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Images
vol. XXXVII/no. 46
Poznań 2024
ISSN 1731-450x

Practices of Co-censorship: The Bilateral Control of Italian-Yugoslavian Co-productions

Abstract. Di Chiara Francesco, Noto Paolo, *Practices of Co-censorship: The Bilateral Control of Italian-Yugoslavian Co-productions*. "Images" vol. XXXVII, no. 46. Poznań 2024. Adam Mickiewicz University Press. Pp. 25–42. ISSN 1731-450X. https://doi.org/10.14746/i.2024.37.46.2

This paper investigates the connections between the film censorship systems of Italy and Yugoslavia, two countries that in the post-war years had different political and economic structures, but were involved in frequent collaborations that were first formalized in the co-production agreements signed in 1957. The underlying hypothesis is that censorship functions as both a repressive and enabling agency, insofar as it facilitates the negotiation of cultural, industrial, and ideological issues. Archival documents preserved in Rome and Belgrade, namely those of the Direzione Generale dello Spettacolo and the Savezna Komisija za Pregled Filmova, the bodies responsible for censorship in the respective countries, are used to reconstruct the cases of film made in collaboration between Italy and Yugoslavia and that therefore passed through the control of the authorities of both countries, such as *Kapo* (Gillo Pontecorvo, 1961), *The Great War* (Mario Monicelli, 1959) and *War and Peace* (King Vidor, 1956).

Keywords: censorship, Yugoslavia, Italy, film production; runaway productions, post-war cinema, Savezna Komisija za Pregled Filmova, Direzione Generale dello Spettacolo, *Kapo*, *War and Peace*

Cinematographic co-operation between Italy and Yugoslavia began formally in 1957, when representatives of the two countries signed co-production agreements inspired by the pioneering understanding already in place between Italy and France, based on the principles of reciprocal economic contribution and acknowledgment of public benefits to national films.[1] These agreements produced meagre tangible results,[2] as only two films were officially recognized as Italian-Yugoslav productions between 1957 and 1967. Yet, according to official statistics, about fifty films were made in collaboration: they were mostly Italian productions in the sword-and-sandal and costume drama genres, realized on the borderline between formal and informal agreements that took advantage of location shooting in Yugoslavia, where production facilities were more affordable than in Western Europe, especially for films that required large amounts of extras, stage sets and herds of horses. Such film may be labelled

[1] Decreto del Presidente della Repubblica 5 March 1958 N. 463, GU Serie Generale no. 112 May 9, 1958, Gazzetta ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/1958/05/09/058U0462/sg (accessed: 29.02.2024).

[2] F. Di Chiara, P. Noto, *Timber, Horses and Dollars in Free Currency: Film Policy Cycles and the Italian Yugoslav 1957 Co-production Agreements*, "Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies" 2023, vol. 11, no. 3–4, pp. 647–666.

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as runaway productions, borrowing a term typical of the post-war film industry,[3] and the story of the cinematic co-operation between Italy and Yugoslavia fits neatly into the broader story of the relationships and networks that emerged after the Second World War between 'peripheral' film industries in response to the dominance of Hollywood.

Co-productions and censorship are strongly connected. In the post-war period in particular, international collaborations enabled European states to enhance the quality of films and compete with the Hollywood industry during a period of relative decline in the latter. The negotiation and implementation of agreements, as well as the routine management of individual projects, enforced institutional policies that translated into concrete measures of support and guidance for production. Censorship and international distribution are among the fundamental aspects of what Steve Neale defined as the institutionalization of art cinema,[4] and the sections of film bureaucracy tasked with content control were assigned an even stronger function when films were intended for distribution abroad.[5]

The subject matter of this article lies at the intersection of these two issues: censorship and international collaboration between Yugoslavia and Italy. How do the censorial institutions of these two countries operate? What role do they play in the various contexts of support and control of film production? To what extent is the relationship, or lack thereof, between them indicative of the collaborative system? We take into consideration the preemptive censorship that operates at the administrative level and addresses scripts and financing plans – therefore projects, rather than actual films – insofar as it affects the production stage, and often creates exchanges between public bodies and filmmakers.[6] Such forms of revision operated, in different ways, in both Italy and Yugoslavia.

The methodological starting point is provided by the approach defined as "new censorship,"[7] indebted to a Foucauldian and Bourdieusian conception of the cultural field and its intrinsic logic of power, and, more broadly, with the recent scholarship that takes on the productive and formative aspect of the censorial praxis.[8] This approach finds its reference point concerning cinema history in the extensive work of Annette Kuhn,[9] as well as in the explanation of the so-called "pre-

[3] See D. Steinhart, *Runaway Hollywood: Internationalizing Postwar Production and Location Shooting*, University of California Press, Berkley 2019.
[4] S. Neale, *Art Cinema as an Institution*, "Screen" 1981, vol. 22, no. 1, pp. 11–40.
[5] F. Di Chiara, P. Noto, *Realism Across Borders: The Role of State Institutions in Making Italian Neo-Realist Film Transnational*, [in:] *Landscapes of Realism: Rethinking Literary Realism in Comparative Perspectives*, vol. 1: *Mapping Realism*, eds. D. Göttsche, R. Mucignat, R. Weninger, John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam 2021.
[6] For a different take on the Italian case that encompasses the different institutional levels and considers films both at pre- and post-production stage, see T. Subini, *La via italiana alla pornografia*, Le Monnier, Milano 2022.
[7] See B. Müller, *Censorship and Cultural Regulation: Mapping the Territory*, [in:] *Censorship & Cultural Regulation in the Modern Age*, ed. B. Müller, Rodopi, Amsterdam and New York 2004, p. 5.
[8] See R. Darnton, *Censors at Work: How States Shaped Literature*, W.W. Norton, New York 2014.

