

Introduction

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In many ways, the remit of this book revolves around an obvious proposition. The Spaghetti Western, as a transatlantic meeting place, is of necessity a cinematic category to be considered in international contexts, the hundreds of films which the category comprises documenting shifts in Italy's cultural outlook, as the reference points of American popular culture became ever more visible in the post-war years. Yet an Italo-American focus tells only a fraction of a story in which myriad strands of influence converged within, and continue to emanate from, this amorphous group of films. Spaghetti Western is a classification constantly in transit between cultures, genres and conceptions of taste, and its patterns of production, distribution and consumption display diverse acts of 'border crossing' and translation. By appraising a broad selection of films – from the internationally famed works of Sergio Leone to the cult cachet of Sergio Corbucci and the more obscure outputs of such directors as Giuseppe Colizzi and Ferdinando Baldi – this volume seeks to reconsider the cultural significance of the Italian Western, its position within global cinema and its continuing trends of reception and appropriation around the globe.

Scholarly volumes are always at pains to stress their timeliness in relation to trends within their broader disciplines, and in this respect this one is no different. What Mette Hjort has termed Film Studies' 'transnational turn' (2010: 13) highlights a desire to understand the ways in which cinema has offered a means to document the movement of peoples and identities across perceived cultural and spatial boundaries. A medium whose development through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has coincided with a marked historical fluctuation of inherited borders, cinema has been pertinently described by Tom Conley as 'the privileged geopolitical medium ... at once local and global' (2013: x). Thus, what might at first appear to be a merely modish application of 'trans-' prefixes – 'transnational', 'transcultural', 'translocal' – in fact signifies wider

historical approaches to cinematic output that scrutinise nationally-constituted discourses and thereby seek to understand the complexities of specific cultural-political moments. Even such a seemingly nationally-based discipline as Italian Film Studies increasingly embraces these concerns, recognising and interrogating the unstable, movable nature of the 'national' referent in a globalised era, and thereby questioning notions of a local industry talking to or for its nation state. The *Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies*, for example, introduces its inaugural edition with a mission statement that places Italian cinema 'within the realm of a post-national and trans-cultural debate ... transcending geo-ethnic land and sea borders and moving away from merely celebratory local cinematic experiences' (Laviosa 2013: 4).

Such undertakings are also characteristic of recent scholarship around the Western genre, whose well-worn tropes are increasingly studied for how they have been decoupled from their supposed roots in US culture. Multifarious strands of international Westerns are being repositioned within a polycentric cultural landscape (rather than one approaching the USA as the genre's 'centre'), revealing the Western to be a malleable space of cultural blending that has traversed national and political boundaries. Recent research into how the genre has obtained diverse meanings upon contact with particular historical, cultural and political contexts includes volumes edited by Miller and Van Riper (2013), Klein et al. (2012) and Higgins et al. (2015), along with special journal editions of *Frames* (Iverson 2013) and *Transformations* (Cooke et al. 2014). As Miller and Van Riper explain, issues central to the Western's dynamics such as imperialism, industrialisation, the relationship between individual and community, and the rights of indigenous peoples are not unique to the USA or to the late nineteenth century: 'They were, and are, part of the shared experience of all expansionist nations, and the international appeal of the Western rests, in part, on the potential for the historical experiences of one culture to resonate with audiences from another' (Miller and Van Riper 2013: xiv).

The approach summarised in the quotation above makes a valuable point about the genre's cross-cultural appeal, but still positions the Western genre as one that originated in the USA, to then be embraced and adapted by other cultures: 'a genre with its roots on the late-nineteenth-century American frontier ... relocated to other frontiers' (Miller and Van Riper 2013: xvi). Neil Campbell goes a step further down this transnational route, arguing that 'the West' breaks away from notions of 'rootedness' in the USA altogether, constantly renewing and transforming itself in various cultural forms. Campbell applies Mary Louise Pratt's notion of interlocking 'contact zones' to escape

