In compartecipazione. Italian and Algerian Films in the 1960s[1]

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This paper focuses on a handful of films made between Italy and Algeria in the late 1960s. I analyse the trajectory from political and militant interactions—Ennio Lorenzini's *Le Mains libres* and Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers*, *La Battaglia di Algeri*, both produced in Algeria by the Casbah film—to more strictly industrial and financial preoccupations which we can trace in a heterogenous group of films: Luchino Visconti's *The Stranger* (*Lo straniero*, 1967), an adaptation of Camus's book of the same title; Sergio Spina's *The Golden Donkey* (*L'asino d'oro: processo per fatti strani contro Lucius Apuleius cittadino romano*, 1970), based on Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*; Mario Monicelli's comedy *Brancaleone at the Crusades* (*Brancaleone alle crociate*, 1970), and Enzo Peri's Spaghetti Western *Death Walks in Laredo* (*Tre pistole contro Cesare*, 1967). Combining an archival, historical, and cultural approach with a consideration of the business models involved, I discuss why these Italian directors and producers went to Algeria, what kind of collaborations were in place, and what were the long-lasting effects of these productions.

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"Bienvenue à Alger à Luchino Visconti pour le tournage de 'L'Etranger'":[1] Algerians read this headline on page 6 in the 19 October 1966 issue of the national newspaper *El Moudjahid* (Hennebelle 1966, now in Layerle 2018, 163).[2]

1 I presented this paper, in different forms, in a PhD seminar at La Sapienza, University of Rome in March 2025 and at the University of Texas at Austin in April 2025: thanks for the invitations to Damiano Garofalo, Claudia Pisano, Paola Bonifazio, and thanks to all the participants of the two events for the excellent questions. Thanks also to Ahmed Bedjaoui, Valentina Carola, Leonardo De Franceschi, Valerio Coladonato, Nabil Djedouani, Luana Fedele, Zineb Sedira.

2 The article is anonymous, but written by the French film critic Guy Hennebelle,

As the article makes clear, the Italian director arrived in the Algerian capital to shoot *The Stranger* (*Lo straniero,* 1967), based on Albert Camus' book *L'Étranger*, and set precisely in Algeria, where the writer was born and lived for a long time (Camus 1988; Kaplan 2016). At the time, sixty-year-old Visconti had already shot eight feature-length films, several documentaries, short films, and episodes in collective films: he arrived in Algiers with the aura of a "great director" and therefore, Hennebelle wrote, "we welcome him, and we wait impatiently and curiously for his adaptation of Camus' work. But we are perfectly tranquil, as we know his immense talent" (Hennebelle 1966, now in Layerle 2018, 163).[3] The seasoned Italian director arrived in a city that was not new to Italian cinema: in September of that year, among the few non-French and non-Hollywood films that the inhabitants of Algiers could watch in cinemas, there were Italian films like *L'avventura* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1960) and Visconti's own (*The Leopard*, *Il gattopardo,* 1963) as we learn thanks to the advertisements for the films in different *El Moudjahid* issues. Several arthouse Italian films were also distributed in post-independent Algeria, where Neorealist cinema was an important point of reference, discussed in publications and events—like a special screening of *Rome, Open City* (*Roma città aperta*, Roberto Rossellini, 1945) in December 1965, where the film is praised as a model (EM 1965, 6). At the end of October 1966, one of the most anticipated films in the recently independent Algeria opened in as many as three cinemas of the capital: *The Battle of Algiers* (*La battaglia di Algeri,* Gillo Pontecorvo, 1966), having recently won the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival, could be seen at the Marignan, the Roxy, and the iconic L'Afrique—where another Algerian film directed by an Italian, *Les Mains libres* (Ennio Lorenzini, 1965), had premiered the year before (Peretti 2022). Algerians knew about the film, which was produced by one of the heroes of the struggle for independence ("produit par Saadi Yacef", as the newspaper advertisement mentioned), which was highly anticipated in *El Moudjahid* with several reports and whose filming, in the second half of 1965, mobilised half of the city (Forgacs 2007). Later in the 1960s, the Algerian audiences would also be increasingly exposed to Italian genre films, westerns and much more, as the long-forgotten film *November* (1971, sponsored by the ruling party FLN) would later illustrate in a sequence with Algerian filmgoers watching spaghetti westerns.[4]

