

**Theorizing Liminal Cinema:
Unsettling the Transnational Spaces of Italian-Indian Co-productions**

Monia Acciari (Independent Scholar)

Abstract:

This article seeks to provide a contribution to the contemporary writing on transnational cinema. By acknowledging the prolific literature that characterizes transnational cinema through specific categories of cultural and societal mobilization, and the writing on crossover cinema, this work aims to enter into a dialogue with the respective authors and propose a less structured approach to transnational mobilization. To study such mobilizations and its complex forms, co-production ventures were used as case studies to highlight the efforts of early international joint endeavors, and more recently, those of outsourcing agencies, as being nodes for changing forms of international collaborations. By focusing on Italian-Indian co-produced films, this work situates co-production studies within the literature on transnational cinema, and unsettles fixed cinematic categories in favor of a more mobile and fluid paradigm. Hence, the term Liminal cinema is proposed to critically assess and emphasize the dynamics of the complex phenomenon of transnational cinema-in-motion.

Keywords:

Liminal cinema

Transnational cinema

Transnational-in-motion

Crossover cinema

Co-productions

Italian-Indian co-productions

Bollywood

Outsourcing

Bio

Monia Acciari gained her PhD in Film, Media and Cultural Studies at the University of Manchester (United Kingdom) from the Drama Department in 2011, with a thesis that explored the cultural relationship between Italy and India via film culture. She is a UK-based independent scholar, working on a variety of projects on transnational Indian cinema and culture, with colleagues at the University of Manchester and Florida International University. She is part of the Euro-Bollywood Research Network and the expert on the Italian-Indian cultural relationship. She has recently co-edited a special issue of the journal *Cinergie* (2015, Vol. 6, Issue 2) on 'Geopolitical Strategies in Film festivals between activism and cinephilia'. For *Cinergie*, she serves as an editor for the section on Cinephilia and Film Critic, and she

is also part of the editorial board of the Media Watch Journal. Her extracurricular interests include contributions to the online magazine Festivalists.com.

Contact: monia.acciari@gmail.com

Introduction

The use of the term liminal cinema in this article differs from that of other authors who have spoken about liminality as some kind of international mobilization (Skrodzka 2012:169) and an accented form of production (Naficy 2001: 78). The aim here is to encapsulate and articulate the kind of films that result from international collaborations and specifically co-productions. In detail, this article intends to explore the Italian-Indian co-productions that crossed cultural borders and stimulated a possible conceptualization and construction of a cinematic grammar that affects the film at a textual level as a result of the pluralistic nature of such co-production agreements.

By exploring liminal cinema, the aim is to provide an alternative definition for the changing nature of cinema with the intent of grafting – allegorically speaking – novel reflections on encounters, exchanges and hybridizations via co-production ventures on to the existing body of literature on world and transnational cinemas. In order to explore the unfolding of liminal cinema, old and new co-production ventures will be examined, and the films *Vrindavan Film Studios* (Lambertini, 1996), *Lezioni di Volo/Flying Lessons* (Archibugi, 2010) and the most recent *Besh Korechi Prem Korechi/I have a love* (Chanda, 2015) will be used as case studies.

Throughout, this work could be seen as a response to the dissatisfaction in dealing with the paradigm of national cinemas to largely understand representations of cultural identity. Moreover, I seek to expand the traditional understanding of

transnational cinema as the ultimate conceptual abode to place and define some of the international productions. The article does not intend to assert liminal cinema as another category for transnational cinema; rather, the intention is to provide a specific and subtler conceptual frame that will complement the literature on transnational cinemas.

By studying the intersection of creativities from multiple countries, this article will seek to reflect on a more fluid definition of cinema practices, narratives and aesthetics, and the reasons surrounding the formation of transformative conceptual spaces resulting from international collaborations and partnerships. This contribution will offer a sensitive point of view within the radar of transnational cinema and co-production studies and will enable a clarification of the terms of transnational exchange that liminal cinema embraces. In addition, the article aims to refine the approach that considers the encounter of cultures as offered by crossover cinema.

Tim Bergfelder pointed out that film studies has historically ‘lag[ged] somewhat behind other academic disciplines’ when it comes to accepting the influence of cultural hybridization and the use of a concept such as ‘transnationalism’ (Bergfelder 2005: 321). On this premise, I intend to engage with the notion of liminality – that is the state of cultural ambiguity and disorientation intrinsic to moments of exchange and encounter (Turner 1994:16) – to recount the cultural fluidity occurring between the cinematic industries of Italy and India. The intellectual stimulus offered by Bergfelder leads to the reflection on the notion of hybridity in Homi Bhabha’s work (Bhabha 2012), and the nature of travelling cultures that has led nomadism to dominate the understanding of cultural movements. Furthermore, while nomadism is an element enabling transnational connections, it is also essential for the

identification of the transformative states of both identity and film aesthetics (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 12). Liminal cinema can be conceptualized from anthropological premises from the notions of 'rite of passage' and liminality previously explored by van Gennep (van Gennep 2004: 11) and Turner (Turner 1994: 4). Turner pinpointed how in liminal situations of all kinds, cultural hierarchies can be reversed or temporarily dissolved, continuity of traditions may become uncertain, and future outcomes once taken for granted may be doubted (Turner 1994: 14). However, prior to providing a framework for liminal cinema through the analysis of Italian-Indian co-production ventures, it is important here to set up a distinction between the definitions of transnational cinema and crossover cinema. This would provide the conceptual boundaries for liminal cinema to be theorized.