approaches that identify a single point of generic origin: ‘To examine the West in the twenty-first century is to think of it as always already transnational, a more routed and complex rendition, a traveling concept whose meanings move between cultures, crossing, bridging, and intruding simultaneously’ (Campbell 2008: 4). Indeed, this line of enquiry is now flourishing, with recent scholarship following Campbell’s lead by examining how the Western narrative format and its various iconographies have been deployed for the negotiation of multifarious national and sub-cultural identities since before Hollywood’s golden age. To cite just a few notable examples, this includes studies of pre-World War I Westerns shot in the French Camargue region (Wessels 2014), socialist-era Hungarian Westerns (Simonyi 2013), Latin American ‘Third’ Westerns (Wessels 2015) and Australian outback Westerns (Cooke 2014, Wessels 2014). Such approaches allow for a broader picture to emerge: one of alternative trajectories from generic building blocks, which emerge from no single point of origin and thus result not in American Westerns and copies of (or reactions to) American Westerns, but instead countless global offshoots of a format that has by the whims of historical circumstance become known as a ‘Western’ due to the economic hegemony of the USA in the first half of the twentieth century.¹

By focusing on the globally-oriented origins and legacies of Westerns produced or co-produced by Italian studios, this volume seeks to engage with these evolving fields of enquiry, addressing routes of cultural, political and ethnic relocation that lie at the heart of the ‘Spaghetti’ Western phenomenon. By analysing these films’ processes of production, distribution and consumption as sites of dynamic cultural exchange wherein supposed boundaries become blurred, the book aims to widen the socio-historical debate around this much-loved *filone*.² It is for precisely this reason that this volume does not reject the USA as one of its contextual reference points (as do Miller and Van Riper, for example, whose remit is ‘Westerns produced outside the United States’ (2013: xvi)), since this would paradoxically serve to perpetuate a US-centric perspective by dividing the Western into ‘American’ and ‘others’. If, as Campbell argues, the Western was never firmly moored to US national experience in the first place, then the Spaghetti Westerns must be considered a constituent part of this continuum, rather than an anomalous reaction to a founding text. Though the Italian Western has become one of the most culturally visible variants to contemporary eyes, it is nevertheless one of many manifestations of an innately transcultural genre.

In my own past work on the Spaghetti Western (Fisher 2010, 2011), I approached the films as historical documents, following well-established fields of academic enquiry that analyse film’s role

in negotiating, questioning and shaping conceptions of the past and its relationship to the present.³ I specifically investigated the connection between the politicised strands of this *filone* that emerged in the second half of the 1960s and the contemporaneous ideological ferments that were erupting in Italian factories and university campuses, in response to global events in the various theatres of conflict at the height of the Cold War. The function of such films as *A Bullet for the General* (*Quién sabe?*, Damiano Damiani, 1966), *Face to Face* (*Faccia a faccia*, Sergio Sollima, 1967) and *Tepepa* (Giulio Petroni, 1969) was, for the purposes of my study, one of registering the immediate concerns, confusions and conflicts of the films' time and place. Yet, particularly given the extraordinarily long and influential reception tail of the Spaghetti Western, such an approach raises an important question: if this *filone* is indeed to be read as a document of 'time and place', which times and which places? The immediate concerns of 1960s and 1970s Italy are certainly pivotal to an understanding of these films' cultural-political significance, but so too are their varied antecedents and legacies in Italian neorealism, French comic books, Japanese *chanbara* films, Bollywood, Eastern Bloc film distribution and the contemporary cinema of Quentin Tarantino.⁴ It is to be hoped that, by examining these and other disparate contexts, this volume will go some way to enriching our comprehension of this broad vista.