From this brief information it should already be clear how Italy and Algeria enjoyed a privileged cinematographic relationship; one that, however, has hitherto been little analysed. Whilst distribution and critical discourses on these films and in general on the filmic interactions between the two countries de-

who was in charge of the cinema page of the Algerian newspaper (Layerle 2018, 153–165).

3 Unless otherwise noted, all translations are the author's responsibility.

4 The film, preserved at the Archivio Audiovisivo del Movimento Operaio e Democratico in Rome, has been screened publicly only once and, at the time of the writing of this essay, still awaits a new life.

serve further analysis, in this paper I will focus on the making of a group of Algerian and Italian films, all made after the most known and studied one, *The Battle of Algiers.* In fact, after Visconti (and of course after Lorenzini and Pontecorvo) other Italian directors made the trip across the Mediterranean Sea: Sergio Spina, to shoot the peplum *The Golden Donkey* (*L'asino d'oro: processo per fatti strani contro Lucius Apuleius cittadino romano*, 1970, henceforth *L'asino d'oro*), based on Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*; Mario Monicelli, who filmed in Algeria several scenes of the second instalment of the Brancaleone saga, *Brancaleone at the Crusades* (*Brancaleone alle crociate* aka *For Love and Gold*, 1970, henceforth *Brancaleone*), and Enzo Peri, who filmed in the North African country the only spaghetti western ever made in Africa, *Death Walks in Laredo* (*Tre pistole contro Cesare*, 1967, henceforth *Tre pistole*). Combining an archival, historical, and cultural approach with a consideration of the business models involved, I will discuss why these directors and producers went to Algeria, what kind of collaborations were in place, and what were (and are) the long-lasting effects of these productions.

COPRODUCTIONS AND *COMPARTECIPAZIONI*

In the 1960s Italian cinema was booming. A 1962 newsreel about the opening of the De Laurentiis studios in Rome optimistically noted "Hollywood is known to be in decline, and Rome can rightly take the leadership in the world of cinema. With the studios under construction, all the pieces are now in place for this succession" (CIAC 1962). If perhaps the emphatic newsreel voice-over was exaggerating, it is true that in terms of quality and quantity Italian cinema was second only to Hollywood. This is reflected in the value of coproduction and the span of filming abroad that Italian cinema enjoyed at the time. Leonardo De Franceschi calculated that during the so-called golden era of Italian cinema, from the end of World War II to the 1970s, as many as 209 Italian films were partially or completely filmed in Africa—more than French, British or US American films from the same period (De Franceschi 2024, 12). It is a stunning number that certainly speaks to the Italian abilities to collaborate with different national cinemas and to seek profitable markets and production opportunities, but also to the role that Italy had in the Mediterranean basin and in Africa more in general (Borruso 2024). Eight of these films were filmed in Algeria, either by Italian productions or Algerian-Italian joint productions or even Algerian-Italian-French productions. Some of these films were made before the independence, as the relationship between Italian cinema and Algeria was one with roots in the past (De Franceschi 2024); furthermore, during the liberation war some of the early Algerian newsreels and militant films were developed in Italy, particularly at the Microstampa Laboratory in Rome (Bedjaoui 2020), possibly with the intercession of the same Sergio Spina who, during the 1960s, would entertain privileged relationships with Algeria (Peretti 2023b, 66–67). These interactions and relationships made the making of *The Battle of Algiers* possible:

