

<b>Institution:</b> University of Glasgow (UofG)		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 34 Communications, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Promoting African cinema and cultures in the UK and beyond		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2013–2019		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Lizelle Bisschoff	Senior Lecturer in Theatre, Film & Television Studies	2012–present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> August 2013–31 <sup>st</sup> December 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>		
<p>Africa in Motion (AiM) film festival was founded by Lizelle Bisschoff to counter lack of knowledge of African cinema and cultures in Scotland. Using her subsequent research identifying 'lost' African films unknown in Europe, since 2013 Bisschoff has expanded audiences in Scotland and London, reaching 35,000 people between 2014–2020, and enhancing their understanding of African cultures. Festivals and cinemas in Australia, Africa and the US now screen films promoted through AiM, and Bisschoff is training aspiring African film curators to put on film events in Africa. Bisschoff's research, recognising films by marginalised African women directors, has raised their profile in the UK and beyond and, finally, AiM has supported UK film organisations to enact diversity policies, especially attracting minority ethnic audiences who are often difficult to engage.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>		
<p>The body of research builds on Bisschoff's doctoral thesis, which found that although African cinema has been hugely marginalised in filmgoing culture in the UK, film could be used to enhance cross-cultural understanding. This foundational insight has been further developed since Bisschoff's original appointment as a research fellow at UofG in 2012. This development is in two main areas: the recovery of 'lost' African films, and highlighting the work of female directors. Being concerned with countering cultural marginalisation, the research contributes significantly to discussions around decolonisation and equalities, diversity and inclusivity (EDI) in both academic and public spheres. It is conducted through numerous field trips to African countries, attendance at African film festivals, interviews with African filmmakers, and visits to film archives.</p> <p>Bisschoff's archival research on the <i>Africa's Lost Classics</i> project in collaboration with Professor David Murphy, then of University of Stirling, culminated in an edited volume [3.4]. This work covered over 30 classic African films – largely unknown, marginalised or forgotten – and revealed many parallel filmmaking pioneers working contemporaneously with canonised filmmakers such as Egyptian director Youssef Chahine and Senegalese director Ousmane Sembene. The research revealed the geographical range and historical depth of African cinema, offering more complex genealogies and revised histories of African cinema. The volume presents an activist intervention intended to urge scholars, curators and film festival organisers to look beyond the most obvious and available histories of African cinema. For example, it uncovers the work of early African animators, including Nigerien director Moustapha Alassane.</p>		

Alassane made his first film before Ousmane Sembene (who became known as the ‘father of African cinema’) directed his first film, thus challenging accepted genealogies of African cinema. Some of the *Lost Classics* project’s most significant discoveries are the work of female African directors, perennially disregarded within canonised film histories that favour Euro-American male directors. Bisschoff’s research, including as PI on the follow-on AHRC-funded *Lost Classics* project with co-I Stefanie Van De Peer of Queen Margaret University, on women in African cinema (historiographies of female African directors and analyses of the representations of African women on-screen) is extensive. She has published widely on the topic [e.g. 3.2, 3.3, 3.6], and has also contributed to a report on the roles of African women in the creative industries, commissioned by UNESCO [3.5]. This research shows how the ‘canon’ systematically oppresses and suppresses the histories of African women and their contributions to historiography; something that is also addressed in films by African women. History has written African women out of politically, culturally and socially significant moments in the past, even though female directors reveal in their films that important freedom fighters, entrepreneurs and cultural instigators in Africa were very often female. This ongoing strand of research has been consolidated in a monograph (co-authored with Stefanie Van de Peer) [3.1], covering the work of, for example, the first female-directed Tunisian documentary, *Fatma 75* by Selma Baccar; and many recent films by a growing number of female directors from all over the continent.

Significantly, *Africa’s Lost Classics* restored three classic women’s films which have generated ongoing screening requests for the films in the UK and internationally. This work is not only about uncovering films, but about how they help us rethink dominant patriarchal histories and Western-centric, nationalist and postcolonial master narratives that often ignore the contributions and roles of women. *Fatma 75*, for example, is a feminist film essay made in 1976 – at the height of second-wave feminism in the Western world – which offers new cultural insights into the development of feminist theory in the Arab and ‘third’ world, revealing that non-Western women made hugely important, and under-appreciated, contributions to the advancement of women’s rights. This research is therefore significant both in highlighting marginalised film industries, and, through sociological and contextual analyses of the films, enhancing understandings of African cultures through film.