code cinema", provided by Richard Maltby,[10] and regards censorship not only as a device for repressing free speech but also as a complex system for allowing content within the public sphere. In this sense, it considers the differences between democratic and authoritarian states to be incidental rather than substantive. For these reasons, we do not focus primarily on the outcomes of censorship (bans, requests for changes to texts, approvals) but on the negotiations that occur between the stakeholders involved in the realization of films, which can be retraced through documents produced by the controlling institutions. In examining these materials, we use a bottom-up approach to reconstruct the implementation phase of both co-production agreements and censorial procedures. Contrary to top-down perspectives, which view implementation as a hierarchical process where lower levels of governance execute policies determined at higher levels, bottom-up theories consider any deviation from the intended goals as not solely attributed to errors in policy formulation or execution. Instead, the analysis, as elucidated by Elmore's concept of "backward mapping,"[11] commences from the grassroots level, involving what Lipsky refers to as "street-level bureaucracy."[12] Censors, like any other bureaucrats, when encountering challenges in executing policies, engage in problem-solving by negotiating with other functionaries or social actors involved. This establishes shared work routines that retrospectively may influence policy formulation, as we can see from the documents produced by two relevant public bodies, the Italian Direzione Generale dello Spettacolo and the Yugoslav Savezna Komisija za Pregled Filmova.

Censorship in the Italian Film Industry: The Role of the Direzione Generale dello Spettacolo

The Italian Direzione Generale dello Spettacolo (Directorate-General for Entertainment, henceforth: DGS) was not a censorship body in the strict sense; from its re-organization in 1948 it depended on the Undersecretary of State for the Presidency of the Council of Ministers (in 1959 the related competences were moved to the Ministry of Tourism and Entertainment) and was responsible for carrying out public policies regarding cinema and theatre. In doing so, the DGS continued the tasks of the similarly named Direzione Generale per la Cinematografia that operated under fascism. This continuity has often led historians to consider the DGS to be an instrument of ideological interference by the conservative and Catholic Democrazia Cristiana party (Christian Democracy) – that ruled the country from the 1948 until the early 1990s – in the film industry.[13] In fact, despite its unde-

[9] A. Kuhn, *Cinema, Censorship and Sexuality, 1909–1925*, Routledge, London and New York 1988.
[10] R. Maltby, *More Sinned Against than Sinning: The Fabrications of "Pre-Code Cinema"*, "Senses of Cinema" 2003, vol. 29 (www.sensesofcinema.com).
[11] R.F. Elmore, *Backward Mapping: Implementation Research and Policy Decisions*, "Political Science Quarterly" 1980, vol. 94, no. 4, pp. 601–616.
[12] M. Lipsky, *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*, Russell Sage Foundation, New York 2010.
[13] See, for instance, L. Quaglietti, *Storia economico-politica del cinema italiano. Dal 1945 al 1980*, Editori Riuniti, Roma 1980 and M. Argentieri, *La censura nel cinema italiano*, Editori Riuniti, Roma 1974.

niable dependence on the government, the role of the DGS was much more complex.

In managing Italy's system of state aid, which included mandatory screenings for national films, tax rebates and soft loans, the DGS acted as a gatekeeper, but also as the centre of a "neo-corporatist" system in which conflicting interests (those of producers, distributors, exhibitors, workers, other sectors of the state bureaucracy, external pressure groups, etc.) were all incorporated into the formulation and implementation of public policy.[14] Also, the DGS maintained relations with foreign film industries, since it was responsible for signing co-production agreements with other film industries and managing their implementation within the framework of joint commissions. The main instrument of political and financial control exercised by the DGS was the "revisione preventiva" (eng. "preventive revision"), a preliminary examination of the film script and financial plan that was mandatory for access to state benefits. This was carried out by anonymous reviewers, who pointed out both politically and morally controversial elements, as well as potential issues from a financial point of view. As for content control, the DGS followed a model established by fascist bureaucracy, and inspired by the Production Code Administration:[15] it took over most of the preliminary work, leaving it to the censorship commissions to finally grant permission to show films made on the basis of a screenplay that had been approved.

The examination carried out by the DGS rarely resulted in a total refusal, but more often led to a negotiation with the producers with the aim of suppressing inconvenient content. Besides its repressive function, the DGS also interacted with bodies such as the Ministry of Foreign Trade, which was responsible for approving co-production contracts and authorising the use of hard currency to import technical equipment and recruit foreign personnel. In doing so, the DGS often lobbied in favour of film projects, in accordance with the dual function of controlling and stimulating national production assigned to it by the State. This dual function was, to a certain extent, also characteristic of the censorship bodies of a very different system, that of Yugoslavia.