as producer and guerrilla fighter Yacef Saadi noted, Algerians were strongly influenced by Neorealism, they recognised a Mediterranean kinship with Italians, and this film could not be done in France, and he therefore looked at Italy (Forgacs 2007). Gillo Pontecorvo and writer Franco Solinas were also planning a film on Algeria, *Parà,* and from this serendipitous or "fortunate encounter" (Forgacs 2007, 363) one of the most important political films in history was made. What interests me here is understanding the production model they employed, and how the making of this film helped make other Algerian and Italian films possible. After being rejected by several Italian producers, Pontecorvo created a small company with a trustworthy production manager he worked with, Antonio Musu: the Igor Film, named after Igor Stravinsky, a composer they were both passionate about. He partnered with Casbah Film, created by Saadi Yacef in the immediate post-war Algeria, with the aim to make a film on the struggle for Liberation, that is to continue the struggle with other weapons (Peretti 2023a). A similar model followed for two more films that I analyse here, *The Stranger* and *Tre pistole*, both produced by Casbah Film with an Italian company, or by one Italian and one French. For the other films, it is not Casbah Film that partners with Italian firms but the Algerian cinema office, the ONCIC (Office National pour le Commerce et l'Industrie Cinématographique), created in the second half of the 1960s, during a period of drastic reorganisation and centralisation of Algerian film institutions, as with many other aspects of post-independence Algeria. Understanding how these productions came to be, from the Italian side, is relatively easy, as they employed similar production models of other international coproductions—when official agreements were signed—or *compartecipazioni*, as the collaborations with countries without treaties were called (Nicoli 2017; Di Chiara 2023).[5] Furthermore, part of the production material for these films is readily available at the Archivio Centrale dello Stato (State Central Archive, ACS): as Di Chiara and Noto explained,

> The Italian state was involved in virtually every aspect of the post-war film industry—from financing to studio management, production and film distribution—either through publicly owned or controlled companies. The combined provisions of the laws and rules enforced by the state in the post-war years made the Directorate-General for Entertainment (Direzione Generale dello Spettacolo, DGS) a bureaucratic hub to which requests for such diverse matters as funding, censorship visas, labour controversies and currency transactions were addressed. More specifically, requests submitted by producers for the recognition of the nationality of films [the *certificato di italianità*], which in turn allowed access to soft loans provided by the state-controlled Banca Nazionale del Lavoro, were organised in files (one for each project submitted to the DGS) that are now kept at the Archivio Centrale dello Stato ('State Central Archive') (ACS). This archive contains evidence of the day-to-day mediation and negotiation between the industrial stakeholders carried out by the DGS, and it is a major primary source in our research (Di Chiara and Noto 2023, 648).

5 I will use the Italian term throughout the paper for lack of a better English corresponding term.

The documents kept at the ACS show how the Italian film industry interacted with the Italian state. The newly independent Algerian nation inherited from colonialism a wealth of functioning cinemas (Bedjaoui 2020; Sadoul 1966; Tenfiche 2020a, Tenfiche 2020b) and a solid film culture (Peretti 2023b, 57), but as in the other French colonies in Africa, no production companies, no film laboratories, i.e., no possibility of making films with foreign help and collaborations. In the first ten years after independence twenty something feature-length films were produced, whilst sectors of the film industry were reorganised and nationalised (Austin 2012; Cheurfi 2013; Bedjaoui 2020). Given the limited access to Algerian archives, understanding precisely the production patterns of these films remains a hard task. What can be said, and that helps understand the relationships with Italian cinema, is that the first years of Algerian cinema are dominated by a combination of state intervention and spontaneity, and that in the second half of the 1960s the entire film sector is centralised and nationalised, ending—in the words of Hala Salmane—a period of "confusion and rivalry" (1976, 20). The regime of monopoly was installed with the creation of the ONCIC. As Italy never signed an official coproduction agreement with Algeria—unlike with France, Spain, and other countries (Nicoli 2017, 174)—these productions were on a one-to-one basis and not part of wider agreements.

