



**Higbee, Will, Flo Martin, and Jamal Bahmad.-  
*Moroccan Cinema Uncut: Decentered Voices,  
Transnational Perspectives* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh  
University Press, 2020), 278p.**

Moroccan Cinema is elusive, yet the academic endeavor is forever apposite. Researchers attempt to construe the Moroccan film textually, aesthetically, socio-culturally, discursively, etc. Valérie K. Orlando's *Screening Morocco* (2011) approaches Moroccan cinema thematically. Kevin Dwyer's *Beyond Casablanca* (2004) centers Muhammad A. Tazi's lived experience within filmmaking, funding, and exhibition. Sandra Gayle Carter's *What Moroccan Cinema?* (2009) historicizes Moroccan cinema and its production since independence. *Moroccan Cinema Uncut* (2020) encompasses and furthers the literature on Moroccan cinema via its transnational focus. One ingenious claim is implied throughout the book: Moroccan cinema is already transnational. The argument's value materializes further in the authors' transnational situatedness. Will Higbee is from England, Florence Martin from the U.S., and Jamal Bahmad from Morocco. The argument is legitimized since the authors have done extensive research on Maghrebian cinema.

Through articulating the institutionalized spaces of production, the alternative "from below" forms of production, then the domestic and international modes of distribution/exhibition, the authors claim transnationalism as a recurrent, dominant aspect of Moroccan cinema. The *cinéastes de passage* or diasporic filmmakers, the international co-productions, digital and global distributions, and international festivals for film exhibition are traced in length to pronounce the transnationalism of Moroccan cinema. The encompassing analysis of cities, productions, institutions, film schools, filmmakers, festivals, etc., furthers the existing scholarship and instills the authors' erudition. Hence, Moroccan cinema becomes *a priori* transnational through the authors' *a posteriori* scrutinization.

The scrutinization is done in three parts. The first centers on the formal spaces of cinematic production nationally and beyond. The authors articulate the history of the Centre Cinématographique Marocain (CCM) from its establishment in 1944 under French colonialism. CCM, after the Moroccan independence, became an institution of legitimizing a nationalist, collective visual identity. With the enthroning of Mohamed VI in 1999, the country entered a new phase of reforms. Ouarzazate has a strong presence in international movies, yet the city's infrastructures are lacking, cinema theatres are closed, and the local economy is fragile. Tangier is explored as a city of cinematic history beginning with the Lumière Brothers in 1897. Against its demise, the *cinéastes du nord* are cosmopolitans with novel ways of funding their filmmaking because of their diasporic status. Casablanca is a site of socio-economic equalities, diverse populations, and cultural disparities. In the second chapter, transnationalism is primordial in the directors' locatedness and co-productions even if their movies are considered Moroccan. European countries continue to be the

dominant co-producers because of their established film industry with an underlying pan-European discourse. Hence, most Moroccan producers and directors center on CCM's funds and private investors in Morocco, for they fear the co-producers to limit their cinematography. The authors argue for transnational collaboration to instill new perspectives and to expand collaborations beyond Europe towards the Maghreb, MENA, and the Sub-Saharan region. The *cinéastes de passage* feature three themes: return narratives in search for "roots," the disinterest in the Moroccan "roots," and awareness of Moroccan "roots" and diasporic "routes." The authors describe the latter as 'accented' filmmakers because they are in constant negotiation with the host and homeland which reflects in their projects.

The second part shifts towards the under-represented Moroccan filmmakers, film schools, and networks of production. Since the 2000s, ISMAC, a public film school, and ESAV, a private film school, present the opportunity to emerging filmmakers to collaborate, network, and target funding. Sahara Lab is an initiative that is already transnationally contextualized in the political tension on Western Sahara although its founders attempted not to politicize it. As a form of soft power, the Sahara Lab voices the under-represented to represent their Saharan lived experience. Hicham Lasri is a filmmaker who denies categorizations and isms; his use of YouTube, youth sub-cultures, and global cultures break away from traditional filmmaking, especially since his experimental movies do not always rely on CCM funds. The unconventional, yet critical inquiry of Moroccan culture through his films and web-series establishes Lasri as a prolific filmmaker. Nadir Bouhmouch's guerilla filmmaking refuses the commercial film industry. Through the 20<sup>th</sup> February Movement, Guerilla Cinema became dominant because it focuses on social and environmental issues against the dominant state discourse. The fourth chapter focuses on the diverse voices within Moroccan Cinema. Amazigh Cinema, born in the 1990s, is an adequate example of a short yet rich history. The Amazigh films are dominantly set in rural areas which evoke nostalgia for the simple village life. The authors refer to this cinema as Soussywood because of its continuous visibility in national festivals and its consideration as a dominant branch of Moroccan Cinema. Women's cinema has seen a significant rise since the 2000s. This new wave of women directors shares themes of social inequality and taboos. They have been able to move beyond the CCM's policies while adhering to them. The authors claim that this relationship with the establishment is not one of resistance, but of dialogue situated in their diaspora.