Transnational cinema emerged in response to an increased preoccupation with the limiting conceptualization of films as products of national industries, in light of the awareness of a more mobile cinematic culture. Significantly, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam wrote: 'The global nature of the colonizing process, and the global reach of the contemporary media, virtually oblige the cultural critic to move beyond the restrictive frameworks of monoculture and the individual nation-state' (Shohat and Stam 2003: 1). Such an approach undeniably sets the mood to frame the cultural mobilization that is intended to be unfolded here. However, the problematic orientation regarding the global mobilization of the cultural industries comes with the term transnational cinema, and specifically with assumptions that address the transnational as 'an essentialist element built into it' (Dannison and Hwee Lim 2006: 1). I argue that criticism could also be levelled at other kinds of intellectual readings that tend to provide an explanation for transnational cinema as being an essentialist phenomenon.

Indeed, similarly, Ezra and Rowden's work stresses this issue by adding ambiguity and writing that: 'the transnational comprises of globalization – in cinematic terms, Hollywood's domination of world film markets – and the counterhegemonic responses of filmmakers from former colonial and Third World cinema countries'. (Ezra and Rowden 2006: 1). This wide inclusion of global cinematic practices does require specificity. Transnational activities when associated with cinema are characterized by the moving nature of film productions and distributions. Also, transnational mobilization has long been a determinant in filmmaking, specifically in terms of a film's cast and crew (Higson and Maltby 1999: 34). In addition, an increasing number of films that present hybrid traits or that belong to the international market are being identified as transnational and depleted of their national traits (O'Regan 2004: 263). Many films utilize multiple shooting locations across nations, or employ a multinational cast and crew, while others are funded by a wide array of production companies across different countries – co-productions. Co-productions are defined (Enrich 2005: 2) as a form of film production where at least two producers join forces to fund a single film project, via a co-production agreement and contract. With a contract, the parties agree to collaborate and pool their resources collaboratively.

Besides acknowledging transnational cinema, another concept that warrants further examination is crossover cinema. Sukhmani Khorana's seminal *Crossover cinema: cross-cultural film from production to reception* provides a novel and challenging reconceptualization of existing ideologies on transnational and world cinemas. She proposes the term crossover cinema to define 'an emerging form of cinema that crosses cultural borders at the stage of conceptualization and production and hence manifests a hybrid cinematic grammar at the textual level as well as

crossing over in terms of its distribution and reception' (Khorana 2013: 3). Khorana's work reveals, via a holistic approach, an all-inclusive account on transnational creative practices, comprising filmic content and textual analysis, along with their distribution and reception at the verge of cross-cultural encounters. This account is challenging and enthralling; however, it seems to overlook the liminality of such encounters and with it the cultural disorientation that some films can produce at a textual level.

Therefore, I will be approaching my study of Italian-Indian co-productions within a transnational frame by addressing the transformative nature of it, as advocated by Higbee and Lim (2010):

(...) studying a concept (in our case, transnational cinema) demands not just the tracing of its genealogy in descriptive terms or prescribing the terms of its usage depending on one's politics, but also the self-reflexive unveiling of the concept's discursive history, development and transformation. (Higbee and Lim 2010: 9)

Debora Shaw (2013: 48) presents transnational cinema as an all-inclusive and vague term to refer to films and cinematic practices that experience international mobilization, and proposes to deconstruct it within specific categories. In contrast, by broadening Naficy's discourse on liminality, I propose to expand the notion of liminal cinema and bring back transnational cinema to its natural state of vagueness that is inherent of the transnational flow of people and commodities. By acknowledging a broader theoretical frame to talk about transnational mobilization and national specificities, I propose to move towards a degree of cultural ambiguity – in Turner's terms – characterized by conceptual tests, assays and *communitas*.¹ I wish to rethink

the spaces of transnational itemization (Shaw 2013; Hjort 2009) to gain a more fluid approach and apply it to my area of expertise – transnational Indian cinema – in order to reflect on Italian-Indian productions as liminal cinematic experiments.