FROM POLITICAL TO BUSINESS-ORIENTATED INTERACTIONS

After independence Algeria became a meeting place for militants and revolutionaries, a country that peoples struggling for their independence looked at for inspiration, and one where guerrilla organizations, like the Mozambican FRELIMO or the US American Black Panthers, could establish offices. It became, to use a known formula, the Mecca of the revolution, or the capital of the Third World (Prashad 2007, 119–33; Byrne 2016; Simon 2009). *The Battle of Algiers,* not incidentally one of the films routinely screened at their events precisely by the Black Panthers, helped putting Algiers on the political map of the world—as Bedjaoui wrote, "the film by Gillo Pontecorvo has done much to promote the image of Algeria and its liberation war throughout the world" (Bedjaoui 2020, 78–79). And cinema continued to play a part in Third-Worldist and internationalist Algeria, whether to witness and recount what was taking place in the country—such in the case of the films shot by the US American William Klein, *Festival panafricain d'Alger 1969* (1969) and *Eldridge Cleaver, Black Panther* (1970)—or as a location: it is in fact in Algiers (with the help of the Algerian government and the involvement of the ONCIC) that Costa-Gavras shot *Z* (1969), one of the most important political films of all times. Among others, Italian popular actor Renato Salvatori stars in the film.

The Algerian and Italian films of the second half of the 1960s apparently tell another story, one that moves from militant and political motives to more strictly industrial and financial preoccupations, with the aim to exploit cheap locations and extras. They seem to comply with a fairly common coproduction model that

existed at the time in Italy, a model which has been aptly described by Francesco Di Chiara and Paolo Noto (2023) for the Italian-Yugoslavian coproductions—where a formal agreement was in place, unlike the Italian-Algerian productions. In other words, these films seem to run parallel to the political films of Costa-Gavras or Klein, yet still participating in the creation of the "archives of specific places" (Gorfinkel and Rhodes 2011, xi), the specific places being in this instance the Algerian cities, deserts, countryside. These films also participate not only in the history of Italian cinema (perhaps a minor and neglected chapter of it) but also and more predominantly in the history of Algerian cinema.

After the political films produced by Casbah Film, that is *Les Mains libres* and of course *The Battle of Algiers,* the first film to be produced across the two countries is *Tre pistole*. According to its screenwriter, Piero Regnoli, the film was "ahead of its time" (Regnoli in Faldini and Fofi 2009, 397) as it pioneered the spaghetti westerns—albeit following the "official" pioneers of the tradition (*filone)*, Sergio Corbucci's *Django* (1966) and Sergio Leone's *A Fistful of Dollars* (*Per un pugno di dollari*, 1964) (Fisher 2011; Frayling 2006; Totaro 2011). More importantly, Regnoli also briefly explained why the film was filmed in Algeria:

> The film was made in Algeria because Gillo Pontecorvo had just finished shooting *La battaglia di Algeri* there, and Visconti was going to shoot *Lo straniero* there a few months later. Thus Dino De Laurentiis, who had met the general manager of Casbah Film in Algeria [probably Yacef Saadi], wanted to test the organisational skills of the Algerians before sending Visconti's crew there. Therefore, he sent us ahead with this western. We managed to shoot it by turning the cowboys into Mexicans because the faces of the Algerian extras obviously couldn't look North American (Regnoli as quoted in Faldini and Fofi 2009, 397–398).

Tre pistole contro Cesare, whose working title was *I tre ragazzi d'oro*, presented the typical elements of the genre but, as the general inspector of the DGS recognised, "more cosmopolitan… as the three heroes of the film, even if they are brothers, present very different genotypical types, one 'yankee', one French and one Japanese".[6] It was filmed in the De Laurentiis studios in Rome (27 June–13 July, and 22 August–10 September) and in Algeria (16 July–19 August) that is, as attested from a production document dated 20 June 1967, 30 days in Italy and 27 in Algeria.[7] In North Africa, two locations were involved in the making of the film: Algiers, in the second half, and before that the film was shot in the oasis of Bou Saâda, a city nicknamed the "door of the desert" precisely for its proximity to the desert and one that is not new to foreign productions. Thanks to its climate and different landscapes, the city became in fact an important location, referred even, with a certain emphasis, as the *Hollywood algérienne* (Boukhakf 2023). Among others,

