

Africa as a Creative Partner: Co-Productions and Cultural Exchange in Film

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In a context of globalization, contemporary cinema has become not only a recreation for a mass audience but a landscape of transnational flows, international labor and cultural exchange. However, when a conversation turns to a big-screen industry, it is always the USA, which, obviously, comes to our mind first.

Africa has never been a driving force in the global film industry. We can hardly remember a single movie, created by Africa. at least half of it. Some interesting facts about cinematography in Africa were revealed. It is not only about the exoticized backdrop in American iconic movies such as *Casablanca* (1942), it is about being a partner.

In the early history of global cinema, Africa was constructed through a colonial visual regime that branded the continent as exotic, undeveloped, and fundamentally “other”. The tendency is evident in films such as *Tarzan the Ape Man* (1932) and *King Solomon’s Mines* (1950), where Africa functions primarily as an adventurous backdrop, stripped of cultural specificity and local outlook. Within this paradigm, Africa is spoken about rather than speaking. There is no focus on authorship and authentic cultural exchange.

The late 20th and the early 21st centuries mark a decisive shift toward African authorship, driven by the expansion of regional film industries such as Nollywood, Nigeria (emerging in the 1990s), along with established cinematic traditions in Senegal (since the 1960s) and South Africa (since 1994). African filmmakers have thus begun to reclaim the means of cinematic production, repositioning themselves as agents rather than objects of storytelling. A compelling example is Abderrahmane Sissako’s *Timbuktu* (2014), which delivers a message and contextually grounded portrayal of life under jihadist occupation in Mali.

In 1969 Algeria hosted an event: Regional Culture Festival, alongside the World Festivals of Youth and Students in Moscow (1957) and Havana (1978), as well as the international exhibitions in Brussels (1958) and Montreal (1967), at which films were presented as a pioneering art form.

Co-production is defined as a collaborative organisation involving shared financing, multinational crew and worldwide distribution networks. For African filmmakers, such co-production offers significant advantages, including access to broader commercial, increased financial and technical resources and also boosted international visibility for tales with a strong local foundation. However, these collaborations are structured by asymmetrical power where Western sources of financial support and organizational structures prevail over regional contribution. As a result, co-productions entail compromises in a creative freedom, where the story’s structure, rhythm, or central message is adjusted to appeal to international film festivals or Western audiences. The production of *Atlantics* (2019), a film by Mati Diop co-financed by Senegal, France, and Belgium, demonstrates this phenomenon. The movie, which magnifies African viewpoints and gains international recognition, is concurrently implemented in European production frameworks.

Cultural exchange within global cinema operates as a mutual and dynamic process rather than a one-way flow of influence. While African filmmaking has historically been shaped by global production systems, aesthetic standards, and supply network, it concurrently follows a

growing influence on global cinematic language. This dual directional exchange is particularly evident in the emergence of hybrid storytelling forms that summarize native traditions with transnational cinematic techniques. For instance, *Yeelen* (1987) by Souleymane Cissé illustrates Bambara cosmology and oral myth while employing elements of arthouse cinema, producing a narrative structure that resists Western models. Similarly, *This Is Not a Burial, It's a Resurrection* (2019) by Lemohang Jeremiah Mosese integrates poetic visual composition, slow cinema aesthetics, and oral storytelling rhythms, creating a clearly hybrid cinematic language.

These movies demonstrate that hybrid storytelling is not about copying, but rather about blending. It's a process where local ways of knowing and understanding the world come together with universal narrative structures. Cultural exchange, therefore, becomes a process of aesthetic dialogue through which African filmmakers actively reshape the agreements and possibilities of contemporary global cinema.

Africa's role in universal cinematography has been transforming from a passive recipient of representation to an active and creative powerhouse, signifying a meaningful turning point. This development is a consequence of evolutionary authorship, industrial progress, and the increasing value placed on culturally authentic stories. As soon as, co-productions have opened doors to expanded audiences and markets, they also have highlighted the persistent differences that complicate partnership. Global cinema's future will be efficient in consequences of adoption of more equitable and collaborative storytelling models that allow for the complete expression of diverse cinematic voices.

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