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While festivals receive only a passing mention in Neale’s and Higson’s essays, their importance to the exhibition, distribution and creation of meaning for art cinema has become clearer in recent years. David Andrews (2010, pp. 7–9), explicitly builds on Neale’s argument, positing that film festivals have become “art cinema’s central institution” and “the primary mechanism through which art cinema has sustained through time the ideas of high-art value that have bound it together.” Film festivals not only maintain these ideals of high art, however; festivals have a “generative function,” producing the key terms and tropes through which art cinema comes to be defined (Andrews, 2010, p. 6).

Given their significance, it is fundamental to understand the processes by which film festivals construct art cinema. Many of the studies cited above frame these processes of construction in a way that indicates the influence of different factors—the two main ones being notions of artistic worth and potential for commercial success. These culminate to produce a homogenising definition (art cinema) for a body of films that can differ enormously in style, theme, site of production and so on. Returning to Neale (1981, p. 15), we find a thrust towards a homogenisation of meaning in the institutional construction of art cinema, in this case via auteurist conceptions of film:

Even where the marks of enunciation themselves are heterogeneous, they tend to be unified and stabilised within the space of an institution which reads and locates them in a homogeneous way (each mark serving equally as the sign of the author) and which mobilises that meaning in accordance with commodity-based practices of production, distribution and exhibition (the mark of the author is used as a kind of brand name, to mark and to sell the filmic product).

This not only occurs through festivals' preoccupation with the figure of the auteur (which I analyse in chapters 2 and 3). At the most fundamental level, film festivals should be understood as unifying and stabilising the heterogeneous production of art cinema: their construction of films entails reading "marks of enunciation"—in this case, aspects of a film text—in "a homogeneous way" and, crucially, the mobilisation of their meaning "in accordance with commodity-based practices of production, distribution and exhibition."

Meaning is mobilised in a way that serves certain interests. This is necessitated by the very structure of film festivals and their own embeddedness in geopolitical networks and flows of capital. As third-sector cultural events, film festivals rely upon a mixture of public and private investment, and their success in securing this depends upon their ability to present themselves as culturally important and commercially viable (Rhyne, 2009, p. 20). Film festivals are required to present themselves under a common identity as a "discrete cultural sector," meanwhile differentiating themselves from each other in order to attract investment from public and private organisations (Rhyne, 2009, pp. 9–10). Rhyne (2009, p. 19) underlines the relationship between film festivals and their economic functioning, arguing that, while they may appear "discursively independent," they are "financially dependent" on state, public and corporate bodies. These bodies can include ministries of culture, local authorities, and multi-national corporations. Film festivals have thus developed models for managing diverse stakeholders and, crucially, for "channeling their diverse interests towards the goals of nation-states and global capital" (Rhyne, 2009, p. 10). Yet the discursive independence to which Rhyne refers has also been questioned, with a wealth of recent scholarship demonstrating the link between festivals' promotion of certain films and their management of political and economic interests (Chan, 2011; Ahn, 2012; Cheung, 2016). Several of these studies—from Chan's (2011) "Making of a National Cinema" to Ahn's (2012) analysis of the Pusan International Film Festival—focus on individual festivals and their construction of certain national cinemas. To what extent, then, do geopolitical and commercial interests condition the construction of categories of art cinema across several festivals?

Marijke de Valck (2014) highlights the generalised flows of prestige and capital across the global network of film festivals in a way that is particularly apposite to our study of their role in the institutional construction of art cinema. Due to the increasing commercialisation of major, competitive festivals in the new millennium, cultural legitimisation is contingent upon selection committees' and juries' perceptions of not only the artistic worth



but the commercial viability of a film. De Valck (2014, p. 76) concludes that global art cinema has moved on from being a “loser takes all game” in which financial success is detrimental to a film’s symbolic success as a piece of art. Rather, a film’s chances of being selected or receiving an award at a film festival are determined as much by its expected viability in the global marketplace as its perceived artistic integrity (de Valck, 2014, p. 81). Thus, not only the selection of films, but the additional prestige afforded by awarding prizes to some films within that selection is motivated by commercial as well as aesthetic judgments. The legitimisation of some films as “art,” and therefore art cinema, is achieved through processes of selection and awarding that have become more intensely influenced by commercial interests in recent years.