The third part discusses the international and national networks of distribution and exhibition. The National Film Festival (FNF) has incorporated the new generation of diasporic filmmakers to establish Morocco as a modern and diverse country. Despite the international attempted visibility of Moroccan films in festivals, Moroccan cinema is in a crisis. Piracy allows movies to cross the borders and exemplifies the failure of the national film industry to respond to the globalized and digital age. Piracy, then, might be a crisis for the CCM, but it is blessing for the large Moroccan populace. The demise of Moroccan cinema is not only in piracy but also distribution and exhibition because there is no efficient marketing strategy. The Cinémathèque de Tanger, as an innovative film theatre, promotes Moroccan cinema to a cosmopolitan audience. Its initiatives bring the audience closer through

different activities that approach the youth in and outside the area. In the sixth chapter, certain films are repeated throughout these festivals while the new films gain little international fame. Although the *cinéastes de passage* seem to have gained entry into these dominant European festivals, not all filmmakers could be featured in them. International film festivals in the Gulf are vulnerable since their purpose is not the flourishing of cinematic culture. African film festivals have a more subtle vision dedicated to cinematic culture. Thus, throughout the 1960s until now, African film festivals' encouragement of auteur-based films adds to the value of these festivals even if the visibility is limited. The last chapter argues that international distribution, as the most important aspect of cinema production, influences the success or failure at the box office. Co-productions have been a direct, easy means to distribute internationally through co-producers. The difficulty lies in the scarcity of Moroccan sales agents and Moroccan distributors' inability to distribute abroad. Hence, the accented Moroccan filmmakers have better chances for visibility because of their contacts with foreign sales agents and international film festivals. For instance, Nabil Ayouch's *Much Loved* (2015), which was banned in Morocco, has been widely distributed in Europe. Digital disruption has changed the distribution process. Certain Moroccan filmmakers are using the internet to promote their work to much popularity. The authors propose to distribute Moroccan cinema through a niche VOD platform for visibility.

*Moroccan Cinema Uncut* establishes a valuable route of literature in Moroccan cinema. Through the three parts, the reader attains insight unto the intricacies of Moroccan film co-production processes. Yet, the book might seem to have two minute minuses. Firstly, the sub-sections abruptly start and end; that is, when a sub-section's subject matter is being scrutinized, a sub-section begins to discuss another subject matter. This might appear as incoherent shifts from festivals, filmmakers, then to production which could avert the reader's attention. Secondly, although the authors' VOD platforms analysis proves valuable, the perception of cinema among the general youth seems to be dismissed. Moroccan YouTube, for instance, is filled with short films directed by unprofessional, unskilled directors. The latter amass substantial following and viewership that might exceed that of the skilled, renowned Moroccan directors. These short films often plagiarize plots from other international YouTubers and adapt them to the Moroccan context.

Yet, because *Moroccan Cinema Uncut* has a clear line of thought and centered on one claim, these aforementioned two weaknesses of the book are, in truth, its strengths. The introduction of the book, especially the last four paragraphs, traces the coherent itinerary of each part. Also, the sub-sections are discussed with the main idea of the chapter; then, in turn, the chapters' main points constitute the part's claim. If one wishes to read a section or a chapter without the rest, the book is structured to allow this accessibility without a loss of coherence. The seeming abruptness of sub-sections is a shift from tautology to conciseness. Therefore, the book's tidiness has furthered its value and persuasive endeavor. The dismissal of YouTube's short films and unskilled directors is justified because they do not belong to Moroccan cinema, the subject matter of the book. If this new digital phenomenon was discussed in the book, it would have been a limitation since their cinematic process is entirely

different. Also, the bibliography of the book is a fecund use of almost the entire literature on Moroccan cinema; the theoretical and the practical merge to materialize transnationalism. In the end, an encompassing list of films is presented to the readers for further immersion in Moroccan cinema.

The book's persuasive prowess lies in the tone of the authors. That is, throughout the book, the authors have maintained an impersonal, academic tone which furthers the book's authority. The latter encourages readers to continue reading within and without the book. Since the book has three authors, the personal, informal tone could have restrained the book to an opinionated reflection on Moroccan cinema, yet the conflux of the three voices fosters an in-depth, academic inquiry. The latter fits the academic audience as well as the subject matter to which it is dedicated. This encourages the reader, especially the Moroccan, to know, watch, and read more about Moroccan cinema. Accordingly, the book's great caliber reflects not only in what is written but also in how it is written.

*Moroccan Cinema Uncut* is a study of great significance, peculiarly since it shifts from the national to the transnational. To this end, the authors analyze the cinematic process in its entirety. The structure, tone, argumentation, and analysis of the book further its importance within the film and Maghrebian studies. The authors' claim engages in valuable dialogue with the previous literature on Moroccan cinema and encourages further research on the transnationality of Maghrebian and African cinema. The layperson and the avid readers of cinema would find value in the book because of its great academic caliber. Hence, the authors have successfully undergone this academic endeavor to articulate the importance of the transnational processes of Moroccan cinema.

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