This approach branches out from the work of Mette Hjort (Hjort 2009) and Debora Shaw (Shaw 2013), who provided fifteen groupings of transnational – cinematic – categories. While Shaw defines these as ‘not self-contained categories’ (Shaw 2013: 52) of transnational cinema, Hjort avoids the degree of generalization that the term transnationalism offers, and writes:

There is nothing inherently virtuous about transnationalism and there may even be reason to object to some forms of transnationalism [...] My own view is that the more valuable form of transnationalism features at least two qualities: a resistance to globalization as cultural homogenization; and a commitment to ensuring that certain economic realities associated with filmmaking do not eclipse the pursuit of aesthetic, artistic, social and political values. (Hjort, 2009:15)

By theorizing liminal cinema, this article hopes to build a framework and a space for co-productions to intersect and intertwine with the discourses of transnational cinematic mobilization. To begin this investigation, I will trace a brief historiography that locates the initial experimental Italian-Indian productions.

A lens on co-productions in transnational cinema

Co-production ventures are not a recent phenomenon. These forms of collaborations have been a part of the film industry even before the 1920s (Lev 1993: 38). The rise of co-productions in the European film industry took place following the Second

World War, when European governments introduced a number of measures that could guarantee a form of control in order to safeguard their national industries from the hegemonic competition of Hollywood's productions. While co-productions were constituted on the grounds of cultural protection, it must be noted that these ventures were introduced to encourage international collaborations in order to cap the earnings of foreign distribution companies and prevent a European negative balance in the audiovisual trade. Italy and France were the first two countries to sign a co-production agreement in Europe in 1949 (Jäckel 2001: 158); in the 1950s and 1960s co-production treaties extended beyond Europe and included countries such as Canada, Latin America and North Africa, making it possible for countries with small means and market potential to increase their visibility and audiovisual ventures (Jäckel, 2001:155; Betz, 2007). However, conceptually, where does co-production sit within the discourses of cinematic mobilization and transnational cinema?

Co-productions have been largely considered to be the result of film and television producers who seek to gain international market access to increase their revenues (Pendakur 1990:194). However, although the case study that investigated Canadian co-productions (Finn et al. 1996:157) highlighted that international collaborations, and co-productions in particular, are commercially more successful than domestic films, this does not apply globally. In other industries (among which there are many industries from India) co-producers rate the earnings from a co-production process as less financially rewarding than from single-country productions (Finn et al. 1996: 159; Acciari 2011: 218).

Nevertheless, with Hollywood still controlling most of the global film market, only in the last decade or so have the Indian producers also considered co-producing

and settling within discourses of film culture mobilization and global consumption. Despite Bollywood's attempt to co-produce with other international productions, the outcome has proven to be of scarce success;² but the art films and non-mainstream Indian productions are currently expanding and exploring the viability of creating awareness and a market within the European context. Mumbai cinema is indeed very different from what it was years ago. The rise of independent cinema has settled the terrain for expanding topics and languages that were previously considered taboos in many Indian cinema industries and by the local and diasporic South Asian audience. Current co-production ventures move into the terrain of transnational trial and testing of narratives and languages, thus defining the nature of some co-production agreements as being experimental.

In a transnational mobilization and global circulation of cultural goods, co-productions occur to test markets and establish novel creative and economic partnerships (Acciari 2011: 211). Enrich reminds us that co-productions occur to overcome the problem of financing projects in an industry characterized by a constant lack of financial capital, through resource pooling by multiple countries (Enrich 2005). However, despite the struggle to establish co-productions at a global level as viable alternatives to hegemonic cinematic industries, the important advantage of these productions resides in the nations participating in such ventures. Co-productions are an invitation to think about the financial status of the co-producing nations involved in a project, where producers are allowed to access public funding sources in each of the partnering countries. Co-productions are generally regulated by agreements to which film producers have to adhere; these include the amount of budget to be used within the partnering country, or to employ part of the cast, crew, or other creative staff from each nation involved. This has historically led to an ambiguity that – to

engage with the framework that this article intends to elaborate – brings forth co-productions as liminal experimental cultural products. Such productions have been called ‘cultural bastards’ (Morawetz 2008: 66) and ‘cinema del meticcato’ (personal translation from Italian as ‘half-cast’ cinema) by Marco Müller (Acciari 2011: 210) and have often failed to achieve critical success. Does this affect Italian-Indian co-productions too? Can the Italian-Indian co-productions produce a narrative, an effective contribution and a case study that fosters theorization of liminal cinema? To uncover these aspects, I will provide a brief historical exploration of the collaborations that have characterized early filmic ventures between Italy and India, and then move on to more contemporary co-productions and achievements.

Historical reconnaissance of Italian-Indian collaborations

Currently, the evidence regarding the early collaborations between the two countries in question can only be gathered by performing a literature review due to the much-needed and scarce archival research into the history of co-production and co-cinematic ventures between Europe and India. As far as film history acknowledges, traces of Italian and Indian collaborations go back to 1898 when two Italians named Colorello and Cornaglia appeared as early cinematic entrepreneurs in India. The pair were renowned within the Indian entertainment circuits for being organizers of early film shows. These screenings occurred within tents at the Azad Maidan (or Azad ground) in the old Bombay and also at the Calcutta Maidan (or Calcutta ground) (Thoraval 2000: 78; Rajadhyaksha and Willemen 2002: 254). The history of early co-productions goes back to the 1920s when small Italian production companies engaged with Madan Theatres, a large distribution corporation and studio that dominated India’s silent era. It is recorded (Rajadhyaksha and Willemen 2002: 34) that Madan