## The European A Circuit

Film festivals’ practices constitute a long-standing process of contestation for the meaning(s) of art cinema. Such practices, and thus the process of contestation, are underpinned by commercial and sometimes geopolitical pressures. The influence of these factors is clearest within a particular sub-set of film festivals: the A circuit, festivals that have been accredited by FIAPF as “competitive feature film festivals”—annual, non-specialised festivals that hold an international competition, such as Cannes or Karlovy Vary (FIAPF, 2019). While film festival scholars have long manifested suspicion towards the notion of the “circuit” due to its unreflexive use to refer to *all* film festivals (Elsaesser, 2005; de Valck, 2007; Iordanova, 2009; Loist, 2016), European A festivals present several common features that justify not only their grouping as a circuit, but also their treatment as exemplary sites for the institutional construction of art cinema.

The A-list is archetypal of a festival circuit both in its organisation and its status in the imaginary of the film industry. This circuit is, in fact, the one that many scholars and industry professionals implicitly refer to when they speak of the film festival circuit in general: as Skadi Loist (2016) notes, “circuit’ is often used synonymous[ly] with the elite A-list” (p. 60). A-list festivals may also underpin the notion of the circuit itself: “as soon as FIAPF started to regulate the festivals and create the “A-list” festivals, the idea of a circuit became visible” (Loist, 2016, p. 55). Moreover, in a very practical sense, A festivals can be distinguished and grouped together due to their common subscription to the regulations that FIAPF imposes on them; their shared accreditation by FIAPF requires them to meet the federation’s “minimum

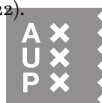


standards” of organisational infrastructure, inclusion of international premieres (at least fifteen) in each annual competition, and commitment to serving the film industry.

The features that secure such festivals’ accreditation make them not only typical as a festival circuit, but render them particularly relevant to a study of the dominant notions of cinema that film festivals (re)produce. A-list festivals are at once particularly commercialised and particularly influential in the film industry. In part, this is a result of FIAPF’s role in managing festivals, since accreditation as A-list is influenced by the association’s mediation of industrial and commercial interests. FIAPF (2016) is a regulatory body whose aim is to “facilitate the job of the producers, sales agents and distributors in the management of their relationships with the festivals.” Moreover, its accreditation and regulations “constitute a trust contract between those festivals and the film industry at large. Accredited festivals are expected to implement quality and reliability standards that meet industry expectations” (FIAPF, 2016). In other words, FIAPF functions as a mediator between festivals and the film industry, with its accreditation guaranteeing certain standards for film professionals. An accredited film festival must meet certain requirements in order to attract the sales agents, distributors and producers that, in turn, secure the festival’s influence. Indeed, the strong commercial presence at A festivals has led to them being dubbed “business festivals,” events aimed primarily at facilitating the business of the film industry (Peranson, 2008, p. 38).

While it is reasonable to assume that simply being present in a festival’s programme has a positive effect on a film’s international success, it is winning awards at A festivals that has a demonstrable impact on a film’s distribution.<sup>2</sup> Stephen Mezias et al. (2008, 2011) have shown that winning top prize at Cannes, Venice or Berlin significantly increases the number of countries that a film is distributed in, making entering and winning the main competition at such festivals an attractive strategy for sales agents and distributors. Their study suggests that Best Picture winners are among the most significant cases of films that come to represent a cinema worldwide, achieving the widest global distribution. While there are likely to be exceptions to this rule, Mezias et al.’s findings suggest the value of studying top prize-winning films as a means of identifying and interrogating the dominant notions of art cinema most likely to circulate widely around the globe.

2 For further research on the role of major competitive film festivals in film circulation, see Skadi Loist’s project *Film Circulation on the International Film Festival Network and the Impact on Global Film Culture* (2017–2022).