Censorship in the Yugoslav Film Industry: The Role of the Savezna Komisija za Pregled Filmova

The changes undergone by Yugoslav film censorship in the post-war period are embedded in the unique industrial and institutional system of the federation. Throughout its whole existence, the Yugoslav apparatus went through several phases, which were mainly related to two phenomena: destalinization, following the withdrawal from the Cominform in 1948, with the establishment of self-management since 1950, and a general process of decentralisation that gradually affected several sectors of the Yugoslav social framework. Self-management

[14] P. Noto, *The Standard Exhibition Contracts in the Italian Film Industry: A Neo-corporatist History*, "L'avventura" 2023, no. 1 (special), pp. 73–92.

[15] V. Zagarrio, *Cinema e fascismo. Film, modelli, immaginari*, Marsilio, Venezia 2004.

swayed the newly established film industry from the already assimilated model of the state-socialist mode of production,[16] pushing it to experiment with an unprecedented system. This led from a centralized situation typical of what Goulding has called the "administrative period,"[17] in which a federal Committee for Cinematography created six major film production companies (one for each Republic) and dictated their objectives on the Soviet model, to a situation in which such production companies, following the film act enforced in 1956, were left free to plan their production strategies.

Such autonomy was facilitated by the fact that the previous centralised financing system was replaced by the Federal Film Fund, sustained by deductions from the ticket sales of foreign films, and automatically redistributed to domestic companies according to their turnover in the domestic and foreign markets.[18] Self-management was unique in post-war Europe, but this financing system bore some similarities with measures enforced in Western Europe, such as the French *avance sur recettes*[19] and the Italian compulsory loan for the dubbing of foreign films.[20] Strategic planning was carried out by the "film councils" of each company, which evaluated projects both financially and qualitatively (but also ideologically). However, despite the decision-making autonomy, it was the federal organisation Udruženje Filmskih Proizvođača Jugoslavije (Association of Film Producers of Yugoslavia, from now on: UFPJ) that collected federal funds and redistributed them to the companies.[21]

Film censorship in Yugoslavia was affected by the same conflicts between pressures for decentralisation and centripetal forces through federal institutions that characterised the film industry. According to Radina Vučetić's comprehensive study, it was also characterised by that kind of "omnicensorship"[22] typical of many Eastern European countries: a combined action of institutional censorship and "self-censorship" on the part of the artists, in a general climate of interpersonal control that Golubović called "self-managed censorship."[23] Although film, unlike other media, had had its institutional censorship since 1944, the proliferation of bodies operating at different levels maintained a climate of uncertainty between formal and informal censorship. First of all, there were forms of filtering that operated before, in parallel with and

[16] P. Szczepanik, *The State-Socialist Mode of Production and the Political History of Production Culture*, [in:] *Behind the Screen: Inside European Production Cultures*, eds. P. Szczepanik, P. Vonderau, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2013, pp. 113–134.
[17] D.J. Goulding, *Liberated Cinema: The Yugoslav Experience, 1945–2001*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1985, pp. xiv–xv, 3–7.
[18] I. Škrabalo, *101 godina filma u Hrvatskoj 1896–1997: pregled povijesti hrvatske kinematografije*, Nakladni zavod Globus, Zagreb 1998, p. 225.
[19] *Le Cinéma: une affaire d'Etat 1945–1970*, ed. D. Vezyroglou, La Documentation française, Paris 2014.
[20] M. Nicoli, *The Rise and Fall of the Italian Film Industry*, Routledge, London and New York 2016.
[21] I. Škrabalo, op. cit., pp. 225–227.
[22] R. Vučetić, *Monopol na istinu. Partija, kultura i cenzura u Srbiji šezdesetih i sedamdesetih godina XX. veka*, Clio, Beograd 2016, p. 32.
[23] Z. Golubović, *O 'samoupravnoj cenzuri'*, "Književna kritika" 1990, no. 3–4, pp. 23–24.

after the intervention of institutional censorship, such as the aforementioned "film councils" of production companies, the Federal Film Fund Council and the UFPJ, but also film festival committees and distributors.[24] Institutional censorship underwent a series of modifications too, related to the aforementioned general process of decentralisation that characterised the film industry.

Film censorship was, in fact, established before the official birth of the Yugoslav Federation, as soon as partisans and the Soviet Red Army liberated Belgrade in 1944, then in 1945 the competent board was put under the Agit-Prop commission of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. An official body called Cenzorna Komisija pri Filmskom preduzeću DFJ (Censorship Commission within the Film Society of the Democratic Federal Yugoslavia) operated from 1946 to 1949, when it was renamed Komisija za pregled filmova pri Komitetu za kinematografiju Vlade FNRJ (Film Revision Commission within the Cinematography Committee of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia) and finally Savezna Komisija za pregled filmova (Federal Film Revision Commission, henceforth: SKPF).[25] The term "revision", which replaced censorship, helps to clarify the role of this body, which exercised a form of pre-emptive censorship on film scripts. Producers were encouraged to submit scripts voluntarily. The revision process was framed as a service to producers, who paid a fee to the members of the commission. Similar to the preventive revision carried out by the DGS in Italy, this could lead to approval (in which case the approved project would theoretically be protected from further intervention, provided it followed the Commission's instructions), rejection or, more often, negotiation between the SKPF and the producers.[26] The procedure differed from the Italian context in that the project had already been examined by the production company's film council before being submitted to the board. The SKPF was thus the central node in a system characterised by overlapping functions.