Theatres in Mumbai worked collaboratively with Eugenio De Liguoro and cameraman T. Marconi. Also, in 1923, Madan Theatres claimed to have co-produced the film *Savitri*, also known as *Savitri Satyavan* (1923) with Italy, directed by Giorgio Mannini for Cines in Rome and starring Rina De Liguoro opposite Angelo Ferrari. *Savitri Satyavan* is a silent film that narrates a love-is-stronger-than-death story and taps into Hindu mythology. Savitri (played by Rina de Liguoro) is the daughter of King Ashwapati and a goddess who falls for Satyavan (played by Angelo Ferrari), a man who is destined to die within a year. Satyavan is killed by a falling tree and his soul is collected by the Hindu God Yama (played by Gianna Terribili-Gonzales), who will later bring him back to life, thus providing a happy ending to the story. It was regarded as a colorful spectacle and had been promoted as Italy's most 'daring' film to that date. Its delayed release and short running time suggest that the film was re-edited, omitting some nude scenes and other erotic images in order to satisfy the firm censors. Despite being considered by some as the first film co-produced by India under the direction of Madan Theatres (Thoraval 2000: 23), others believe that the film was not co-produced but only released by Madan Theatres (Rajadhyaksha and Willemen 2002: 255).

Nala Damayanti,³ directed by Eugenio de Liguoro, was released in 1920. The film was a big-budget production featuring Madan's Anglo-Indian star Patience Cooper. The film, which narrates the story of Damayanti (played by Patience Cooper) and Nala (played by Adajania), is a frequently narrated story from the holy book from Hindu mythology, the *Mahabharata*. The film relied on - primitive - special effects and saw the participation of Eugenio de Liguoro as Pushkar; de Liguoro was well known to the Italian panorama for his orientalist spectacles (Uffreduzzi 2013: 25) and specifically for the film *Fascino d'Oro/Gold Charm* (Eugenio de Liguoro, 1919).

In 1921, the film *Dhruva Charitra/Triumph of Devotion* (Eugenio de Liguoro, 1921) was released. The film had an international cast and crew⁴, and the plot was based on the Puranic⁵ legend of the boy Dhruva, whose quest for eternal salvation was rewarded when he became the brightest star in the heavens (the Dhruva Tara, or the Pole star). As per Madan's objective of having an international reach, the cast featured several European stars with a range of Italians, Anglo-Indians and British actors. As reported by Rajadyaksha and Willeman (2002), the *Times of India* on 11 June 1921 stated that Madan Theatres had offered 'directions in which a greater appeal may be made to the westernized mind in trying to picture modern India' (Rajadyaksha and Willeman 2002: 234), interestingly setting the foundations for the understanding of transnational film consumption and reception. The Indian version of the film was successful, but *Dhruva Charitra* became better known in a shorter version adapted for Europe.

It should be noted that early co-ventures that characterized the Italian-Indian productions were, at a textual level, concerned with the mise en scène of stories drawn from Hindu mythology that contributed to feed the Western countries with a certain level of imagined far Orient. In spite of the strongly Hindu mythological narratives of these early films, the much-declared vision of international reachability of Madan's productions was possible due to the inclusion of an Italian cast and crew that framed these films as truly global efforts. These early collaborations appear to produce what Turner defines as liminality, which is the transitional state between two phases in which the individuals are 'betwixt and between' (Turner 1994: 5) cultural contacts and transformations, experiencing and testing a novel format between diverse cultures.

The early collaborations mentioned above have not been defined under any official co-production agreements. Instead, these early ventures hint at a kind of creative, cultural and dynamic exchange of workforce that naturally occurs with co-production projects. Also, these early experiments formed the basis for thinking about co-productions not only in terms of versatility of the cast and crew that is very typical in these sorts of productions (Higson and Maltby 1999: 56), but also at the dynamism and the foresight of these early joint ventures to broaden their reach to an international audience.

However, much archival research needs to be performed in order to obtain clarity on early collaborations between the two countries so that questions such as the following could be answered: How and why did the Italian cinematic pioneer reach India at the time of silent cinema? Were any other Italian producers contributing to Madan Theatres' pot of international funds? More importantly, was there any form of international regulation facilitating and monitoring such cinematic ventures to run smoothly? If so, did any agreements exist between India and Italy? Also, how did the colonial history play in the production of a collaborative documentation between the then colonized India and the rest of Europe in the early twentieth century?

Such questions of early co-production dynamics are still uncertain and remain unanswered. Undeniably, this ambiguity casts a shadow on the history of co-productions between the two countries and sets up novel research trajectories in the historiography of transnational cinema. Yet, by highlighting such questions and recording these known joint ventures, some insight into early international collaborations can be obtained, leading to a further reflection on more recent co-productions.