The festivals Mezias et al. use for their analysis are all European A festivals. In fact, even within the “top tier” of the festival hierarchy lies another hierarchy, one that underscores the geopolitical fault lines with which global film culture is riven. Whether in film festivals or the academy, to speak of art cinema is to evoke a struggle to define a certain kind of cinema that has historically taken place through largely Eurocentric structures of film exhibition—including the European A festival circuit. This echoes Galt and Schoonover’s (2010) discussion of art cinema as a profoundly politicised “discursive field,” inflected by geopolitical power relations and “enmeshed in an imperialist and Eurocentric history” (p. 4). The development of both the film festival phenomenon itself, and the accreditation of film festivals by FIAPF, are expressive of a persistent Eurocentrism in both the industry and the academy.

Julian Stringer’s (2001) assessment of film historiography underscores the influence of a select few North-Western competitive film festivals over the canonisation of certain films. Stringer (2001, p. 137) argues that the organisation of the festival circuit is “a metaphor for the geographically uneven development that characterises the world of international film culture.” He identifies film scholarship’s reproduction of these structures of value, canonising only films that have been recognised by “the apex of international media power, the center of which is located, by implication, at Western film festivals” (p. 135). Vallejo (2020) continues Stringer’s argument, drawing our attention to the continuing “cultural hegemony” of specifically European competitive film festivals, as well as the “cultural hierarchies” that this produces within film canons (p. 158). Crucially, Vallejo argues for the need to take a situated approach to the study of film festivals and film canons rather than collapsing the distinctions between national and regional film cultures and reproducing notions of European film culture as universal. Building on Vallejo’s proposition, this book explicitly engages with a limited, and situated, circuit of film festivals: European A festivals. I treat these festivals, and their influence, as not universal but contingent and proceed throughout the book to examine the effects of this contingency on institutional meanings of art cinema.

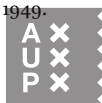
FIAPF’s accreditation of film festivals as “A-list” is itself rooted in historical Eurocentrism: the festivals it recognises and standards it requires for recognition were borne of the “Cannes-Venice duopoly” that dominated both European film culture and FIAPF in the postwar years (Pisu, 2018, p. 110). We thus cannot understand the A festival phenomenon without considering the period of postwar European reconstruction in which Cannes and Venice became the circuit’s two main nodes of power. As Janet Harbord (2002)

argues, the film festival phenomenon was driven by the “broad historical project of rebuilding Europe [...] the consolidation of Europe as a significant player in a global economy” (p. 64). This project gave rise to a proliferation of accredited, European film festivals, starting with Cannes and Venice in 1951, which were recognised immediately following FIAPF’s decision to begin accrediting festivals (Strandgaard Pederson & Mazza, 2011, p. 147). Soon after, FIAPF-accredited festivals such as the Berlinale and Karlovy Vary, in a move that was deeply influenced by the diplomatic project of promoting capitalist democracy synonymous with Western Europe and the US (de Valk, 2007; Iordanova, 2009; Cordoba, 2022). As I show in later chapters, these projects continue today through European A festivals’ advocacy of ideals of cinematic value rooted in traditional notions of European art cinema, and political progressiveness rooted in traditions of European humanism. In promoting such ideals, and legitimising films in relation to them, these festivals maintain Europe’s position as central in global film culture and the production of meanings for art cinema.

FIAPF continues to manifest a bias towards European and, more broadly, Global Northern film festivals. This “A-list” is currently comprised of fourteen competitive feature film festivals, of which eight are based in Europe.<sup>3</sup> These include the European “early adopters” of the film festival model, such as Cannes, Venice and Berlin, which established norms that other festivals face “isomorphic pressure” to follow (Strandgaard Pederson & Mazza, 2011, p. 145).<sup>4</sup> Since the aim of this book is to analyse and critique the most dominant representations of art cinema by film festivals, I have chosen to focus on films that have won top prize at an A festival within the European sub-section of the A circuit. This has been narrowed down to European A festivals due to their ongoing dominance in the circuit and as a means of limiting this book’s corpus to a manageable size. It must be acknowledged, however, that in centring its analysis on European A festivals, this book risks reproducing the uneven structures of power that have materially

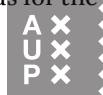
3 Of the remaining seven, two are based in the Middle East, two in East Asia, one in South America and one in South Asia. A full list of FIAPF-accredited A festivals can be found in Appendix 1.