6 L'Ispettore generale, "I tre ragazzi d'oro", 7/6/1966, in Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero del Turismo e dello Spettacolo, Direzione Generale Cinema, Tre pistole contro Cesare, CO 34

7 Dino de Laurentis Cinematografica to Ministero del Turismo e dello Spettacolo, 20/6/1967, in Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero del Turismo e dello Spettacolo, Direzione Generale Cinema, Tre pistole contro Cesare, CO 34

Cecil B. DeMille shot there *Samson and Delilah* (1949). According to the documents at ACS, the reasoning for filming in Algeria, besides the "reasons inherent to the *compartecipazione*" was precisely because the landscapes could resemble Texas, where the story was set—"motivi di ambientazione (zone simili al Texas)".[8] The film qualifies as Italian, according to the law of the time, and produced by Dino De Laurentiis Cinematografica *in compartecipazione* with Casbah Film (30%)—the initial proposal from June 1966 was 50%–50%. As is customary, the Italian side would enjoy the distribution rights in Italy and some of its former colonies, plus Spain and its territories, whilst the Algerian partner would have rights in France, its territories, and some of the former colonies. Less typically, instead of 30% (that is, the production quota), Casbah Film would have gained 50% from the rest of the world, something that the inspector, in his notes from 7 June 1966, found problematic.

Two preliminary conclusions can be drawn from the study of the production model of *Tre pistole:* first that, as Regnoli noted, De Laurentiis was trying out different potential avenues, locations, possible collaborations, as he did in other countries in those years; second, as De Franceschi argued (2024, 170), the documents preserved at the ACS omit the participation of Algerian cast and crew, or minimise them. There is a precise reason, in this case and the next films as well, that is because in order to receive the certificate of Italian nationality, the overwhelming majority of the people working on the film needed to be Italian. To understand who, from the Algerian side, participated in the film we are aided by Algerian sources, and particularly the two volumes promoted by the Algerian Minister of culture (Ministère de l'Information et de la Culture 1974; Aissaoui 1984). In the case of this film, one example will suffice, that is the involvement of Moussa Haddad in the making of the film. One of the legendary figures of Algerian cinema, he worked on the set of *The Battle of Algiers* and *The Stranger* and would later direct films of his own (among others, *Les Vacances de l'inspecteur Tahar*, 1972). In the Italian documents, his name is never mentioned; in the Algerian sources, he was unequivocally credited as co-director of the film, as in Cheurfi (2013, 312 and 611). Given what I have noted about the partiality of the Italian documents, one may be tempted to state that Moussa Haddad was indeed, as the two catalogues argued, the co-director of the film; but it is equally important to note how these two catalogues are far from error-free, given that, for example, they credited actor Enrico Maria Salerno as author of the screenplay, which is surely incorrect. At this stage, it is impossible to determine the precise involvement of Moussa Haddad in this film.

We have several pieces of information and documentation on the making of *The Stranger,* which was long and complex, and saw the participation—in the span of a few years—of different agencies, individuals, even political forces (De Franceschi 1999; De Franceschi 2024, 173–174). The project started probably in the early 1960s, long before the beginning of Algerian-Italian collaborations. Reading Luchino Visconti's letters, one can learn about the long

8 L'Ispettore generale, "I tre ragazzi d'oro", 7/6/1966, in Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero del Turismo e dello Spettacolo, Direzione Generale Cinema, Tre pistole contro Cesare, CO 34

evolution of the process of writing the screenplay, with the direct involvement of Camus's widow, Francine.[9] The initial project saw Alain Delon as a main actor with the participation of the French company Les Nouveaux Mondes, as a letter from ANICA (Associazione nazionale industrie cinematografiche e affini), the Italian film trade association, to the Ministero del Turismo e dello Spettacolo (Minister for Tourism and Show Business, MTS) attests.[10] The film was a major production, with De Laurentiis partnering again with Casbah Film but also with another Italian company (the Master Film, partially financed by lead actor Marcello Mastroianni) and in coproduction with the French Marianne Production. Differently from *Tre pistole,* Visconti's film is indeed an official coproduction, following the agreements signed in December 1961 between Italy and France, as a MTS statement from 27 May 1968 clearly states.[11] From other documents, we learn that the film is 70% Italian and 30% French. It is more complicated to understand how the film qualifies as Algerian. In the budget, 400 million lire were to be given to Casbah Film for the expenses in Algeria, a huge sum, almost half of the total budget. Furthermore, the general inspector of the DGS, in a note from 6 July 1966, explained that, given that the book is set in Algeria, naturally the film would also be filmed there.[12] Therefore, we can conclude from the documentation available that the Italian 70% of the film included somehow the Algerian part.