Italian-Indian co-production agreement: old fascinations and novel twists

By acknowledging the joint ventures that have characterized early co-production experiments between Italy and India, I aimed to trace a brief historical reconnaissance and raise some concerns on the consequences of historicizing transnational cinematic mobilizations. A glance at the more contemporary work between Italy and India draws attention to the established co-production agreement between the two countries signed in 2005, followed by a series of major meetings between the two industries during the Rome Film Festival in October 2007. During this festival, the commission paid tribute to the Indian industry with a number of transversal events such as 'La Nuova Bollywood del box office' (the new Bollywood on the box office) (VV.AA 2007) and the 'Indian Day' within which the meeting entitled 'India-Italy Business Forum: Entertainment industry within a growing global partnership' took place between the representatives from the governments and the entertainment industries of both countries. This event at the Rome festival fostered debates among producers to understand the terms of regulated co-production ventures. In order to have an insight into the processes behind international collaborations, I interviewed Italian producer Riccardo Tozzi in 2008,⁶ following the Focus India at the RomeFilmFest. An observation of the current co-production panorama in Italy highlighted Cattleya as one of the most prolific production company inclined to engage with topics such as immigration, diversity, racism and transcultural experiences through a fictional approach. When asked to comment on the procedures that are at the core of collaborations with non-European countries, Riccardo Tozzi responded:

First of all, we have to work on knowing each other's culture and learn not to rely on what we think we already know of that specific culture. Ideally we

should abandon certain kinds of stereotypes. We need to learn how to decipher and read their ‘yes’ and their ‘no’, as they have to do with us. Initially, it is absolutely necessary to have a cultural mediator to translate modalities or representation, but the real need is for a cultural translation...Essentially, we have to know each other despite what has been proposed and filtered into the respective culture, of the ‘other’, until now. (Personal interview with Riccardo Tozzi, in Acciari 2011: 211)

In 2002, at the European Festivals Associations held in Italy, Riccardo Tozzi expressed the interest in partnerships and highlighted the advantages of co-production ventures stating: ‘It is convenient to co-produce, even just to entrench the film in other territories such as Spain, Great Britain and France’ (Ramberti 2003). The will to find a meeting point and step into a new terrain has resulted in only a small number of co-productions between Italy and India. Titles include: *Vrindavan Film Studios* (Lambertini, 1996), produced by Italian Indrapur Cinematografica and RAI Cinema; *Lezioni di Volo/Flying Lessons* (Archibugi, 2007), which includes among its main producers S.M. Ferozeuddin Alameer from Khussro Films⁷ (in India) and Riccardo Tozzi from Cattleya (in Italy); *Barah Aana/Twelve Aana*⁸ (Menon, 2009) produced by Bandra West Pictures, Shrinagar Films Pvt. Ltd and Giulia Achilli, an independent Italian producer; and *Gangor/Behind the Bodice* (Spinelli, 2010) produced by BiBi Film, Isaria Productions and Nirvana Motion Pictures. However, more recent outsourcing activities that have occurred between Italy and India (Cucco Scaglioni 2014: 417) could also be read as novel forms of international collaborations that expand the financial, technological and creative capabilities of co-production procedures, and will be further investigated in this article.

Exploring *Vrindavan Film Studios*, *Flying Lessons* and *Besh Korechi Prem Korechi* as case studies for liminal cinema

Vrindavan Film Studios

Even before the official agreement was established, the film *Vrindavan Film Studios* (Lambertini, 1995) was co-produced in 1995. It does not fall under the umbrella of a regulated co-production; however, due to its intent, interest and common effort, it could be considered as an early co-production that conjoined the efforts of the industries of both countries. The film was a eulogy to the early Italian-Indian co-productions mentioned above due to its heavy use of Hindu mythological narratives. The plot narrates the story of Francesco (Enzo de Caro) who returns to India after many years to meet his friend Goutam (Goutam Ghose), a film director who is an expert in epic-based Indian cinema and manages the family-owned Vrindavan Film Studios. Francesco and Goutam's ambition is to work together for the realization of a co-authored film by tapping into a set of tales called the *Kathasarit Sàgara*.⁹

The tale/film, of which the spectator is offered a view, intersects the main plot of the film and narrates the vicissitudes of the beautiful Radha (Sonali Kulkarni), her husband (Sudip Mukherjee) and her husband's best friend (Pijus Mitra). After going on a pilgrimage, the two men end up sacrificing their lives; they are beheaded at a temple of goddess Kali,¹⁰ where Radha later finds the gruesome display of their bodies. Seeing Radha's pain, Kali agrees to grant her a wish and re-attaches the heads back to the bodies. In doing so, Kali switches them, creating the dilemma as to who is now Radha's husband? *Vrindavan Film Studios* is constructed by a series of textual clusters, namely, Francesco's journey to India and to self-rediscovery, the exploration of the realms of authenticity and imagination, the friendship between the two

characters, and the emotional process beneath the creation of a film. Vrindavan appears to be informed by the technique of a grand *mise en abyme*, where the story of Radha that questions the sense of imagination and reality is used to illuminate some preoccupations in the life of Francesco, the character in the framing story. The film within the film is an attempt to shed the veil of Maya transforming the film on Radha's vicissitudes into a source of imagination and knowledge. Staging this story offers Francesco and Goutam a reason to question the sense of the real and the imaginary, as well as the sense of identity and ego. The protagonists of both films are embedded in a kind of fantasy-realism, away from the opulence of mainstream Indian cinema and closer to the poetic and popular representation of the ancient Indian spiritual fables, translated into today's reality.

