

**GLOBAL GENRES, LOCAL FILMS.
THE TRANSNATIONAL DIMENSION OF SPANISH CINEMA**

Elena Oliete-Aldea, Beatriz Oria, and Juan A. Tarancón, eds.

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This important collection of essays, edited by Elena Oliete-Aldea, Beatriz Oria, and Juan A. Tarancón, makes a decisive contribution to the study of Spanish cinema by establishing the matrix genre-global-local as a critical axis the better to read the cinema associated with this country, as well as its transnational dimension. Following Barry Jordan's proposal to consider the dyad national-transnational as suspect of being an unqualified heuristic device, *Global Genres* engages a copious body of critical literature about Spanish Cinema, offering its readers a compelling set of essays about politics, history, social conflict, crime, music, violence, melodrama, resistance, migrations, immigration, bromance, regionalism, and transnational co-productions, among other matters. The collection as a whole raises critical questions about the past, present, and future of the so-called 'Spanish' cinema, about the importance and meanings of movies associated in some way with an auteur affiliated with Spain, or with films shot, produced and watched inside and outside of its national borders, films that one way or another have come to be known as 'Spanish'.

In the "Foreword", Jordan expands on the decade-old guide he co-authored with Mark Allinson, entitled *Spanish Cinema*, and sets the stage for *Global Genres* by stating the importance of the 'national' as a force in filmmaking. He underscores the global and transnational dimensions of Spanish cinema as two critical concepts for an understanding of these films, arguing that the figure of the nation cannot be simply eliminated in order to favor the 'transnational' as the essential trait in Spanish Cinema: "they are both", he says, "part of the same political, social, and cultural

environment and thus interdependent, where the one cannot function or exist without the other” (xix). As a point in case, Jordan establishes two perspectives: on the one hand, the taxing environment of film production in Spain during the past decade which, coupled with the competition faced by movie theatres from other places and modes of film watching (the privacy of the living room, Filmin, Netflix), led to a return of commercially successful films in 2014 and a realization of the need to make movies that entertain, challenge, and enlighten. On the other hand, the backstage political drama sustained by administrative figures at FAPAE (Spain’s main film and TV producer’s association), the PP, ICAA (Institute of Film and AV Media) boded ill for the prospects of a moviemaking industry in Spain. The bottom line, according to Jordan: a “declining home market, with a resistant and falling audience base, and the prospect of a serious drop in taxpayer funding, (and thus, presumably, far fewer shoots and jobs), local Spanish filmmaking stands on the edge of a precipice” from whence only commercial projects and profits can rescue it (xxiii-xxiv).

In the “Introduction”, the Editors raise questions about transnationalism and genre, considering them points of departure for questioning static borders in history, film, politics, culture, and reading. Their goal is to interrogate the concept of Spanishness and to place movies center stage in the making of a ‘counter-history’ of the nation and its cinema, seeking “to unveil the competing discourses at stake in specific films when examined against the rearticulation of different genres and film traditions” (8). They hope to prove that the connections of these films with world cinema has existed since day one, and to establish an “intricate dialogue between cross-cultural aesthetics and narrative models on the one hand, and indigenous traditions on the other, as well as the political and historical contingencies these different expressions responded to” (8-9).

Three sections address critical angles on the negotiation of the global-local and national-transnational: the first group focuses on a thorough revision of the concept of Spanishness, showing that Spanish early genres and film language are transnational factors “capable of putting forward a more complex assessment of the challenges faced by Spanish society” (9). These first five chapters analyze hybridity and transnational dimensions of early musicals from the 1930s (Valeria Camporesi), historical films of the late 1940s and early 1950s (Vicente Benet), criminal melodramas (Juan A. Tarancón), the mix of historical epic and musical (Federico Bonaddio), and the influence of Hollywood melodrama (Daniel Mourenza). As a whole, they show how these films cross folklore, new technologies, historical heroines, realist techniques, melodrama, and other referential threads in order to entertain culturally diverse audiences throughout the world. Individually, these chapters analyze how some movies target female spectators from Spain, or how others tap into the rising social unrest of the mid-century, to undercut

patriotism, or how others bring to the private sphere the social and political situation of Francoism, thus ‘resignifying’ a landmark of Hollywood cinema by adapting it to Spain’s political terms.

