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CULTURE

Africa Film Festival 2019: Migration and citizenship take center stage

Africans born and raised in Europe often go through great difficulties to acquire citizenship. Several of the features shown at the African Film Festival in Cologne, Germany, highlighted this issue.



"I am sorting out my paperwork. That is why my residence card has expired," a baffled Brahim tells a police officer who has just arrested him. But the officer answers, "You are illegal, don't move, stay right there."

The fate of many Africans born and raised in Europe is told through the experience of Brahim in the short feature *Timoura* (Territories). The film, directed by Azedine Kasri, was shown at the 17th Africa Film Festival in Cologne, one of 75 features, documentaries, animations and short films shown in the German city.

Timoura tells the story of car mechanic Brahim, who was born to Algerian parents in France and raised there. Brahim has lost touch with his Algerian heritage. But when the police tell him he is living in France illegally it sets him on a path to rediscover his Algerian identity. Migration, citizenship, identity and fundamentalism were prominent themes at this year's festival. The themes were explored by a number of films using the story of Africans born and raised in Europe like Brahim who, despite living all their lives in Europe, are still not European enough in the eyes of their fellow citizens.



DW 77 Percent Wanjiku Mwaura discussed with filmmakers how they portray identity in their films.

Anti-immigrant movements in Europe

In June, [73 far-right lawmakers from the European Parliament formed a bloc](#) with the aim of curbing immigration and stopping the spread of Islam. In France, this agenda is being spearheaded by the far-right National Rally party. The frustration of the people targeted by the party is expressed by Brahim in *Timoura* when he tells the police officer, "I was born and raised here, how can I be illegal?"

Under French law, children born in France of foreign parents must request French nationality when they reach adulthood and are not automatically granted citizenship.

It comes as no surprise that, increasingly, Africans are returning home. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) said it helped a record 92,000 people return to Africa voluntarily in 2016.

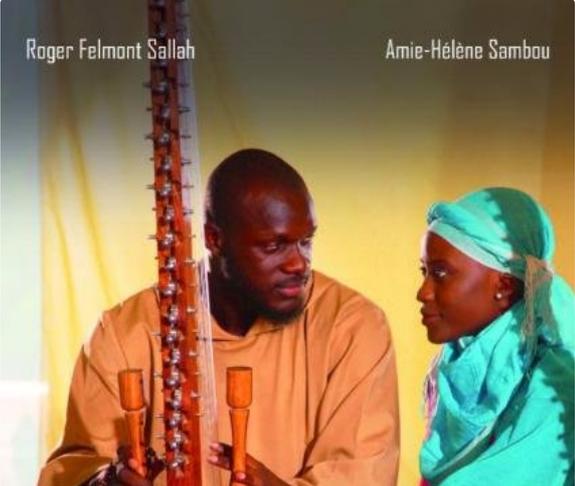
Director Coralie Majouga explores the issue of reverse migration in her film *Au Revoir Paris*. When their father moves back to Africa, Mathis and Antoine know it is only a matter of time before they have to go too. The two young boys, who are used to life in France, however dread the prospect.

"I hear in Africa the spiders are as big as your head. Kids have to sell peanuts to survive. Sometimes a blackout means people go to bed at 4 p.m., otherwise they trip over each other in the dark," one of them tells his friends.



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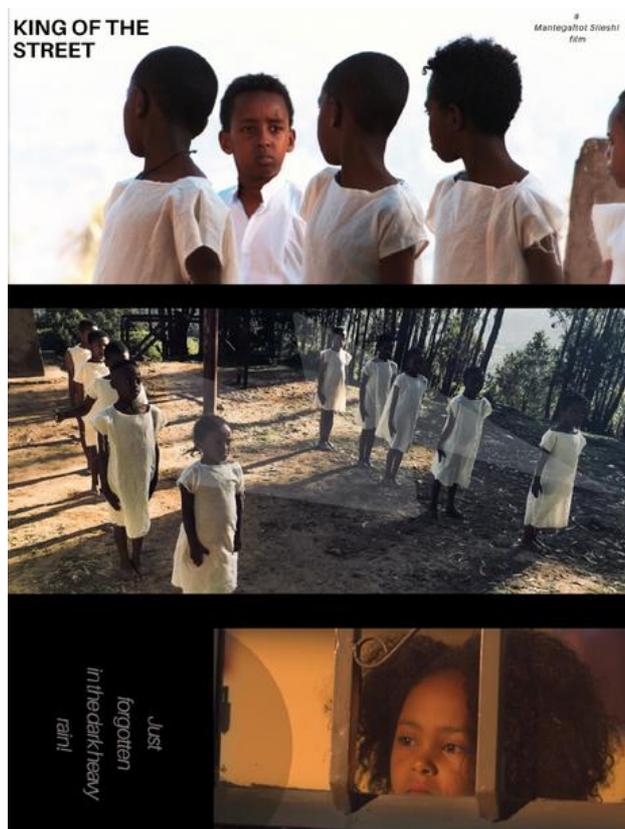
Au Revoir Paris addresses the subjects of migration and African stereotypes through the eyes of two young children who have internalized negative images of Africa. In the end, though, the two children realize that Africa is probably not all bad. "We will be okay," Antoine reassures his brother, holding him close.