The textual construction of Lambertini's film is a *mise en abyme* made up of a series of narrative layers that gently slot into a chromatic blur and timeless spaces, where the human and creative dichotomies of reality and imagination merge. This film is praiseworthy for a number of reasons, such as its articulation of Indian philosophy and mythology within the narrative enacted by a talented cast from both Italy and India, the use of foreign settings, and the scrupulous visual referencing to the history and complexity of Indian cinema. However, it is also commendable for the restless humanitarian bond constructed between the regional fringes of Naples and Kolkata established by the Italian co-producer Sergio Scapagnini that broadly inspired the film (Acciari 2011: 220). The film is a eulogy to the secularism of the Indian tradition that meets the folklore of Italian culture, and it stitches the two together into a transitional visual text.

Lezioni di Volo/Flying Lessons

Flying Lessons (Francesca Archibugi) was the first Italian film to be produced following the Italian-Indian co-production agreement. As a typical co-produced film, it had a variety of artists, including Giovanna Mezzogiorno (Chiara), Andrea Miglio Risi (Pollo) and Tom Karumathy (Curry).¹¹ The plot narrates the journey of two eighteen-year-old friends from Rome, one named Apollonio and nicknamed Pollo (chicken), and the other named Marco but known as Curry due to his Indian origins. Together, they are chicken (with) curry. Curry is an Italian boy of Indian origin adopted by an Italian middle-class family, and Pollo is the son of a Jewish antiquarian, Leone, with whom, he is constantly in conflict. After failing to pass their final exams at school, they both decide to begin a journey and travel across India for the summer by leaving Rome behind. Upon reaching Delhi, the impact upon them is tough, and the two find themselves trapped in a reality far removed from their comfortable life in Italy. Curry complains on the phone to his adoptive mother in Rome by saying: ‘Here everyone mistakes me for an Indian, you wouldn’t believe it!’ – with distinctive Roman accent¹². After surviving a local riot where the two friends are separated, Curry is sucked into the crowd and finds himself confined amongst a group of Indians, and separated from his companion Pollo. Their journey unfolds through the desert of Rajasthan and the lush greenery of Kerala, where eventually Pollo and Curry reunite; however, during their separation, the two friends meet several characters who impact their stay in India and provide them with some hands-on experience of the local culture. The two boys also encounter the world of international charities where they meet Chiara, an Italian doctor working in a village in the Thar Desert. Meeting Chiara proves to be an important moment in the journey of the two friends; Pollo finds a Jewish district, accesses a synagogue for the first time, falls in love with Chiara, and loses his father. By experiencing love and pain through the death of his father, Pollo

soon abandons his adolescence to embrace adulthood. Likewise, Curry digs deep into his Indian origins; he finds his sister and takes her back to Rome with him. Chiara moves back to the UK to finally form a family with her husband. The journey of the protagonists proceeds not only geographically from one place to another, but also introspectively. They run away from their respective responsibilities in search of friendship, romance and family ties and, finally discovering their (renewed) identities, they spread their wings and fly back to where home is.

Flying Lessons appears to be a tribute to the arduous search for one's own identity across different generations: the parents of the two boys, Chiara, and the two protagonists are all different, and so represent multiple facets of an Italian society 'in the changing' (Laviosa 2007: 103). *Flying Lessons* employs transnational connections to articulate cross-cultural transits and passages. The film recounts the passage from adolescence to adulthood, infatuation to love, life to death, and plays liminal strategies via the narratives and cultural content within the plot. Archibugi stages the sociological and psychological mutations that characterize adolescence in this era with a high level of accuracy and sensitivity. This is combined with the eternal dilemma posed by race politics (Gilroy 1993: 59) that looks at being white or black as not only a way of marginalization and 'ghettoization' of cultures, but also as a form of dominance of one culture over another. Curry is shown to be well integrated within Italian society, converses fluently in Italian with a very strong Roman accent, and shows the perplexities and struggles of a young individual born in India and raised in Italy, who faces the complexities of embodying and belonging to multiple cultures. Archibugi's film embraces a mobilization that goes beyond national borders into geographical and cultural diversities, tapping into the complexities of human emotions.