4 Strandgaard Pederson and Mazza (2011) list Venice, Moscow, Cannes, Karlovy Vary, Locarno and Berlin. They also discuss Indian, Argentinian and Australian festivals but situate these in relation to the forerunners just mentioned. More detailed research into the extent to which festivals such as the International Film Festival of India straightforwardly adopted the model set out by Venice and others would illuminate or perhaps challenge these scholars’ argument. IFFI was founded in 1952, early in the history of film festivals’ development and shortly after India’s formal decolonisation in 1949.



and discursively placed such festivals in a hegemonic position. As scholars such as Antoine Damiens (2020) have argued, there is a need to undo the demarcations between different festival types, above all between this “top tier” of international, competitive feature film festivals and specialised or identity-based film festivals. Robbins and Saglier (2015, p. 4), for example, seek to put all film festivals on an equal footing of attention, and acknowledge the “porosity” of the film festival network. Although taking European A festivals as its case study, this book aims to open a conversation about the ideological functioning—the mechanisms of meaning creation and legitimisation—of film festivals in general, as well as the possible flows of prestige between them.

Moreover, it is impossible to ignore the many calls to decolonise film studies, including film festival studies, calls in which I have participated elsewhere (Johnson & O’Leary, 2022; Johnson, forthcoming). Scholars such those cited above, as well as Lindiwe Dovey, Joshua McNamara and Federico Olivieri (2013; Dovey, 2015), and Abé Marcus Nornes (2013) have rightly challenged the Eurocentric model through which film festivals have often been researched. This book at once replicates and aims to undermine this model: it situates the European A festival phenomenon in a way that challenges the uncritical positioning of European film cultures as universal or central. (I directly challenge such positioning, effected by European A festivals themselves, throughout the book.) To be clear: decolonisation is a distinct project, the appropriation of which has been warned against by Indigenous scholars such as Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Wang (2012). This book, in its focus on European film festivals and Italian cinema, as well as its use of Anglo-French psychoanalytic theory (see the following chapter), is not decolonial. However, it aims to support ongoing, vital calls for decolonisation by making explicit the structures of imperialist power where they would otherwise remain implicit (Bhabra et al. 2018). I seek to offer a modest contribution to scholarship that highlights the stakes of decolonisation by tracing such imperialist histories via European film festivals and Italian cinema, as well as by identifying and critiquing the values, norms and ideological structures that constitute hegemonic ideas of “art cinema” today. While focusing on Italian cinema, I aim to draw attention to systems of value that may pertain to the institutional legitimisation of a range of cinemas, including those associated with Asia, South America and Africa. In making such values—the “unwritten rules” of European A-list film festivals—explicit, I hope to provide a basis for further analyses of the discursive power that film festivals wield; in interrogating them, I seek to further support demands for the decolonisation of global film culture.





## Film Festivals and Italian Cinema

Italian cinema is a central pillar of dominant conceptions of art cinema and its sites of exhibition. While the concept of national cinema has been problematised down to its most basic meanings, signifiers of nationality continue to carry weight in the institutional construction of film (Hjort & Mackenzie, 2000; Bergfelder, 2005; Higson, 2020). European A festivals continue to highlight films' supposed nationalities in their programmes and, as will become clear throughout this book, also tend to situate films within national cinematic traditions either explicitly or implicitly through their marketing copy. Although I acknowledge the risk of homogenising the idea of art cinema by attempting to view it through one case of a national cinema, I treat the study of European A festivals and art cinema *through* Italian cinema as a largely experimental iteration that offers a starting point rather than an end point for inquiry. I have chosen to use a relatively small unit of art cinema (a singular national cinema) as a means to test out the hypotheses I put forward above, and a particular methodology—ideology critique—that I discuss in detail in the next chapter. In other words, I have chosen to use something relatively small (Italian cinema) as a means of looking at some very big things (film festivals, art cinema and ideology), with the ultimate aim of stimulating discussion rather than offering a definitive statement on either. The case of Italian cinema was selected for its historical centrality to the film festival phenomenon as well as the roles of Italian neorealism and auteur cinema in producing dominant notions of art cinema: both afford a productive significance to the study of art cinema's institutional construction. The Italian film industry is, too, representative as one whose films depend on exposure at film festivals for access to the international film market. My hope, then, is that an investigation of European A festivals' construction of a representative case such as Italian cinema can offer a place from which future inquiries into A festivals' ideological construction of films might begin.