This is by no means to say that scholarship on the Spaghetti Western has hitherto been manacled to the concerns of a narrowly Italian milieu: far from it. Dimitris Eleftheriotis influentially approached this *filone* as one that highlights 'the accelerated mobility of cultural products around the world and their increasing detachment from national contexts' (Eleftheriotis 2001: 98). Indeed, the various scholarly trends outlined above increasingly converge to throw light on the diverse contexts of the Spaghetti Western's transnational production histories, reception patterns and afterlives. David Martin-Jones's examination of *Django Kill... If You Live, Shoot!* (*Se sei vivo, spara!*, Giulio Questi, 1967), for example, considers how the film spoke to diverse shared experiences of the Cold War era, and thus offered 'open-ended transnational political resonances for different audiences around the world' (Martin-Jones 2011: 180). In a similar vein, Christopher Robé analyses the Spaghetti Western's politicised strands for how they provide an understanding of cultural flows between 'First' and 'Third' world markets (Robé 2014). Michelle Cho's study of *The Good, the Bad, the Weird* (*Chouñnom, Nappūñnom, Isanghannom*, Kim Jee-woon, 2008) adopts a more culturally-specific approach, by examining the film's merging of overt

quotations from Sergio Leone's 'Dollars' trilogy with equally explicit references to Manchurian action films such as *Break Up the Chain* (*Yonghwa chusik hoesa*, Lee Manhee, 1971). Cho compellingly links *The Good, the Bad, the Weird*'s historical setting in Manchuria during Korea's period of Japanese occupation to the region's broader status as a liminal frontier land with a 'hallowed position of being one of the Korean independence movement's sites of development [and] an important symbolic role as the birthplace of Korean nationalism' (Cho 2015: 53). Thus, in this context, the Spaghetti Western's 'transnational' legacy is one of co-optation for the task of negotiating an East Asian national identity.



Figure 1.1: *The Good, the Bad, the Weird* (2008) deploys Spaghetti Western stylistics within a Manchurian action schema.

Cho's approach highlights an important point: that, while the analysis of Italian Westerns' innately 'transnational' aspects provides insight into the films' ongoing global significance, it is through situating particular manifestations of this process in their historical and cultural 'moments' (locally, regionally, nationally or industrially) that we can best obtain a meaningful apperception of this point. If the 'trans-' prefix is to avoid becoming a merely trendy scholarly accoutrement, it should work to aid understanding of complexities within specific national, local and sub-cultural contexts. As Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim have argued, a 'critical transnationalism' is one that interrogates 'how these film-making activities negotiate with the national on all levels – from cultural policy to financial sources, from the multiculturalism of difference to how it reconfigures the nation's image of itself' (Higbee and Lim 2010: 18). This volume can only scratch the surface of the

Spaghetti Western's multifarious paths of hybridity and its continuing global reach across perceived boundaries of genre, nation and identity. The analysis offered in these pages, however, seeks to advance this field of enquiry by offering a set of case studies grounded firmly in their historical, cultural and political circumstances.

The volume opens with an extended piece from the undisputed father of scholarly enquiry into the Spaghetti Western, Sir Christopher Frayling. Frayling's seminal book *Spaghetti Westerns: Cowboys and Europeans from Karl May to Sergio Leone* (1981) has surely been a key inspiration for all subsequent serious analysis of this *filone*: this one included. It is therefore apt that his latest work opens proceedings, both providing new perspectives on the *filone*'s cross-cultural significance and offering methodological challenges for the chapters that follow. Four sections then progress from the Spaghetti Western's antecedents to its legacies. In Part I, two chapters uncovering hitherto overlooked inspirations and influences (from post-war neorealism and nineteenth-century literature) illuminate the complex interweaving of cultural reference points in Italy prior to the 1960s. Part II then considers the diverse ways in which this *filone* addressed issues of ethnicity and identity through three chapters that reconsider its position vis-à-vis the global politics of its era. Part III interrogates oft-drawn parallels between the Spaghetti Western and Asian cinema, by charting complex routes of reinterpretation that belie linear readings of cultural influence, and by introducing the perspective of the *filone*'s extensive appropriation in India. Finally, Part IV assesses three further examples of how the Spaghetti Western's legacies have been negotiated as its global distribution left its mark on East German censorship, on French comic books, and, finally, on the contemporary Hollywood Western.