Flying Lessons deploys some elements of ethnic realism, on which Gilroy states: ‘the resort to ethnic absolutism can only be a source of weakness in the long run. It is already a source of inertia and confusion’ (Gilroy 1993: 59). In light of Gilroy’s reflections, however, it is important to highlight that the encounter between Italianness and Indianness within the film informs a kind of ethnic confusion – and mingling – typical in the age of transnational mobilization; ethnic absolutism and specificities are abandoned for a more prismatic decoding of cultural mingling. In Curry, his Romanness (through his accent and gestures that are typical of a young man from Rome) and Indianness (Curry has Indian origins) naturally inhabit the character, living a life of estrangement and cultural disorientation. The spectrum of cultural patches that compose the complexities of the main characters is expanded into the narrative of their own journeys and the layering of new identities that composes the complexity of their existences. Curry’s journey elides the issue of singular cultural absolutism in favour of an ambiguity and cultural uncertainty as part of an unstructured community experience (Acciari 2011: 216) in which people are considered equal and share multiple experiences through the rite of passage (van Gennep 2004)¹³. The scenes in the film where Curry passes through a market and the train station in search of his lost friend Pollo are the places of passage *par excellence* within the urban space of the city. The spaces described in the films are cleared of dense cultural connotations, and provide a delicate visual pragmatism. The spaces traversed by the two protagonists appear to be transitional, faded and deprived of cultural hyperboles; the *mise en scène* seems to be in favour of spaces that have the patina of a new spatial dimension in the making: the liminal space. Laviosa reminds us that Archibugi’s work ‘transcends the local and the national as it assembles these elements in a montage of human micro-history and recomposes them as the tiles of an

Italian social and intercultural mosaic' (Laviosa 2007:108). In line with Turner's description of liminality, *Flying Lessons* appears to apply this transformative dimension of cultural ambiguity to the full breadth of the film, providing a form of visual coherence where the transitional phase becomes apparent.

Besh Korechi Prem Korechi: Is outsourcing a new form of co-production?

Besh Korechi Prem Korechi,¹⁴ a Bengali film partially produced by the Italian outsourcing agency ODU Movies, was released in 2015. The fascination of the various Indian film industries with European landscapes has a well-established history. In the past, while Britain and Switzerland held the record for being two of the most favoured Bollywood locations (Dwyer 2002) within diasporic narratives, recently, they have been increasingly giving way to mainland European UNESCO heritage sites¹⁵. These choices define narratives of geographical and cultural mobilization and tourism. Several Bollywood titles have engaged with the landscape and cityscapes of Italy, but in this instance, the film highlighted here belongs to the new generation of Bengali films. Directed by Raja Chanda, *Besh Korechi Prem Korechi* is produced by Surinder Films and Shree Venkatesh Films, along with ODU Movies.¹⁶ This film can be framed as being another tantalizing example of liminal cinema, as it embraces the new grammar of international co-productions. *Besh Korechi Prem Korechi* narrates a love story wherein the two protagonists (Koel Mallik and Jeet) are catapulted into the contemporary Italian landscape of the EXPO 2015 in Milan, where the couple dance and mingle with a local cast and the visitors of the event. ODU Movies have declared that, as well as being involved in the outsourcing of the set for the songs, they were also the executive producers of two songs amongst the array of songs present in the film and released in India in July 2015. Thus, by partially sharing the financial and

creative resources, ODU also became a co-producer of the film. Besides encouraging the international industries to utilize Italy as the set, ODU Movies acted as a cultural and entrepreneurial mediator between the needs of international industries and the regional film commissions in Italy. In its mission and commitment to engender international collaboration, ODU Movies state that: ‘there are many ways to get funds, incentives or discounts from the Public Administrations. ODU Movies will work with you to make the costs lower and the quality better’ (ODU Movies 2012). This commitment is evident in *Besh Korechi Prem Korechi*, which not only used Italian landscapes as backdrops to two of its songs in collaboration with Lombardia Film Commission and Orgoglio Brescia, but also engaged with discourses of global circulation of creativity embodied by the EXPO 2015.

Towards a (transient) conclusion

By examining the theoretical evolution and discourses on transnational and cross-over cinemas that have contributed to inform the mobility of texts and workforces in cinema, I was able to renegotiate their boundaries to explore a novel way of thinking about the transiting nature of the Indian film industry while also acknowledging an area of film studies that is in much need of research: co-productions. With this article, besides tracing a line through the historiography of Italian-Indian co-productions and co-cinematographic ventures, I wished to: contribute to the literature on co-production studies and place it firmly into the evolution of transnational cinema; and expand the current expressions on transnational cinema by focusing on the transnational flow and promoting unstructured categories of mobilization, rather than defined groupings.

By approaching the study of Italian-Indian co-productions, I was able to observe three important aspects: firstly, the necessity for inserting co-production

studies into the growing literature on transnational cinema and therefore think about co-productions as a complex form of cinematic mobilization; secondly, the need for expanding the terms of co-production procedures that include the efforts of outsourcing agencies as nodes for changing forms of international collaborations; and thirdly, the importance of starting to unthink transnational cinema in categories and instead view it as an unstructured and unpredictable phenomenon. By framing this work through Turner's approach to liminality, I was able to propose the notion of liminal cinema to address the trend of this cinema-in-motion constellated by journeys that do not need to be closeted into specific mobilization types, but rather informed through fluid trajectories. The scope was not to provide another labelling to cinema in global transit (in its multiple forms), but to urge the observation of transnational cinema as being a complex phenomenon in motion.