National cinemas, like art cinema, must be treated as contested categories: they are part of taxonomies of filmmaking produced and reproduced at film festivals and in the academy. Italian film scholars have underscored the role of institutions in constructing a narrow canon of “legitimate” films. This institutional legitimisation is usually conditioned by a film's perceived relationship to certain traditions of Italian filmmaking—again, neorealism and auteur cinema (Hipkins & Renga, 2016). Working through this perspective, several studies have questioned the unacknowledged aspects of these national cinematic legacies in relation to gender, sexuality,



post-colonialism and notions of “worthy” cinema.<sup>5</sup> However, the institution that Italian film studies has thus far been most attentive to is the academy itself, notwithstanding some investigations into journalistic film criticism (O’Rawe, 2008) and state funding (Manzonli & Minuz, 2017). While focusing on higher education, Hipkins and Renga (2016) identify several institutions that contribute to the process of canon-making, including the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities (Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali, MiBACT), universities and film festivals. Considering these together as a network from which the “new canon” of contemporary Italian film emerges, Hipkins and Renga point to the importance of taking a holistic approach to the construction of Italian film and the need to begin researching each of the institutions involved in such a process.

We find a focus on film festivals in one study of Italian film circulation, Damiano Garofalo’s “Italian Cinema in the Shadow of the Film Festival Crisis” (2018). Garofalo highlights the importance of Italian cinema to film festivals, observing the “notably high presence” of Italian films at ten major international film festivals in 2008–2017.<sup>6</sup> While this indicates the continuing relevance of Italian cinema to these institutions, Garofalo also shows that film festivals maintain influence over the circulation of Italian cinema. Many of the Italian films selected at these events have since secured international distribution, and every prizewinner was distributed in at least ten countries beyond Italy. This confirms Mezias et al.’s (2011) claim that winning top prize leads to greater international circulation for films.

However, Garofalo (2018) identifies a decline in the presence of Italian cinema at these festivals between 2011 and 2017, and suggests that film festivals themselves are waning in influence. We should be wary of drawing conclusions about the importance of festivals to the construction of Italian cinema from this data alone. Although the emergence of digital platforms such as Mubi and Netflix raises significant questions about the channels through which Italian films come to be distributed, and how these platforms may influence the kind of Italian cinema with which international audiences become familiar, we should note that this is still a relatively recent phenomenon. Garofalo’s piece indicates a shift in power that has undoubtedly been accelerated by the unprecedented rise in online film

5 See Hipkins (2008), Rigoletto (2014), O’Rawe (2008), Schoonover (2012) and O’Leary (2017), respectively.

6 The festivals are: Cannes, Venice, Berlin, Toronto, Locarno, San Sebastian, Sundance, Turin, Rome and London. Garofalo (2018) describes these as “ten of the most important international film festivals,” although the criteria for selection are not defined within the piece.

streaming during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the extent to which this has resulted in films that otherwise would have screened at festivals being distributed through major online platforms is not yet clear (Johnson, 2021). In any case, despite the changes that have taken place over the last ten years, film festivals have been consolidating notions of both art cinema and Italian cinema for almost a century. If film festivals were to disappear tomorrow, their legacy would continue in the notions of artistic value that they have established over a long history of influence.