The SKPF was responsible for revising all national, co-produced and foreign films circulating in the Yugoslav Federation. It retained these prerogatives until 1962, when the control of domestic films was transferred to the Republican Revision Commissions: from then until 1971, when it was abolished, the SKPF only controlled foreign films. So, when Italian and Yugoslav co-productions began, the SKPF was at its political zenith. At that time, the SKPF consisted of five members from different social backgrounds. A census of these members shows that although most of them were former partisans, there were also artists and professionals, such as directors and screenwriters, as well as prominent figures of Yugoslav culture, such as the Nobel Prize-winning writer

[24] R. Vučetić, op. cit., p. 59.
[25] Ibidem, pp. 54–55.
[26] D. Batančev, *Cenzura partizanskog vesterna* Kapetan Leši *(1960)*, "Historijski zbornik god. LXVII" 2014, no. 2, pp. 361–380.

Ivo Andrić.[27] In other words, unlike the Italian case, intellectuals and filmmakers were formally involved in film revision.

Archival documents offer a glimpse of a stable structure beyond the constantly changing composition of the commissions. Although members were convened from time to time to evaluate individual projects, official communication was usually made by a single signatory, the secretary Mladen Matić. Moreover, these documents allow us to understand that the SKPF's prerogatives went beyond the simple task of revising film projects by making it into a control body whose functions overlapped and interacted with those of apparatuses such as the Drzavni Sekretarijat za Inostrane Poslove (State Secretariat for Foreign Affairs). The documents on international cooperation[28] show how the SKPF was involved in the approval of agreements governing film relations with several countries including Austria, France, Poland, Romania, the USSR, Chile, Egypt and China. It is not immediately clear why the approval of a censorial body was necessary, especially since in at least one case – the agreements with Austria – the SKPF itself emphasises its own lack of competence.[29] Most interestingly, the SKPF was also involved in co-production agreements with Italy, although it was not officially involved in their formulation. In fact, in November 1955, the SKPF intervened on a draft, expressing concerns about issues of technical and cultural importance, such as whether it should be obligatory to mention in the credits that the film was an Italian-Yugoslav co-production, and how the revenues from third countries should be shared.[30] The Commission's reluctance to specify the role of the Yugoslav co-producer in the case of low-budget projects is particularly interesting, as it underlines the importance of national prestige for the SKPF: the Commission seemed to be aware that the agreements would lead to an intensive exploitation of Yugoslav labour, extras and landscapes by Italian runaway productions in films that often had little artistic ambition; hence the request to credit Yugoslav participation only in culturally valuable projects.

Nationalism and Contested Borders: The Case of *The Great War*

In the following sections, we will identify some defining strands in the behaviour of both censorship bodies, with regard to reciprocal co-productions and in their communication with other actors in the respective film industries. The case studies we reconstruct include examples of co-productions vetoed by the Yugoslav authorities, of the main strands of partnerships between the two film industries, of the SKPF's policy towards artistically ambitious co-productions and, finally, of a 'reworking' of co-productions as Italian runaway productions. At

[27] G. Miloradović, *Lepota pod nadzorom. Sovjetski kulturni uticaji u Jugoslaviji 1945–1955*, Institut za savremenu istoriju, Beograd 2012, pp. 280–287.
[28] Arhiv Jugoslavie, Fond: Savezna komisija za pregled filmova (from now on: SKPF) br. fonda 147, br. fascikle 44.
[29] M. Matić, *Letter to the State Secretariat for Foreign Affairs*. SKPF, br. fonda 147, br. fascikle 44, Pov. Br. 347, November 11, 1955.
[30] D. Timotijević, *Letter to the State Secretariat for Foreign Affairs*. SKPF, br. fonda 147, br. fascikle 44, Br. 12/1, December 5, 1957.

the same time, the case studies illustrate the three main issues that drive the behaviour of the censorship bodies of the two states: nationalism, cultural prestige, and territorial expenditure.

The first case, although not in chronological terms, is *The Great War* (*La grande guerra*, dir. by Mario Monicelli, 1959), an example of the internationally successful mixture of drama and comedy that would later be called 'Comedy Italian style'. The project was commenced in January 1959 by Dino De Laurentiis, a pioneer of Italo-Yugoslav cinematic cooperation, the tycoon behind high-profile costume dramas shot in the Federation such as *War and Peace* (*Guerra e pace*, King Vidor, 1955) and *The Tempest* (*La tempesta*, dir. by Alberto Lattuada, 1957). Yugoslav co-producers were probably not involved from the outset. However, in April 1959, De Laurentiis asked Italian authorities for permission to shoot part of the film in the area of the Italian-Slovenian border, and verbally informed the director-general of the DGS, De Pirro, of his intention to eventually move the shooting to Yugoslavia.[31]

The nonchalance with which De Laurentiis mentioned a practice that should have been formally authorised testifies to the credit he enjoyed with the DGS, given his production volumes and ability to attract American capital. But it also testifies to an overconfidence in the willingness of the Yugoslavs to cooperate in a film on a sensitive issue, shot in areas for which a settlement between the two countries had been reached only five years earlier with the London Memorandum. Moreover, *The Great War*, notwithstanding its anti-heroic humanism, tells the story of a war that gave Italy possession of the same contested territories. In submitting the script to the SKPF on April 27, 1959, Bosna Film, which had signed a preliminary contract with De Laurentiis Cinematografica, downplayed the content of the film, emphasising the favourable opinion of its own film workers' council and presenting the project as an important opportunity for the company.[32] On May 4, the Commission quickly rejected the project. In the minutes, not shared with Bosna, the SKPF stated that its plot was based on distinctively Italian themes, it was set in an area over which Italy had territorial claims, and its script had an unacceptable pacifist stance.[33] In addition, after revising the project, the Commission felt compelled to point out the need for a more precise formulation of the requirements and principles of co-production.