### 3. References to the research

- 3.1 Bisschoff, L. and Van de Peer. (2019) [Women in African Cinema: Film Beyond the Body Politic](#). Routledge. ISBN 9780415425667. [available on request from HEI]
- 3.2 Bisschoff, L. (2020) [“African cyborgs: Females and feminists in African science fiction film.”](#) In: *Interventions: The International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*. 22(5), pp.606–623. (doi: [10.1080/1369801X.2019.1659155](https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2019.1659155)).
- 3.3 Van De Peer, S., Bisschoff, L. and Atkinson, J. (2018) [“Africa in Motion: Busting the canon since 2006.”](#) In: *MAI: Feminism and Visual Culture, Issue 2, 21* (Autumn 2018).
- 3.4 Bisschoff, L. and Murphy, D. (Eds.) (2014) [Africa’s Lost Classics: New Histories of African Cinema](#). Series: Moving image. Legenda and Maney Publishing. ISBN 9781907975516. [available on request from HEI]
- 3.5 Bisschoff, L. (2014) [“Gender equality, women and African film.”](#) Report. In: [2014 UNESCO Report on Gender Equality and Culture \(PDF see pp97–107\)](#).
- 3.6 Bisschoff, L. (2012) [“The emergence of women’s filmmaking in sub-Saharan Africa: From pioneering figures to contemporary directors.”](#) *Journal of African Cinemas*, 4(2), pp. 157–173. (doi:10.1386/jac.4.2.157 1).

**Quality:** The key publications are peer-reviewed, except for 3.5 which was a report to funder UNESCO. *Africa's Lost Classics* 2017–2018 was funded by an AHRC Follow-on Funding for Impact and Engagement grant (Bisschoff as PI), and the body of work is expected to meet or exceed the 2\* threshold.

#### 4. Details of the impact

There have historically been low levels of understanding in the UK and Europe of the variety of African cultures, and inequalities persist for BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) people. Seeing cinema as a means to counter problems such as social inequality, marginalisation, and lack of intercultural understanding, Dr Bisschoff founded the Africa in Motion (AiM) film festival in Scotland in 2006. This case study details the impacts of her subsequent research, generated through her ongoing leadership of AiM.

##### **Using AiM to showcase marginalised African films and filmmakers to diverse audiences**

The AiM Film Festival consistently attracts diverse audiences across Scotland, and over 5,000 people yearly [5.1]. Between 2014–2019, the festival drew ~35,000 people to its events, including a much higher proportion of BAME people than the 4% national average (c.29% in 2016 and 26% in 2018 [5.2]). In 2018, 64% of audiences were female, 31% male, and 5% other; 64% were aged between 20-34. Film Hub's Scotland Manager commented: '*[AiM] introduces new filmmaking voices and significantly broadens the audience's engagement and understanding of African cinema. The festival brings vital diversity to on-screen representations and to audiences*' [5.2].

AiM has regularly introduced audiences to films about marginalised, misremembered or misrepresented women. This is well illustrated by the thoughtful audience responses to the AiM showing of a 2017 film about Winnie Mandela: '*I've always had issues with the way Winnie Mandela has been negatively portrayed in [South African] and international media ... Her story is rarely given proper context. I have never seen such a fair reflection of Winnie Mandela and the role she played*' [5.2].

As part of the *Africa's Lost Classics* project and organised through AiM, 20 'lost' African films were screened in 35 events across the UK in October–November 2017. The featured films had disappeared from public consciousness, often because only a single master existed, or from never having been subtitled in English and therefore remaining unseen by Anglophone audiences. Three were classic female-directed films from Zimbabwe, Tunisia and Senegal respectively, restored, digitised and subtitled for UK audiences for the first time, including the first Tunisian documentary feature film directed by a woman (Selma Baccar). These 'lost classics' [3.4] attracted interest from other film festivals and a great deal of press coverage. Filmmaker Mark Cousins wrote in the British Film Institute's official magazine, *Sight & Sound* (November 2017): '*for decades I and many others have been angry at the amnesia about African cinema. I've sometimes called it racism by omission. Reading the Africa's Lost Classics list I felt less anger than relief... It'll be a long time before African directors achieve parity of recognition, support and esteem, but what a lot can be achieved by [UofG] researchers*' [5.3].