Over the course of this history, Italy and Italian cinema have been crucial to both the development of the film festival phenomenon and the construction of global art cinema. The first international film festival was an Italian festival: Venice, then known as the *Mostra internazionale d'arte cinematografica*. The earliest of early adopters, Venice's first edition afforded an initial iteration of the international festival template in 1932. The *Mostra* exhibited films from around the world and held an international competition. The competition eventually fell prey to the Fascist state's cultural politics, awarding prizes only to Italian and German films that promoted fascist ideals, and launching a controversy that would inspire the founding of Cannes soon after. Yet, after the fall of Fascism and the end of World War II, Venice continued to be one of the hegemonic centres of European cinema and the film festival network, constituting one half of the "Venice-Cannes duopoly" and one of the so-called "big three" international film festivals alongside Cannes and the Berlinale.<sup>7</sup>

Together with Cannes, Venice was also one of the first festivals to receive "A" accreditation from FIAPF, and Italian film industry members wielded considerable influence over the federation in its early years. FIAPF was based in Rome between 1950 and 1956 and led by an Italian, Renato Gualino.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, the only festival director invited to the federation's first congress in 1950 was Antonio Petrucci of the Venice film festival. Reenforcing its influence over the European festival circuit, Venice also established the first film market in 1950. Cannes quickly emulated, holding its own market in 1951. Historically, Italy and, in particular, Venice, affords the origin of many features that characterise the European A circuit: the existence of an international competition, "A" accreditation by FIAPF, and close links

7 The notion of the "big three" festivals is as ubiquitous in industry and academia as it is reflective of the Eurocentrism discussed above. See, among others, Fehrenbach (1995), Wong (2011), Chan (2011) and Loist (2016).

8 The historical data used here and throughout the rest of this paragraph is taken from Pisu (2018, p. 111).



to international trade prioritised by such festivals and exemplified by the presence of film markets at some of them. This influence continues today, with Venice remaining one of the most prestigious film festivals worldwide.

Venice's global prominence secures a measure of influence for the Italian film industry as well. Historically, this was particularly the case in film festivals' "nationalist" phase, in which each festival's primary aim was to showcase the cinema of its host nation (de Valck, 2007, p. 58). While festivals have moved into a globalised or "post-national" phase, as signalled by their installation of international juries, these events continue to be important tools in the development of national film industries, as evidenced by their continuing state support, justified on precisely such grounds (de Valck, 2007, p. 68; Andrews, 2010, p. 10). The Venice festival is no exception, receiving state funding from the Fascist era to the present as a means of supporting the Italian film industry at large (Wood, 2005, p. 111). Meanwhile, European A festivals still manifest a commitment to national cinema through their selection and recognition of domestic films in the main competition, and their inclusion of programme sections dedicated to domestic films.<sup>9</sup>

It is therefore little coincidence that the three national cinemas historically associated with art cinema often correspond to the three biggest film festivals' countries of origin: Italy (Venice), France (Cannes) and Germany (Berlin). (We might also add Spanish cinema, which the San Sebastián film festival has done much to promote alongside Lusophone cinema more generally.) Besides the importance of Venice to the development of the European A circuit, we can also observe the importance of Italian cinema to the development of concepts of art cinema promoted by film festivals and scholars alike. The notions of art cinema reenforced in both scholarship and at film festivals have traditionally been grounded in a European cinema defined largely in relation to Italian neorealism and the French New Wave. The initial examples of art cinema that Neale (1981) gives are not only European, but Italian—neorealism and the auteur cinema represented by Michelangelo Antonioni and Federico Fellini. Neale then moves on to case studies of three European national cinemas: French, German and Italian. That this Eurocentric conceptualisation of art cinema persists in academic accounts of global art cinema today has been amply shown, and critiqued, by scholars, as discussed above.

Italian neorealism has often been treated as foundational to global art cinema. Historicising the development of art cinema as a concept, Galt and Schoonover (2010, p. 15) argue that "art cinema's cohesion as a category

9 See Chapter 6.



first emerges with the popularity of Italian neorealism, and it retains a close association with the thematic and aesthetic impulses of that postwar tradition.” Schoonover (2012, p. 218) continues:

Neorealism [...] sets the standard for European new wave cinemas, post-colonial cinemas, cinemas of social change and political liberation, the American “new independents” of the 1970s and late twentieth-century explorations of realism by Italian, Danish, Romanian, and Chinese cinemas.