It is not possible to say whether this request was followed up. In any case, such a position clashed with the pragmatic approach that the SKPF had adopted (and will adopt) in other cases. It is probable that the Commission was put "in an awkward position," as explicitly stated in the minutes, by the leakage of details about the project in the

[31] A. De Fidio, *Note for the General Director*, May 6, 1959, Rome, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero del Turismo e dello Spettacolo, Fascicoli e copioni (from now on: ACS), CF 3001.

[32] V. Kravić, Review request for *The Great War*, April 27, 1959. SKPF, br. fonda 147, br. fascikle 50.

[33] M. Matić, *Meeting and voting minutes*, May 5, 1959. SKPF, br. fonda 147, br. fascikle 50.

Serbian newspaper "Politika." In assessing co-productions with Western countries, the Commission was in fact treading a fine line between the domestic industry's arguments, and those of public opinion regarding the unbalanced relationship with the Italian partner.[34] This example allows us to observe how the gatekeeping function of the Yugoslav film censorship was exercised not only with regard to projects, but also to the circulation of information about them, and how the SKPF worked to redefine the relationship between the two industries, avoiding both collaboration on explicitly controversial themes and their publicity in the press.

War and Peace: Turning a Blind Eye in the Name of Industrial Development

Both the representatives of Yugoslav film companies and the SKPF were aware of their domestic cinema's subordinate status to foreign film companies. This argument was regularly brought up in the reports from the film company councils and in the SPKF reviews. This subordinate position arguably stemmed from the film that posited a working formula for Italo-Yugoslav co-productions that will be replicated in the intervening years. *War and Peace* was conceived in late 1954 as a co-venture between Paramount and Italian company Ponti-De Laurentiis. Beating similar initiatives by David Selznick and Michel Todd, Paramount managed to adapt Tolstoy's novel by offering the Italian partner a USD 2,000,000 minimum guarantee (equivalent to Liras 1,250,000,000) for worldwide distribution rights (excluding Italy), and also directly paid for the contracts of director King Vidor and the many Hollywood stars involved (Audrey Hepburn and Henry Fonda among them) for an additional Lit. 700,000,000. This brought Paramount's involvement to a 75% of the total budget of Lit. 2,600,000,000. Thus, Ponti-De Laurentiis just covered the difference with a minimum guarantee of Lit. 500,000,000 from the Italian distributor. The enormous budget share allocated by Paramount made the Italian company a mere executive producer.

A few months after signing the contract with Paramount, the Italian producers began scouting for a country where they could find scenery for outdoor shooting, find low-cost labour and, above all, extras and horses for the cavalry battle scenes, similar to that of the American runaway productions in Italy. After a purported attempt in Finland, in December 1954 the producers identified the ideal setting in Yugoslavia, where they had good relations with Avala Film in Belgrade, but also with diplomats and the ministry for foreign affairs.[35] In March 1955, the project was scrutinized by the SKPF. Presented by Avala as an important financial opportunity, especially for the arrangement that provided the company with the distribution rights for the film in

[34] F. Rolandi, *L'immagine dell'Italia in Serbia (1950–1965). Dalla questione di Trieste alla cultura di massa*, "Diacronie" 2011, vol. 5, no. 1, p. 11.

[35] Anon., *Italian cinema in Belgrade*. Telespresso of the Italian Embassy in Yugoslavia to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, January 15, 1955. Rome, ACS, CF 2124.

exchange for their services, the co-production project was approved by the Commission, albeit with negative remarks related to the general ideology expressed and the overall quality of the script.

In this respect, the limited involvement of the Yugoslav film industry, which was explicitly stated in the communication between the CEO of Ponti-De Laurentiis and the DGS ("a minimal and negligible artistic and technical participation on the Yugoslav side"[36]), did not seem to be an issue for the SKPF, which, probably following a policy initiated by the ministry of foreign affairs, turned a blind eye both to the fatalist depiction of historical events, and to the limited Yugoslav involvement. Thus, the SKPF endorsed a process in which the co-producing nations played a very specific role: the US majors as financing backers and initiators, the Italian companies as executive producers, and finally, Yugoslav cinema as the provider of extras, locations, raw materials and horses needed for a strain of costume dramas: a co-production model which was to be strengthened after the 1957 bi-lateral agreements.

Problems of Cultural Prestige

This dialectic between the needs of the domestic film industry expressed by the Yugoslav film companies and the idea of cinema as a drive towards national prestige is made particularly apparent in the case of potentially more ambitious projects from a cultural standpoint. Analysing the minutes of the Commission, we can see how the SKPF was often rather indulgent towards projects of which its members speak with open contempt.