Christopher Frayling's chapter charts a personal journey, continuing his pioneering work questioning conceptions of 'authenticity' by looking at how Italian Westerns responded to well-established ethnic images within Hollywood Westerns which were themselves 'inauthentic' in the first place: those of 'Irishness'. Considering whether the contemporaneity of Ireland's 'Troubles' with both a growing fascination with anti-colonialist movements in Western Europe and the zenith of the Italian Western might have played a role, Frayling investigates the hitherto overlooked issue of how images of Irishness filtered through into Italy's version of the genre. As Italians forged their own interpretation of the Western myth, transposing numerous elements from Hollywood while cutting the genre adrift from its nation-building imperative, Frayling asks, in what form did the Hollywood genre's ubiquitous negotiation with a stereotyped Irish ethnicity survive, and what significance

did this hold in this cultural moment? He discovers, intriguingly, that a secondary (or even tertiary) conception of ‘Irishness’ abounds in the Spaghetti Western. Taking Sergio Leone’s *Duck, You Sucker!* (*Giù la testa*, 1971) as a key case study, Frayling charts the labyrinthine intertextual journey through Hollywood’s representations of Irish culture on which Leone and his crew embarked: most pertinently, through the films of John Ford. He concludes that in the Italian Western, ‘Irishness’ exists as part of a larger signifying structure surrounding a reworked, magnified and updated cinematic imaginary, rather than a purposeful reference to contemporary events in Ireland. Frayling thus lays down a gauntlet to beware of drawing direct parallels between films and the contemporary events that surround them too readily.

Part I opens with Pasquale Iannone’s study of Western tropes in Italian cinema’s ‘neorealist’ phase. Taking as his key case studies *In the Name of the Law* (*In nome della legge*, Pietro Germi, 1949) and *The Bandit of Tacca del Lupo* (*Il brigante di Tacca del Lupo*, Pietro Germi, 1952), Iannone explores the complex ways in which Germi worked references to American genres into his work, thereby debunking approaches presupposing an Italian neorealism separated from ‘popular’ cinema, and demonstrating an oft-overlooked precursor to the Spaghetti Westerns of the 1960s and 1970s. Identifying in Germi’s two films a representational equivalence between the Italian South and the American West, this chapter charts a lineage of tales of banditry that blended the international and the local. Aliza Wong then identifies the influence on Spaghetti Western director Sergio Sollima of Emilio Salgari’s nineteenth-century hero Sandokan. Drawing a detailed line of continuity from this iconic character of Italian children’s literature to the postcolonial heroes of Sollima’s *westerns all’italiana*, Wong illustrates a genealogy of ‘Other-ed’ hero archetypes who, through their resistance to imperialist might, were designed to appeal to revolutionary sentiments within Italian national identity from the *Risorgimento* onwards. By extending the focus to Sollima’s own ‘Sandokan’ television series, Wong’s analysis also identifies a melding of the Spaghetti Western’s anarchic borderlands and the primitive wilds of South-East Asia, through which Sollima sought to expound anti-imperialist rhetoric. This chapter thus uncovers continuities in imagined, exotic spaces offering Italians a politicised outlet for fantasy fulfilment.

Part II begins with David Hyman and Patrick Wynne’s response to my analysis of the popular politics of the Spaghetti Western (Fisher 2011). Taking *A Professional Gun* (*Il mercenario*, Sergio Corbucci, 1968) as their key example, they argue that the ‘incoherence’ I identified as a political weakness of this *filone*’s ‘insurgency’ variant is rather a

manifestation of decontextualised transnational bricolage that, by blurring the boundary between ‘text’ and ‘paratext’, allows us to appreciate the possibilities open to an audience for creative participation within revolutionary discourses.⁵ The film is therefore read as a temporal dislocation that exists within images of the Mexican Revolution, and as a conduit through which a plurality of fluid meanings open up for the fomenting of a revolutionary sensibility.