Indeed, we can observe that one of the founding moments of European A festivals also marks the inauguration of Italian neorealism’s international success. The first iteration of Cannes in 1946 sparked the development of the European festival phenomenon in the context of postwar reconstruction and anti-fascist sentiment. This edition culminated in the jury awarding Italian neorealist film *Rome, Open City* (*Roma città aperta*, Rossellini, 1945) its highest accolade. De Valck (2007, p. 49) underlines the importance of Rossellini’s film to Cannes: “the revelation of the 1946 festival was the anti-fascist *Roma, Città Aperta*.” This moment highlights the reciprocal relationship between Italian cinema and film festivals. *Rome, Open City*’s presentation at Cannes helped to generate the mythology surrounding the festival and then the festivals that came to emulate it. Meanwhile, Cannes contributed to the mythology surrounding Italian neorealism and, later, the notions of global art cinema set against such a standard.<sup>10</sup>

This reciprocity characterises festivals’ relationship not only with Italian neorealism, but also with Italian auteur cinema (a trope established through 1950s and ’60s filmmaking in relation to directors such as Fellini and Antonioni). Reading Mary Wood’s (2005) analysis of auteur cinema alongside Cindy Hing-Yuk Wong’s (2011) examination of film festivals renders the comparison clear. Wood (2005, p. 135) argues that competing for recognition on the festival circuit has been a crucial strategy for Italian directors from the heyday of auteur cinema to the present. She observes that contemporary auteurs such as Nanni Moretti “follow the regular pattern of authorial stylistic flourishes and serious themes, playing the festival circuits in order to gain recognition, which will lead to international distribution”

10 This mythology has repeatedly been shown to hold influence over institutional accounts of Italian and world cinema alike. See descriptions of neorealism (and the notions of an ethical, humanist realism that accompany it) as the “insidious common sense” of Italian film studies (O’Leary & O’Rawe, 2011, p. 109). I explore the legacy of neorealism and a very European humanism in relation to *Fire at Sea* and migration narratives in Chapter 5.

(Wood, 2005, p. 135). If “playing the festival circuits” in this way is typical of Italian directors’ strategies to access recognition and distribution, so nurturing auteurs is part of film festivals’ attempts to define themselves and art cinema. Wong (2011) argues that Cannes’s cultivation of Antonioni is typical of the way in which film festivals celebrate certain directors to define the kind of cinema they value, and on which they stake their prestige. It is perhaps telling that the case study Wong uses is that of the archetypal Italian auteur I have already mentioned twice in this introduction: Antonioni. In fact, as recent archival research shows, the canonisation of Antonioni—and, we can now add, Fellini—was part of a conscious strategy on the part of the festival director, Robert Favre Le Bret, to build Cannes’s reputation through the nurturing of Italian auteurs (Coladonato, 2021).

Film festivals have thus been crucial to the development of a certain kind of exportable Italian cinema, beginning with Italian neorealism and auteur cinema, while neorealism and auteur cinema have been crucial to the creation of a certain “image” for European festivals. Tropes of neorealism and auteur cinema recur in this book’s analysis of the ideology of European A festivals. Such an analysis has required me to repeatedly grapple with notions of art associated with the auteur and the political vision associated with neorealism. Both continue to appear in contemporary representations of Italian cinema by European film festivals. Moreover, the development of Italian cinema by festivals also appears to have influenced these institutions’ construction of their “image” and that of art cinema in general.

Italian film is a key example of a national cinema that depends upon film festivals for international legitimisation and circulation. Moreover, it is the source of several tropes through which European A festivals construct art cinema more generally. Italian cinema constitutes a significant example of the kind of film valued by European A festivals, through which the circuit both defines itself and the cinema it seeks to construct. While the examples cited above are largely historical (with the exception of Nanni Moretti) this book seeks to demonstrate the reciprocal relationship between European film festivals and Italian cinema in the new millennium, a relationship marked by an enduring attachment to the mythologies of neorealism and auteurism, and the exclusions on which they are based.