Jacqueline Nsiah, program director for the Africa Film Society in Ghana, oversees an African film platform at the Goethe-Institut as project manager. International film festivals mean that "African films don't necessarily have to be seen only by Africans but can reach wider European and American audiences," she says.

The variety of films at the 17th edition of the festival reflects the growing diversity of film on Africa. "The only thing they have in common is that they are made by people who identify as African," says Nsiah.

Read more: [West Africa's film industry boom](#)

African diaspora dominant at the film festival



Mantegaftot Sileshi Siyoum's short film *King of the Street* focuses on neglected children in Ethiopia

A great number of films set in Africa are produced by Africans living abroad. Bonn-based DW journalist Mantegaftot Sileshi Siyoum, a contributor to this year's film festival, says there are reasons.

Filmmakers in his native Ethiopia get zero government support. "If I want to buy a RED camera, Ethiopian customs will consider this a luxury item and impose huge taxes," he says.

Siyoum says he is luckier than his counterparts in Ethiopia. "A lot of my friends who want to produce short movies have scripted it but cannot produce because they have no money." To make it worse, producers based in Ethiopia are only interested in films that have immediate commercial value, not short films or features.

Read more: [Making movies in Africa: Breaking conventions](#)

Siyoum's *King of the Street*, shot in his private time, is about a boy who lives on the street and wants to be treated like a king. The child is, however, ignored by society. The filmmaker sees a parallel with how filmmakers are treated in Ethiopia.

Independent filmmakers like Siyoum are left to grapple with marketing and distribution all by themselves. "When I participate in festivals, a lot of other festivals get in touch and ask if I want to show my film, so it helps with marketing," he says.

Wakaliwood: Uganda's action-packed movies

DW RECOMMENDS

Making movies in Africa: Breaking conventions

Together with the production companies Good Karma Fiction and One Fine Day Films plus several other partners, DW Akademie is supporting African filmmakers across the continent in bringing local stories to the screen. (05.06.2019)

West Africa's film industry boom

The Cameroon International Film Festival came to an end this weekend. In West Africa, interest in local films is booming and more and more young people are dreaming of an acting career. (01.05.2018)

African stories on movie screens worldwide

Moviegoers rarely get the chance to watch African films. But that may be changing as DW Akademie helps African filmmakers gain international exposure. One of the productions is even striving for an Oscar. (23.01.2018)

Booming African film industry in Berlinale talk spotlight

There are no African films competing at the Berlinale this year, but African filmmaking is going strong. A panel discussion co-hosted by DW Academy and the German Development Ministry discussed its promising future. (14.02.2019)

Far-right parties form new group in European Parliament

A group of 73 lawmakers from far-right groups across Europe wants to devolve power back to EU member states, curb immigration and stop the spread of Islam. Italy's League and France's National Rally are at its head. (14.06.2019)

50 years of African film at FESPACO

The first festival of African cinema took place in Burkina Faso in February 1969. The biennial pan-African FESPACO has been of the most important platforms for African filmmakers for 50 years. (25.02.2019)

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Wakaliwood: Uganda's action-packed movies

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Street Debate: How #ArewaMeToo shed light on sexual abuse in Nigeria

07.10.2019

In early 2019, activists broke the silence on sexual abuse in northern Nigeria. DW's youth program. The 77 Percent travelled to Abuja to discuss the issue and find out what role social media played.



Cameroon opposition leader Maurice Kamto, supporters freed from prison

05.10.2019

Thousands of supporters welcomed opposition leader Maurice Kamto as he left prison after nine months behind bars. In a surprise move, President Paul Biya had ordered a halt to military proceedings.



Tunisia election: A chance for political newcomers?

05.10.2019

Tunisians will elect a new parliament on Sunday, and all indications point to heavy losses for establishment parties. Young, independent candidates could reap the benefits, reports Sarah Mersch from Tunis.