A completely different model is employed by *Brancaleone* and *L'asino d'oro*. Both films are Italian films that use Algerian locations, and it is likely that the Italian production companies collaborated minimally with the ONCIC—but the Algerian film institute is explicitly mentioned in the credits. If the documents from the MTS tend to vigorously downplay the Algerian involvement, because the production companies needed to demonstrate that the films were 100% Italian, from the sources currently available it seems fair to say that the production model for these two films differed from the model of the direct participation of Casbah Film. In both cases, the two production companies—Filmes Cinematografica for *L'asino d'oro*, and Fair Film, owned by Mario Cecchi Gori, for *Brancaleone*—justified themselves for filming in Algeria. For example, on 30 September 1969 Filmes wrote "we will have to film in Algeria for 15 days, where there is an ancient Roman city excellently preserved, essential for the outdoor filming".[13] The shooting went on for longer, in four different locations: Djémila

9 Fondazione Antonio Gramsci, Fondo Visconti.

10 A. Valignani (Segretario Generale ANICA) to Ministero del Turismo e dello Spettacolo, 26/7/1966, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero del Turismo e dello Spettacolo, Direzione Generale Cinema, Lo Straniero, CO39.

11 Il direttore generale, Coproduzione italo-francese del film 'LO STRANIERO'. Istanza della Società Dino de Laurentiis, 10/4/1967, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero del Turismo e dello Spettacolo, Direzione Generale Cinema, Lo Straniero, CO39

12 L'Ispettore generale, "Lo straniero", 6/7/1966, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero del Turismo e dello Spettacolo, Direzione Generale Cinema, Lo Straniero, CO39

13 Filmes Cinematografica to Ministero del Turismo e dello Spettacolo, 30/9/1969, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero del Turismo e dello Spettacolo, Direzione Generale Cinema, L'Asino d'oro, CF5742.

(the said ancient Roman city), El Kantara, Biskra, and Cherchell. As for *Brancaleone,* in an interesting letter to the MTS (dated 19 November 1970), the Fair Film explained how

> as previously requested, the production of our film *Brancaleone alle crociate* required several days of filming abroad due to the specific setting of some scenes in the film, which will undoubtedly enhance its spectacular nature and allow us to promote it more effectively both in Italy and abroad. The filming abroad, specifically in Algeria, first in Ghardaïa and then in Touggourt, lasted four weeks".[14]

A detailed list of the Italian members of the cast and crew follows in the document. In another letter from mid-December, they continued:

> In the opening credits of the film, we have included the names of some Algerian technicians and actors in order to consolidate the good relations between our company and the ONCIC of Algiers, which collaborated with our crew during filming in Algeria. Therefore, it is solely for these reasons that we have chosen to mention some members of the esteemed ONCIC (Ministry of Entertainment) and not because they played a decisive role in the making of the film.[15]

This is probably an understatement, a way to reassure the MTS that the film was entirely Italian. Furthermore, it seems that no other company associated with Mario Cecchi Gori has collaborated with the ONCIC. Once again, looking at Algerian sources, we can note how the director of production of *Brancaleone* was Bachir Hanifi and that other Algerians were involved in different roles (Ministère 1974, 72; Aissaoui 1984, 98). Similarly, several Algerians were involved in the making of Spina's film, including once again Hanifi (Ministère 1974, 73; Aissaoui 1984, 88). Yet, as De Franceschi correctly noted, most of the key roles are held by Italians, to the extreme case of Dada Gallotti's *brownface* for the role of Fotide, instead of hiring an African actress (De Franceschi 2024, 202).