In July 2018, AiM partnered with the Ladima Foundation at the Zanzibar International Film Festival to screen some of the rediscovered African classics. The Foundation's Founder/Director commented that this '*most certainly had a significant impact on the event*', and stimulated a great deal of discussion about the lack of recognition of female African directors [5.4]. Since their

debut in 2017, the *Lost Classics* films have been screened at film festivals and cinemas around the world, including in Tanzania, Morocco, South Africa, the US and Australia. Bisschoff's work has therefore influenced film selections, raised the profile of African films by women directors, and helped to introduce new films and a new awareness of African film and culture to audiences in these countries.

### **Impacts on the UK and African film industries**

By shining an unprecedented light on African cinema in the UK and elsewhere, Dr Bisschoff's work has supported cultural organisations to reach people from minority ethnic communities. The programme co-ordinator of the Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow, commented that AiM has for years been *'helping us connect more broadly with the African diaspora both here in Scotland and further afield'*. The AiM project officer for Creative Scotland stated: *'[AiM] offers a year-round programme to engage audiences from BAME communities in programming, watching and discussing films. It also creates volunteering opportunities for people from BAME, and non-BAME, communities.'* [5.5] AiM has thus supported the efforts of creative organisations in the UK to improve equality, diversity and inclusion. As female South African filmmaker Firdoze Bulbulia commented in 2018, AiM *'manages to bring innovation, excitement, cross media platforms and participatory events across many barriers of race, class, culture, age...'* [quoted in 2018 report, 5.1].

In 2016, the British Film Institute conducted a nationwide survey across their Film Audience Network [5.6]. Of 172 participating film hubs, cinemas and venues, AiM ranked highest in responses stating the organisation:

- *'shows films that broaden my horizons'* (62% strongly agree)
- *'shows films that enhance my understanding of the world'* (54% strongly agree)
- *'offers unique film events/screenings I couldn't access anywhere else'* (70% strongly agree).

Several African filmmakers have attended AiM, and the benefits of AiM are also being delivered directly to African filmmakers through Bisschoff's current GCRF project which has trained 12 aspiring film curators from four East African countries through a workshop in Kigali, Rwanda, in January 2019. Some are now using this knowledge to implement African film events in their respective countries. The founder of the Kwetu Film Institute, Kigali [5.7], described the work as a *'unique and special program that had inspired our institute to continue on this path of film sharing or curating'* adding that *'with the reaction we received' the 'need to have this continued'* was clear.

### **Educational impacts: Educational workshops and resources**

Bisschoff's work has led to educational resources being used in 60 schools in Scotland and London. The *Lost Classics* project collaborated with educational support organisation Into Film [5.9] and London's Royal African Society to develop bespoke resources aligned to the national curriculum. Screenings and workshops held in schools were well-received, and one teacher commented: *'all participants said they learned something and everyone was in agreement that being able to access authentic African film gave them [...] a better understanding'* [5.8]. Animating Africa was launched in September 2018, and Into Film commented that working with AiM *'resulted in us producing a brilliant resource that was able to showcase and celebrate animation talent from across the African continent...'* [5.9].

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

- 5.1 2013–2019 Annual Reports, [Combined PDF, also available at [Africa in Motion website](#)] Contains summaries of survey results and selections of audience feedback.
- 5.2 Testimonial letter, Film Hub Scotland Manager, corroborating the importance of AiM, and to Film Hub Scotland, as a platform for African film and its contribution to diversity [PDF].
- 5.3 Article for British Film Institute analysing the cultural importance of Africa in Motion [PDF, also available at <https://www2.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/comment/africa-lost-classics-uk-tour-open-your-eyes>], corroborating the cultural significance of AiM.
- 5.4 Testimonial letter; feedback from Ladima Foundation, partner organisation for the *Lost Classics* project. [PDF], commenting on the importance of AiM including in highlighting Africa's women filmmakers and women's contributions to African film, and the impact on their organisation.
- 5.5 Testimonial letter, AiM Project Officer for Creative Scotland [PDF], corroborating the impact of AiM in engaging BAME communities as well creating employment and volunteering opportunities, as well as diversifying representations of Africa on screen.
- 5.6 Copy of results of audience survey by British Film Institute of audiences [Excel spreadsheet, exported to PDF], corroborating AiM's impact on audiences.
- 5.7 Testimonial letter, founder of the Kwetu Film Institute, Kigali [PDF], corroborating the impact of the curating programme in East Africa on their organisation as well as participants.
- 5.8 Testimonial letter, teacher at Larbert High School [PDF], corroborating the impact of Bisschoff and AiM on her teaching and on student learning.
- 5.9 Email, Learning Resource Manager at Into Film [PDF], detailing figures and commenting on the success of the collaboration with AiM on Animating Africa.