In such cases, the Commissions probably took into some account pleas formulated by the film company councils. For instance, in a letter concerning a projected adaptation of Robin Hood,[37] Triglav stressed the financial importance of this collaboration. In fact, at the time Triglav had no film in production, so taking part in such a harmless adventure film would have allowed their associate technical company Filmservis to employ studio and technicians for three months and to cover a loan for the acquisition of equipment. Ultimately, it would have brought them $400,000 in foreign currency through the provision of services.[38] Despite some remarks about the nonsensical nature of making a film with a British subject in an Italian co-production, the SKPF understood the reasons of Triglav and approved the project, with the recommendation that an internationally renowned director should direct the film.

Things were rather different, however, when film projects attained to the sphere of national art cinema, or quality cinema.[39] Between the 1950s and the 1960s, Yugoslav cinema was in the search of

[36] L. Tedeschi, *Letter to the DGS*, April 4, 1955. Rome, ACS, CF 2124.

[37] Or possibly later realized in Italy without any Yugoslav involvement as *Robin Hood e i pirati* (Giorgio Simonelli, 1960).

[38] T. Hojan, *Proposal for the approval of the script for co-produced films*. SKPF, br. fonda 147, br. fascikle 50.

[39] G. King, *Defining Quality in Cinema*, "Comunicazioni sociali" 2016, vol. 37, no. 3, pp. 351–360.

a new national aesthetic after the abandonment of the Socialist Realism model of the late 1940s,[40] and, for a few years in the late 1950s, Italian neo-realism seemed like the most viable option.[41] Unsurprisingly, many of the most ambitious projects submitted to the SKPF saw the involvement of Italian progressive intellectuals such as Gianni Puccini and Franco Solinas, and most of all, of Cesare Zavattini, a leading figure of neorealism and the teacher, at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome, of Yugoslav filmmakers Veljko Bulajić and Predrag Delibasić. In reviewing these projects, the SKPF was somewhat more cautious, seeing these films as crucial in defining the international image of Yugoslav cinema. At the same time, however, Yugoslav censors seemed unaware of how the low profile of domestic cinema was also reflected in these projects. A first example is *The Wide Blue Road* (*La grande strada azzurra*, dir. by Gillo Pontecorvo, 1957) adapted from Solinas' autobiographical novel and set in Sardinia. In his review, the literary critic Eli Finci not only emphasised the script's links with the tradition of Italian realism and impelled the SKPF to approve the project – which he did not appreciate on an aesthetic level – on the grounds of the artistic and commercial benefits that Triglav could have derived from it, but also regretted that an Italian-French-Yugoslav co-production should focus on such a specifically Italian theme and not on common problems.[42]

The limited industrial power of Yugoslav cinema made it difficult for producers to autonomously propose collaborations to the Italian partners unless horsemen were involved, as the director of the UFPJ sarcastically noted in a letter to the DGS concerning the production of an eventually unmade films, *Les avalanches arrivent*.[43] However, in the only case where there was a possibility of significant participation by the national industry, the Commission refused to proceed. In December 1957, Triglav sent for evaluation a simple treatment of a low-cost film conceived with an unidentified Italian production partner, but behind which were some young future filmmakers, Paolo and Vittorio Taviani, Valentino Orsini and Mario Volpi. The project, entitled 'Nemoguća avantura' ('Impossible Adventure'), was an adaptation of Italo Svevo's novel *Senilità*, which would have been scripted by Cesare Zavattini. Most interestingly, the contract would provide for the simultaneous production of a second film with a Yugoslavian setting, a script by local writers supervised by Zavattini, and Italian stars. This was a vague initiative on an industrial level, but not one without potential in terms

[40] J. Pavičić, *"Lemons in Siberia": A New Approach to the Study of the Yugoslav Cinema of the 1950s*, "New Review of Film and Television Studies" 2008, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 19–39.

[41] F. Di Chiara, *Looking for New Aesthetic Models through Italian-Yugoslavian Film Co-Productions: Lowbrow Neorealism in* Sand, Love and Salt, "Iluminace" 2013, vol. 25, no. 3, pp. 37–49.

[42] E. Finci, *Letter to the Savezna Komisija za pregled filmova*, March 23, 1957. SKPF, br. fonda 147, br. fascikle 49.

[43] J. Ružić, *Letter to the Italian DGS*, March 24, 1960. Rome: ACS, CF 3304.

of artistic collaboration. The SKPF nipped it in the bud, however, because of the lack of a defined script, but also because of the "risk" of a psychological drama, such was Svevo's novel, and the social dimension present in the treatment, which was considered specious. Triglav criticised the Commission's excessive caution for not being compatible with the high artistic ambitions of a low-budget film industry, where the funds for the development of scripts were plausibly raised after distributors were involved. Only seldom was the Yugoslav industry involved in solid projects, such as the aforementioned *The Wide Blue Road*, wrote Triglav director Branimir Tuma in a letter, suggesting that greater powers should be accorded to the company's film council.[44]

Commissions proved to be more indulgent in the case of more solid projects, where the involvement of famed directors and screenwriters was confirmed, even at the expense of greater margin of manoeuvre on the part of domestic producers: in reviewing Zavattini's script for *The Last Judgement* (*Il giudizio universale*, Vittorio De Sica, 1961), director Radoš Novaković expressed some concerns about the religious content of the plot, but approved the project because of the prestige of both the screenwriter and director.[45] In conclusion, the SKPF seems to have had a very cautious attitude: it often assessed aesthetic, rather than ideological elements, and ended up approving films by well-known names, even if it was not enthusiastic about the quality of the script; projects proposed by less prestigious figures were instead rejected, although domestic filmmakers may have had more room for manoeuvre in them. It is not clear whether this was due to unspecified censorship issues or rather to a contradictory relationship with the concept of quality in such diverse commissions. Despite its centrality, the SKPF does not seem to have been able to express a clear line; it could not or did not want to set up a production that would allow the national cinema to be accredited with its foreign partner.