By commencing this study with an analysis of existing literature on transnational and crossover cinema, I was able to place my work in dialogue with the works of Bergfelder (2005), Higbee and Lim (2010), Shaw (2013), Hjort (2009), and Khorana (2014), and focus on the notion of liminal cinema in order to restore the sense of vagueness that the term transnational cinema naturally entails. This article did not intend to study the different ways in which a film production is mobilized, but instead it aimed to provide a sense of a transnational passage that informs liminal cinema. This concept embodies the various mobilizations that occur in (and out of) the filmic texts, and the ambiguities of such mobility. This ambiguity is not meant to convey a negative connotation to the filmic texts, but rather it describes the construction of a more flexible filmic space and to think about transnational cinema and co-productions as an opportunity to study the transnational-in-motion as continuous cinematic transformative spaces.

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Notes

¹ Turner considerations that build on van Gennep's notion of rite of passage, stresses the one of *communitas* in which people are equal and share a common experience, usually through a rite of passage (Turner 1994: 6).

² This aspect was highlighted during an open talk by Dr Gyorgyi Vajdovich at the University of Vienna in November 2014, within the annual meeting of the Euro-Bollywood Research Network.

³ The film *Nala Damayanti* does not have a title in English, as it is entitled after a mythological story within the Hindu epic the *Mahabharatha* attributed to Vyasa.

⁴ *Triumph of Devotion/Dhruva Charitra* (Eugenio de Liguoro, 1921) had an international cast and crew that included Patience Cooper, Master Mohan, Signora Dorros, Master Surajram, Master Manilal, P. Manelli (no full information regarding the names of these five members of the cast is available), James Magarth, Dababhai Sarkari, Aga Hashr Kashmiri and Pestonji Madan.

⁵ Puranas or Purāṇa, meaning ‘of ancient times’, are 18 collections of divine stories and religious instructions in Sanskrit within Hinduism. The Puranas eulogize several deities, but primarily the Trimurti Gods.

⁶ As part of my doctoral research, I have personally interviewed Riccardo Tozzi. For the purpose of this article, I have selected a significant part of this interview to highlight some aspects regarding the cultural complexities of co-producing between Italy and other countries.

⁷ It is known also for the less fortunate co-produced film entitled *Cheetah Girls* with Disney Pictures and directed by Paul Hoen in 2008, and the better known *The Darjeeling Limited* directed by Wes Anderson in 2007.

⁸ The film *Barah Aana* does not have an English title. Furthermore, an Aana, equal to 1/16th of a rupee, was part of the Indian monetary system until 1957 when the Indian system was decimalised, and therefore the term cannot be translated.

⁹ The Kathasarit Sàgara is an ancient Sanskrit book dated around the twelfth century that contains a series of tales written by Somadeva, Kashmiri Hindu poet of the 11th

century who preserved much of India's ancient folklore in the form of a series of tales in verse. The tales share a common characteristic with an enigma to solve at the end of the narration.

¹⁰ Kali is also known as Kalika from Bengali Kālī and Kālīkā, and from the Sanskrit word Kal which means time. She is the Hindu goddess often associated with death and destruction. Despite her negative connotation, Kālī is not the goddess of destruction but rather of time. Often Kālī is grossly mistaken to be one of the major Hindu Goddess whose iconography, cult, and mythology commonly associated her with death, sexuality, and violence and also lately associated to motherly love. Kali is normally represented in iconography in a fearsome form.

¹¹ Other members of the cast and crew of *Flying Lessons* include: Angela Finocchiaro (Annalisa), Archie Punjabi (Sharmila), along with a mixed technical cast including Francesca Archibugi (Director), Soono Deenanath Mishra (costumes) and Battista Lena (Music). The film was co-produced by: Cattleya, Khussro Films, Aquarius Film, Babe Film, and RAI Cinema, in collaboration with Cinemello s.r.l. and the support of the Torino Film Commission. The film was filmed in Delhi, Jodhpur and the Thar Desert in Rajasthan, Kerala, Mumbai and Rome.

¹² All translations from the original Italian are mine.

¹³ In the context of anthropological studies, van Gennep, describes rite of passage as a transition of individuals and cultures from one status to another within a given society (van Gennep 2004: 11).

¹⁴ The Bengali film *Besh Korechi Prem Korechi*, does not have an English title.

¹⁵ I have discussed early outcomes of an ongoing research that looks at the ways Bollywood cinema engages with UNESCO sites, at the University of Vienna in 2014, within the frame of the Research Network Euro-Bollywood.

¹⁶ ODU Movies is an outsourcing agency specialized in providing full package of services - from locations scouting, equipment, casting to logistic - for international production interested in filming in Italy.