films closer to audiences, fostered encounters among creators, supported training in film and audiovisual professions, accompanied the emergence of new generations, and strengthened Yaoundé and Central Africa as a crossroads for cinema. The thirtieth edition offers a timely opportunity to revisit this trajectory, assess achievements, question shifts, and identify the conditions for a renewed institutional, artistic, professional, creative, aesthetic, economic and educational horizon.

This commemoration carries particular significance, as it follows the passing, on the 12th of May 2026, of Bassek Ba Kobhio, writer, filmmaker, producer, educator and founder of the Écrans Noirs Festival. His physical absence invites us to move from affective tribute toward intellectual, critical and forward-looking inquiry. His work spans several fields: literature, filmmaking, adaptation, production, training, cultural policy and institution-building. This body of work shows educators, builders, mediators and idealists confronted with the contradictions of power, memory, development and collective responsibility. The **30th Écrans Noirs International Scientific Conference (TEN-ISC) 2026**, under the scientific direction of CERDOTOLA (International centre for Research and Documentation on African Traditions and Languages), will examine this multifaceted trajectory, assess its legacy and consider how this legacy can best be carried forward.

2. General Problematic

The topic of the thirtieth Festival edition, "**Cinema, Our Arm for Peace**," expanded for the scholarly tribute under the TEN-ISC 2026 into the theme "**Cinema, Our Arm for Peace, Meaning and Prosperity in Africa**" rests on a particularly productive metaphor. Here, the arm or "weapon" translates the symbolic, narrative, educational and economic power of images. Cinema can counter narratives of hatred, restore dignity to wounded memories, bring marginalised experiences into view, foster mutual recognition and create a shared language among communities separated by history, borders, languages or conflict. It can also stimulate value chains, develop skills, create jobs, strengthen the attractiveness of territories, expand the circulation of films and place cultural industries at the heart of African development strategies.

Yet fulfilling this promise depends on several conditions: freedom of thought and creation; adequate infrastructure; innovative, diversified and sustainable financing able to grow in scale and impact; economic viability; professional training; coherent public policies; rights protection; accessible distribution and exhibition; archive preservation; and audience development. TEN-ISC 2026 will therefore ask a guiding question: in light of the trajectory and promise of **Écrans noirs**, under what conditions can African cinema turn its representational power into a capacity for peacebuilding, social cohesion, emancipation and shared prosperity while safeguarding creators' autonomy and the diversity of imaginaries? This question will bring ambition into dialogue with the realities of production, distribution, exhibition, reception and transmission through a dual retrospective and prospective lens, organised around two main strands: the Festival and its institutional work on the one hand, and the founder's multiple forms of creativity on the other.

3. A Dual Scholarly Focus

3.1. Thirty Years of Écrans Noirs in the Service of Peace and Prosperity: History, Impact and Futures

The first strand of the conference will examine Écrans Noirs as an African cultural institution. It will trace key stages in its development, its programming choices, partnerships, training schemes, and relationships with film professionals, public authorities, the media and audiences. Contributions may analyse the Festival's role in structuring a film ecosystem in Central Africa, recognising talent, enabling the transnational circulation of films and cultivating a critical film culture. They may also examine the vulnerabilities encountered and the adaptation efforts required in response to digital platforms, changing audience practices, new business models, artificial intelligence, archival challenges and the renewal of audiences. Proposals may further consider ways to expand and strengthen the initiative in the face of ongoing transformations, including through complementary institutions devoted to academic and practice-based research, training and professionalisation, as part of both tribute, assessment and future planning.

3.2. Bassek Ba Kobhio: Works, Thought and Legacy

The second strand will be devoted to the full body of works by Bassek Ba Kobhio. Proposals may focus on, or bring into dialogue, his literary writings, films, adaptations, production activities, training initiatives, as well as his institutional and even philosophical engagement and committment. They may explore the continuities between the novelist and the filmmaker, the forms of social pedagogy running through his work, the critique of colonial legacies, the staging of power relations, and his treatment of community, education, memory, otherness and development as sites of sense-making, peacebuilding, and search for collective prosperity. The aim is to both deepen and move beyond commemorative praise, in order to build a rigorous scholarly reception open to aesthetic, historical, sociological, philosophical, economic, decolonial, comparative, intermedial and other approaches.

4. Lines of Inquiry

Contributions and papers should address, without being limited to, the following sub-themes:

- Écrans Noirs: thirty years of programming, mediation, training and networking across African cinemas;
- The Écrans Noirs Festival as a public arena for cultural diplomacy, social cohesion, the circulation of imaginaries and the mobilisation of collective intelligence;

- Cinema as a resource for violence prevention, conflict resolution, justice and reconciliation, historical truth and rehabilitation, memorialisation and the healing of traumatic memory, artistic and cultural education, diversity, peace education, etc.;
- Film industries, creative employment, financing, co-production, distribution, film and other infrastructures, technological challenges, platforms and digital sovereignty, etc.;
- Film reception, audience development, film criticism, youth and transmission;
- Bassek Ba Kobhio's writings, films and adaptations: aesthetics, characters, ideologies, languages and territories, intentions and achievements, and future perspectives;
- Bassek Ba Kobhio as an institution-builder: Écrans Noirs, production, publishing, training and professionalisation;
- Archives, heritage preservation, restoration, accessibility and transmission of the Festival and the broader legacy of Bassek Ba Kobhio.

5. Objectives of TEN-ISC 2026

The 30th Écrans Noirs International Scientific Conference 2026 will serve two complementary purposes. First, it will provide a forum for critically assessing the Festival after thirty years, documenting the contribution of Écrans Noirs, preserving its memory and formulating proposals for its next cycle. Second, it will offer a scholarly framework for honoring Bassek Ba Kobhio through the analysis of his creative work, thought and cultural action. The expected contributions will help build interpretive archives, renew knowledge of African cinema and identify avenues for action linking creation, peace, the cultural economy, education and narrative sovereignty.

By bringing together scholars, filmmakers, professionals, critics, public officials, cultural actors, students and wider audiences, the conference will turn the thirtieth edition into a moment of active remembrance, rigorous debate and collective foresight in support of shared African futures. Contributions from practitioners, professionals, institutional stakeholders, creators, critics and academics will be brought together in a collective scholarly publication by CERDOTOLA Editions: the ***Proceedings of the 30th Écrans Noirs International Scientific Conference***.

6. Proposals submission information

Proposals should be sent simultaneously to the following email addresses: colloque@ecransnoirs.org, contact@cerdotola.org, and biem@post.harvard.edu no later than the 15th of November 2026. Each proposal should include the title of the paper, the name(s) of the author(s), the professional status and institutional affiliation, and a 500-word abstract setting out the issue addressed; the theoretical or methodological tools and orientations; the scholarly, academic or practice-based emphasis; the intended contribution to the debates; and the proposal's positioning in terms of retrospective assessment and future outlook regarding Écrans Noirs, the work of Bassek Ba Kobhio, or any other aspect relevant to the conference's overall theme, rationale and stated lines of inquiry. APA (7th edition) is the recommended referencing style and bibliography for scholarly contributions.