Then what is there of Algerian in these last two films? What do they bring to Algerian cinema or, in general, to Algerian culture? They certainly participate in that archive of specific places that Gorfinkel and Rhodes wrote about. Altered and transformed into something else (Mexico, Mediaeval Italy), the Algerian profilmic space is nonetheless there. A very variegated one: it is interesting to note in fact that these four films were filmed in a variety of places in Algeria, really exploring and exploiting several different locations. They also had a role in continuing to train Algerian cast and crew. And finally, as we have seen, they are considered part of the history of Algerian cinema.

14 Fair Film to Ministero del Turismo e dello Spettacolo, 19/11/1970, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero del Turismo e dello Spettacolo, Direzione Generale Cinema, Brancaleone alle crociate, CF5980.

15 Fair Film to Ministero del Turismo e dello Spettacolo, 15/12/1970, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero del Turismo e dello Spettacolo, Direzione Generale Cinema, Brancaleone alle crociate, CF5980

CONCLUSIONS. ALGERIAN AND ITALIAN FILMS

In this paper I have illustrated the preliminary results of the investigation on the production models of a small group of films made between Algeria and Italy in the second half of the 1960s. A small group of films that are considered part of Algerian cinema, as we have seen, despite being considered on the Italian side as solely Italian or only *in compartecipazione*. About the Italian productions with/in North Africa at the time, De Franceschi noted how

> The absence of coproduction treaties was overcome on a case-by-case basis by coproduction agreements, but these remained outside a framework of reciprocal relations and did not depart from an asymmetrical and ultimately colonial regime, since they did not provide for automatic dual nationality for films produced under coproduction agreements, nor did they in any way provide for the company or film industry of the third country involved in the agreement to acquire, so to speak, credits to be spent in the future on access to the Italian film market, for the production of films shot in Italy, with a mixed technical and artistic cast and intended for the Italian market (De Franceschi 2024, 61–62).

If we consider the matter from a purely film business side, this is certainly correct, and it remains problematic that these films are not considered "Algerian" and did not enjoy the economic advantages that they would have had if double nationality had been recognised. Still, De Franceschi noted how (in this case referring only to the relationship with Algeria), "what emerges is a relationship that, after the great potential opened up by Pontecorvo's film, never really takes off, offering some opportunities for technical staff and a few secondary actors, but without ever changing the framework of an asymmetry in the balance of power" (De Franceschi 2024, 86). What if, however, we consider the matter from a more cultural and less business-orientated point of view? And what if we try to shift the focus from the Italian sources to the Algerian ones? It is precisely what London-based Algerian-French artist Zineb Sedira did when she included the remix, re-enactment, and reuse of some of these films in her pavilion at the French Biennale 2022 (representing France). Entitled *Dreams Have No Titles* (Reggad, Bardaouil and Fellrath 2022), the pavilion used some of these films in a political way.

Whilst Pontecorvo and Lorenzini, as argued, had an immediate political approach, Sedira also looked at the films directed by Visconti and Ettore Scola's *Le Bal* (*Ballando ballando*, 1983), and more in general at the international films made in and with Algeria in the second half of the 1960s as representing "a moment of friendship and [which] created a family with intellectual, artistic and political connections" (Tapponi 2022). Furthermore, I am convinced that the inclusion of the films analysed in this paper in the history of Algerian cinema, from an official source like the catalogue of the Ministry of Culture, shows how the reality is much more complex than what emerges from the documentation produced by Italian film production companies asking for the certificate of Ital-

ian nationality to the MTS, as I hope to have demonstrated. If we look at the history of Algerian cinema, we can also note how between 1962 and 1971 only 22 feature-length films (feature documentaries included) were produced in the country, which means that around one fourth were films jointly produced or *in compartecipazione* with Italians. We can preliminarily conclude that the role that Italian cinema had in the first phase of Algerian cinema is surely more complex than that of a colonial or neocolonial exploitation.

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