The second group, also composed of five essays, engages the ‘opening up’ of borders and genres (both national and filmic), to explore and help readers better understand lesser-known genres from Spain’s cinematic history. Thus, for instance, the exploration of the inter-generic dialogue between what came to be known as Nuevo Cine Español (New Spanish Cinema) and American road movies, French Nouvelle Vague, or the transnational fantastic element in Luis Buñuel (Arnaud Duprat de Montero); the following two chapters trace the production of *gialli* and Gothic films in Spain to link them both to their respective Italian and Anglo-American counterparts, and to underscore the importance of reading Spanish *gialli* such as León Klimovsky’s *Una libélula para cada muerto/A Dragonfly for Each Corpse* and early Spanish Gothic films such as *El espíritu de la colmena/Spirit of the Beehive* in the context of mounting social tensions in the Spain of the 1970s, and the later installments of these films, such as the Gothic *Tras el cristal/In a Glass Cage*, which carried this filmic mode into the democratic era of the 1980s (Andy Willis and Ann Davies). The following chapter compares the Hollywood historical epic of the Quincentenary, to which the Spanish film industry contributed co-productions such as *1492: Conquest of Paradise* and *Christopher Columbus: The Discovery*, adding threads from Spanish heritage film, and reveals the creation of “a transnational product that transcended its local specificity” (127). This, in turn, exposes neoimperial debates and global struggles and audiences (Noelia Saenz). Chapter 10 returns to the link between Spanish and American cinema, and explores the influence of the road movie on Spanish productions of that genre with clear postmodern and realistic traits (Carmen Induráin Eraso). The last chapter in this section focuses on immigration as a defining trait of Spain’s final entrance to modernity, and analyzes how the cinematic capture of rural Castile interrogates the concepts of displacement, homeland, and the infamous ‘difference’ of Spain as place and society, especially in the context of globalization’s realities (Chantal Cornut-Gentile D’Arcy).

The third and last section of the book analyzes the self-conscious dimension of transnationalism, proposing that in Spanish cinema this be used as a strategy to appropriate the global. The first of six chapters questions the globalizing influence of American film on Spanish cinema, taking the appropriation of Hollywood’s comic “bromance” as a dialogic process (with, I add, longstanding performative traditions dating back to the Spanish *Comedia* from the 16th and 17th centuries) in which Spanish films incorporate vernacular tropes to the representation of the traditional American bromance protagonists (Beatriz Oria). The raging proliferation of crime film and television productions worldwide takes shape in Spanish cinema

with a clear focus on the thinking and feeling of characters such as *malamadres* and *bertomeus* (the critic's terms for characters), amongst which spectators see flashbacks mixed with current events in the gangster miniseries *Crematorio* and the prison film *Celda 211* (Luis M. García-Mainar). The dwelling on thoughts and emotion recurs in the next chapter, which examines how “the generic treatment of human suffering in her [Isabel Coixet's] films, characterized by the encounter of various localities, elicits new forms of human relationality” (Hilaria Loyo, 201). The next chapter revisits the phenomenon of immigration and the new realities of Spain's contemporary society, such as a “domestic dimension” sorely missing from recent immigration cinema (Elena and Ana Martín Morán, 224). Galician Documentary Film moves center stage in the next chapter, an analysis of immigration cinema and transnational identities from a peripheral position in Alberte Pagán's *Bs. As.* and Xurxo Chirro's *Vikingland* (Iván Villarrea Álvarez). The last chapter of the collection sets in motion the expression “(in)visible co-productions” to examine the myriad factors in play to brand films and the use of genre as a way to frame Spanish Cinema globally (Vicente Rodríguez Ortega).

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Global Genres is an indispensable source for any reader interested in movies filmed in Spain and in other places, some produced or co-produced by Spain's film industry, some seen in Spain, or abroad, but known as part of what continues to be called and understood as Spanish cinema. Questioning the relationship between what is inside and what is outside Spanish borders, and the relationship of such borders to a concept of a ‘national’ film, the essays in this volume address genre, financing, character, empire, sound, politics, violence, and a number of other referential threads to yield a set of critical perspectives of what constitutes ‘Spanish cinema’. Understanding ‘transnational’ not as an opposite or contrary to ‘national’, but as a link from inside to outside Spanish borders, and as a bridge to collaborative work—which is the basis for all performative arts—, *Global Genres, Local Films* invites readers to think again about the past, present, and future of films belonging one way or another to the category of Spanish cinema. Rigorously researched, well-reasoned and organized, and elegantly written, these thought-provoking essays considerably further the study of Spanish Cinema and film in general.

Works Cited

JORDAN, Barry and Mark ALLINSON. 2005.
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