Lee Broughton’s chapter then offers an alternative take on representations of ethnicity in the Spaghetti Western. While much has been written about this *filone*’s portrayal of Mexican ethnicity, this chapter examines its representation of African Americans, and asks what this might tell us about the politics of race in Italy and the USA in the 1960s. Specifically, Broughton identifies in the films of Giuseppe Colizzi a lineage from the *commedia dell’arte* and Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of the ‘carnavalesque’, through which the Spaghetti Western facilitates an inclusive racial discourse that found a particular resonance in an era of mass protest. Part II then ends with Mikel J. Koven’s study of this *filone*’s extraordinarily influential afterlife, interrogating a critical commonplace that labels the cinema of Quentin Tarantino (as well as that of his collaborators such as Miike Takashi) ‘postmodern’. Examining the precise implications of this term, Koven identifies in Tarantino’s curation of the Spaghettis’ afterlife a particular kind of postmodern engagement, examining *Django Unchained* (2012) not as reductive pastiche (as many critics hold), but rather as an ironic ‘language of grindhouse cinema allusions’. The chapter thus identifies, charts and examines a complex web of references traversing cultural boundaries, which ultimately provides a subversive ‘paracinematic’ discourse.

Part III appraises three overlapping instances of appropriation in Asian film industries. Firstly, Thomas Klein revisits the Japanese *chanbara*, or ‘sword film’. Challenging notions that focus solely on the kinship between the Japanese format and the US Western, Klein instead charts the *chanbara*’s relationship to the Italian version. In the equivalence between the outlaw heroes of the Spaghetti Western and the ‘sword film’, he identifies documents of Italy’s and Japan’s respective processes of post-war Americanisation. Ivo Ritzer then takes the Italian Western’s iterative negotiation with Asian identities as a case study to chart multidimensional routes of cultural transfer. Deploying scholarly approaches around the ‘transnational’, he frames the Italian Western as a junction in a global network of cultural exchange, both borrowing from and influencing Asian cinematic discourses. Using *The Warrior’s Way* (Sngmoo Lee, 2010) as a key example, he therefore sees the Italian

Western's most significant legacy to be its decoupling of the Western from its ideological and historical reference points, freeing the format up for myriad, heterogeneous cultural contexts.

To conclude Part III, Iain Robert Smith continues this methodological focus on processes of cultural transfer, by examining how the Spaghetti Western has played a part in the negotiation of cosmopolitan identities within Indian cinema. By focusing on the network of transnational borrowings that resulted in the 'Curry' or 'Masala' Western, Smith goes beyond 'unidirectional models of cross-cultural influence' to illuminate the networks through which cultures overlap, and the transformations that result from combinations, borrowings and exchanges across national contexts. He also compellingly enters into the debates outlined at the start of this Introduction, eschewing approaches that interpret 'international' Westerns as translations of the genre designed to conform to the specificities of local cultural practices. Deploying a memetic model of cultural hybridisation, he argues for close attention to the specifics of historical context, while warning against the privileging of national signifiers and the attendant misrepresentation of complex negotiations with global cultural flows and exchanges.

Part IV opens with William Grady holding a common point of throwaway critical reference for the Spaghetti Western – the comic book – up to close scrutiny. Relocating this *flone* in a continuum of subversive, surreal treatments of the Wild West, Grady identifies a more substantive alienation effect in both the Spaghetti Western and the Western comic book, whereby familiar generic space is 'made strange' in both formats. Further, by assessing the Spaghetti's influence on later comic books from around the world, Grady's study illuminates another transcultural exchange that took place around this nomadic *flone*. Focusing in particular on the French *bande dessinée*, the chapter charts a rich history of transnational negotiation with the Wild West. In the *Blueberry* series, Grady presents a fascinating tension between appropriation of, and resistance to, US popular culture, making reference to French national crises while becoming mediated through the surreality of the Spaghetti Western. Rosemary Stott then illuminates the Spaghetti Western's hitherto under-researched patterns of release and 'official' reception in the German Democratic Republic, identifying a conduit for transcultural currents that were crossing the Iron Curtain at the height of the Cold War. Taking *Once Upon a Time in the West* (*C'era una volta il West*, Sergio Leone, 1968) as a case study, her chapter uncovers a process of international cultural transfer causing this object of cultural production to be repositioned as it

entered a new, state-controlled, reception context. Stott's key insight concerns the film's borderline acceptability for the East German censors, which marked a shift in the selection criteria for foreign imports upon its release in 1981. Once again, we see the Spaghetti Western providing us with insights into larger processes of cultural-political change, as this *filone* obtains fresh meanings in a new cultural backdrop: this time, one of ideologically-driven aversion to the Classical Western genre. This case study therefore offers insights into the peculiarities of this cultural moment, when East German authorities were juggling the appeal of Western culture with socialist ideological imperatives.