Reframing Co-producers as Service Providers: *Kapo*

The previous examples focused on the gatekeeping role of the SKPF. In this section, we will see how diverging interests and the lack of direct dialogue between Italian DGS (as a multi-tasking body that acted as an institutional hub for film production) and SKPF (as a commission that formally limited its activity to content evaluation) led to a redefinition of relations that effectively returned to the situation before the co-production agreements were signed, cementing the role of the Yugoslav co-producers as service providers.

As we have seen, the main concern of the SKPF, at least officially, was preserving the cultural prestige of Yugoslav cinematography. In contrast, the DGS was more attentive to the question of territorial spending. When the DGS realised that the first two films produced

[44] B. Tuma, *Treatment for 'Nemoguća avantura'*, January 4, 1958. SKPF, br. fonda 147, br. fascikle 49.

[45] R. Novaković, *Letter to the Savezna Komisija za pregled filmova*, January 12, 1961. SKPF, br. fonda 147, br. fascikle 50.

under the 1957 co-production agreements, *Dubrowsky* (*Il vendicatore*, Dieterle, 1958) and *The White Warrior* (*Agi Murad il diavolo bianco*, Freda, 1959), two Italian-majority co-productions, had been shot entirely on Yugoslav territory, in October 1958 it decided to block the approval of co-productions until two Yugoslav majority films were shot entirely in Italy. This decision, which was notified to ANICA, the trade association of Italian producers, and to UFPJ, reflects one of the mandates of the DGS, which mediated in conflicts between domestic industry players. In this case the DGS had to negotiate between the interests of Italian producers, who aimed to reduce costs by filming in Yugoslavia, and those of service providers (especially studios) and workers, who were worried about the loss of production due to the shooting in a foreign country. One of the first projects to be affected by the new line dictated by the DGS was *Kapo* (*Kapò*, dir. by Gillo Pontecorvo, 1961). It was an ambitious film about the Holocaust and the result of a considerable production effort involving three Italian production companies (Vides, Zebra and Cineriz) and directed by Gillo Pontecorvo, who had shot his debut film, *The Wide Blue Road*, in Slovenia. *Kapo*'s project was presented by the co-producer Lovćen Film Council as an important ideological opportunity. After noting that one film made by the Italian partner Vides had won several prizes at the Venice Film Festival, producer Sonja Perović explicitly stated that the owner of the company, Franco Cristaldi, was an anti-fascist and that the director Pontecorvo, who had also been praised by Vittorio De Sica for his style, was a member of the Italian Communist Party.[46] These arguments persuaded the SKPF, as the project was soon approved. In fact, Holocaust-themed *Deveti Krug* (*The Ninth Circle*, dir. by France Štiglic, 1960) was screened at Cannes and nominated for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film and was one of the most popular Yugoslav films of the early 1960s. Yugoslavia's participation in *Kapo* as an official co-producer was soon questioned by the Italian authorities, as it violated the recent resolution suspending co-productions to be shot on Yugoslav territory. Nevertheless, this did not mean the end of the Yugoslav involvement: the project was reworked as an Italo-French co-production and, following a direct suggestion of one of the DGS functionaries responsible for foreign relations,[47] Lovćen was again relegated to the role of service provider.

On the part of the Italian authorities, this guaranteed that at least the bulk of the interior shooting would have happened in Italian studios, while a co-production contract would have justified a much higher number of working days in Yugoslavia. By acting as gatekeeper in the enforcement of contracts, the DGS strengthened its role as a regulatory force in internal relations, within the Italian market, and between the

[46] S. Perović, *Letter to the Federal Censorship Commission*, January 8, 1960. SKPF, br. fonda 147, br. fascikle 50.

[47] B. Orta, *Handwritten note*, March 31, 1960. Rome: ACS, CF 3275.

Italian and other film industries, thus enabling national producers to contain production costs at virtually no cost to Italian facility providers. For the Yugoslav authorities, on the other hand, this was a serious loss, especially in terms of prestige, since, although nothing changed financially – Lovćen was still paid for its services – a potentially high-level artistic and ideological collaboration would be downgraded. It was the UFPJ that protested vehemently against this decision in a series of letters and telegrams sent between April and June 1960. In fact, it was this body that, according to article 11 of the co-production contracts, was in charge of giving the Yugoslav companies, along with the internal Film Councils and the SKPF, and authorised to carry out the co-production contracts. The UFPJ repeatedly asked for authorisation to implement the co-production contracts between Lovćen and Italian co-producers and requested a meeting of the joint commissions responsible for verifying the implementation of the agreements, a request which was rejected by the DGS "due to prior unavoidable commitments."[48]

In this affair, the UPFJ showed a fragility that it had already demonstrated in November 1958 when, in response to the DGS letter sanctioning the freezing of co-production agreements, Secretary General Jovan Ružić declared that he had no power to influence "the definition of the proportions in the contributions of the Yugoslav co-producers, since they enjoy complete freedom to decide what and how many obligations they will assume by concluding contracts within the framework of the general regulations."[49] This episode marks an irreconcilable difference and impossibility of dialogue between the institutions of the two national systems. The DGS, which combined the functions of gatekeeper, industry enabler and mediator with international actors, was confronted with the fragmented Yugoslav system, where the various functions were divided between an institution in charge of censorship control (the SKPF), with which the DGS had no direct communication, and what presented itself as a trade association rather than a control body (the UPFJ). As a result, the DGS acted alone, relegating the Yugoslav co-producer to a subordinate role that was risk-free and therefore acceptable for the SKPF. In the dozens of co-productions that the two film industries made before the end of the 1960s, Yugoslav co-producers thus continued to act as service providers.

Conclusions

The conclusions of this article are somewhat negative. We would expect that, particularly during the initial phase of agreements and the early implementation of co-productions, the two systems would mutually influence each other, and that the discussion on film content – within the realm of competence, albeit to varying degrees, of the two entities under examination here – would lead to an alignment

[48] N. De Pirro, *Telegram to the Association of Yugoslav Film Producers*, July 14, 1960. Rome: ACS, CF 3275.

[49] J. Ružić, *Letter to the Italian DGS*, November 21, 1958. Rome: ACS, CF 3275.

of their standard routines. The working hypothesis was formulated by analogy to the institutional isomorphism[50] which was observed, in the post-war period, in decision-making processes and internal organization between the Italian DGS and the French Centre National de la Cinématographie or the Spanish Dirección General de Cinematografía y Teatro, to cite two examples of countries that collaborated closely with Italy during those years.

However, each of the two systems, in Italy and Yugoslavia, operated independently; interactions between the DGS and SKPF (as well as UPFJ) were minimal. It can be argued that the agreements were in fact created to facilitate dialogue among producers that was already underway, and, with respect to which the two institutions simply provided corrections, with a focus more on internal stakeholders – particularly those producers who showed excessive autonomy in relation to the established guidelines.

Nevertheless, the limited interactions do not necessarily imply that this observation fails to yield interesting results from the perspective of a comparative study of the two censorship systems. Although it is not possible to infer a theory of cross-border censorship from our case studies, there are practices and routines that one can reconstruct by observing the relationship between co-production and censorship. Broadly speaking, international cooperation, analysed on a case-by-case basis, tends to intensify the relationship between national censorship institutions and other domestic stakeholders, rather than leading to common practices with international partners. The most evident result pertains to the ongoing transgression of the nominal tasks assigned to both bureaucratic bodies: content control is a defining (and in the Yugoslav case, predominant) aspect of their activity, but by no means the sole one. Censorship, as understood by the DGS and SKPF, implies a broader operation of "quality assurance" over films, encompassing aspects related to ideology and morality, as well as those tied to production and industrial propriety. It is evident from the examples provided that these aspects may conflict with each other, rendering no prefabricated solutions applicable. Instead, case-by-case indications are necessary, which under certain conditions may translate into policy reformulations.

From this perspective, and here is a second issue that connects Italian and Yugoslav bodies, the theme of quality appears to be more than a pretext for masking ideological and moral repression; rather, it serves as a key value guiding the intervention of censors who, due to generational and cultural reasons, possess a taste and conception of the role of cinema (and popular culture in general) that are rather traditional. For them, decorum, sobriety, plausibility, and the ability to uphold national prestige are indispensable elements that must be taken

[50] P.J. DiMaggio, W.W. Powell, *The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields*, "American Sociological Review" 1983, vol. 48, no. 2, pp. 147–160.

into account, sometimes even to the detriment of promising industrial and commercial prospects; hence the conflicts with production needs.

This leads to a final and – given the provisional nature of these archival insights – tentative conclusion that once again links the censorial bodies across the Adriatic Sea. As Ana Hofman has noted about ideological control over Yugoslav folk music, as long as censorship is mainly understood as a regulatory practice of authoritarian states carried out by censorial institutions, it is customary to assume that the censored person – namely, the artist – is a passive object, while the censors hold the active power to repress statements and expressions.[51] What we have seen, in line with Hofman's findings, but also with what Darnton writes about book censorship in the DDR (to mention another case of a socialist state), is that such positions are to some extent reversible and that, because of the authority they hold and the taste they embody, censors sometimes prohibit, but just as often suggest, arrange, rewrite, both in a socialist and authoritarian context like that of Yugoslavia, and in a democratic and paternalistic context like that of Italy. In a word: they co-create. At the same time, the controlled and censored subjects, albeit within the limits imposed by contingent conditions, take initiatives, speak up and propose solutions. Only a deeper knowledge of production files, starting hopefully from those of the UFPJ (provided they are accessible), as well as a wider exploration of the arena where the public opinion emerges, may help us refine and possibly reframe such arguments.

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[51] A. Hofman, *Ko se boji* šunda *još? Muzicka cenzura u Jugoslaviji*, [in:] *Socijalizam na klupi: Jugoslovensko društvo očima nove postjugoslavenske humanistike*, eds. L. Duraković, A. Matošević, Srednja Evropa, Pula Zagreb 2013, pp. 282–286.

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