Finally, the volume closes with Pete Falconer's interrogation of the ever-disputed 'death' of the Western. Considering how the genre and its attendant tropes have functioned since its departure from mainstream production, Falconer uses the Spaghetti Western as a touchstone for understanding the implications for how the Western more broadly is produced and understood to the present day. By analysing varying levels of familiarity with the genre's traditions, Falconer holds that the Italian Western makes the genre 'strange', and alienates the viewer from the world of the Wild West. This final chapter thus makes a compelling case for how the seemingly familiar codes of the Western have in fact been rendered alien in differing ways upon contact with various contexts, and thereby offers insights into the representational practices of twenty-first-century Westerns such as *Appaloosa* (Ed Harris, 2008), *3:10 to Yuma* (James Mangold, 2007) and *True Grit* (Ethan and Joel Cohen, 2010): films that insistently place themselves in a long-gone past through painstaking attention to historical details. Falconer's intervention illuminates the extent to which the Spaghetti Western has come to hold sway over the dominant lexicon of the Western genre's cultural memory.

Falconer's chapter is therefore an apt note on which to end this volume. Throughout the book, the Spaghetti Western is approached as a unit of culture that has traversed space and time, encompassing temporal journeys as well as physical ones within 'transcultural' readings. Taken together, and through their very diversity, the various chapters attest to this *filone's* survival instinct, as it has adapted and morphed in response to multifarious cultural conditions, and continues to do so in an era when familiarity with the larger Western genre and its traditions can no longer be assumed. This collection therefore seeks to advance scholarly debates around both the significance of Italy's popular cinema of the 1960s and 1970s and its ongoing influences on our contemporary culture.

NOTES

1. Iain Robert Smith's chapter in this volume further explores this scholarly trend with specific reference to the Indian 'Curry' or 'Masala' Western, and situates the tendency within the Western's 'cultural roots controversy' as outlined by Christopher Frayling ([1981] 1998: 121–40), which branded international Westerns as culturally 'inauthentic'.
2. The word '*filone*' is generally preferred to 'genre' in scholarship around popular Italian cinema of the 1960s and 1970s, as a way of distinguishing this industrial context from that of Hollywood. This of course runs the risk of making rather broad generalisations about both the popular cinema of the USA and the scholarly field of 'genre studies', both of which are vast and heterogeneous: a trap into which I have fallen in the past (Fisher 2011: 36). This caveat notwithstanding, '*filone*' remains a useful descriptor for this set of culturally- and temporally-specific production and distribution practices, in which numerous trends of very rapid replication would ebb and flow according to the whims of the market, often existing for only a short period before ceasing to be profitable.
3. The work of Marc Ferro ([1977] 1988) and Pierre Sorlin (1980), for example, influentially investigated how cinematic representations of the past illuminate films' contemporary condition.
4. While my own work has considered the uses made of the Spaghetti Western by Quentin Tarantino, this was done purely to back up an argument that, divorced from their immediate contexts, the films are stripped of their intended political meanings (Fisher 2011: 193–201). I now consider this to be an oversimplification, since detailed analysis of the cultural moments in which the films have been distributed and received is just as valuable in the appraisal of their ongoing cultural significance. Had *Django Unchained* (2013) been released before I wrote the book in question, I like to think that I would have approached the subject somewhat differently. Mikel Koven does precisely this in these pages.
5. This is indeed a justified criticism of my previous work. I argued too forcefully and too defensively for the necessity of political coherence within the films' texts. Hyman and Wynne's chapter therefore offers a valuable entry point into a re-evaluation of the Spaghetti Western's politics.

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