## Book Outline

This book offers in-depth analyses of five case studies—five Italian films that have won Best Picture or equivalent at a European A festival since the

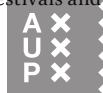


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year 2000. I supplement these analyses with a discussion of other Italian award-winners in the conclusion. Since my primary concern is with how festivals construct Italian cinema, I have used festivals' own designations of a film's nationality when selecting Italian films for the corpus. This book initially takes European A festivals' symbolic representation of cinema at its word, yet does so precisely as a means of critiquing them. This approach is, in part, informed by Slavoj Žižek's (2005, p. 71) proposition that the most effective critique of ideology entails "over-identification" with it: taking it at its word as a means of bringing its implicit laws into view.<sup>11</sup> The corpus reproduces the hegemony of the Northern Hemisphere by focusing on European A festivals, and it reproduces the assumptions regarding art cinema by focusing on Italian films that have won top prize at such festivals. It also reproduces, on a basic level, European A festivals' definition of Italian cinema in that it treats films as Italian if they are defined as such by the European A festival that has awarded it top prize. Such a definition is, as I discuss extensively in Chapter 3, a gendered one, too: the films awarded top prize are all directed by cisgender men (though not entirely, albeit mostly, white and heterosexual). This corpus reproduces, in short, the dominant ideas of art cinema and the geopolitical and gendered power structures in which such ideas are embedded. However, I do not take such notions as either fixed or universal: I treat concepts such as the Global North and Europe, art cinema and Italian cinema as inherently unstable and thus open to critique. Initially drawing from these ideological constructions provides the terrain from which we might destabilise such terms at their foundations.

Following a discussion of the study's theoretical framework and methodology in chapter 1, the book proceeds in three sections, with chapters alternating between considerations of overarching ideological structures and their particular expressions. Section 1 analyses European A festivals' claims to an artistic universality predicated on the celebration of the auteur and, moreover, an auteur who is typically gendered male and his artistic vision masculine. I examine these constructions through the hysterically auteurist Nanni Moretti film, *The Son's Room* (*La stanza del figlio*, 2001) and indulgent, Fellini-esque male melodrama, *The Great Beauty* (*La grande bellezza*, Paolo Sorrentino, 2013). Section 2 focuses on political universality, with Chapter 4 identifying European A festivals' preoccupation with figures of the other, as exemplified in Karlovy Vary's representation of queer Holocaust melodrama *Facing Window* (*La finestra di fronte*, Ferzan Özpetek, 2003). Chapter 5 focuses in on a particular figure of the other

11 On ideology critique, film festivals and Žižek, see the next chapter.





integral to European A festivals' geopolitically-inflected humanism, that of the North African migrant, represented in the contentious docu-fiction *Fire at Sea* (*Fuocoammare*, Gianfranco Rosi, 2016).

An investigation of the role of European A festivals' embeddedness in global capitalism guides the book. While I begin this line of reasoning in Chapter 2, examining auteurism's role in disavowing commercial constraint, Section 3 provides a sustained analysis of the relationship between film festivals, ideology and capital. The final case study, *Gomorra* (*Gomorra*, Matteo Garrone, 2008), highlights European A festivals' displacement of the excesses of capital onto a fantasmatic Global South. Meanwhile, the conclusion outlines the generative function of capital in European A festivals' ideological construction of art cinema, and finishes by calling for a decolonial, anti-capitalist cinephilia.

I have chosen to analyse the films that are most representative of the ideological procedures and effects that I have found when examining the entire corpus. To avoid duplication, I have not included in-depth analyses of films that present similar information. The secondary case studies in the corpus, and discussed in the conclusion, are: *A Children's Story* (*Certi bambini*, Andrea and Antonio Frazzi, 2004), *Private* (Saverio Costanzo, 2004), *Caesar Must Die* (*Cesare deve morire*, Paolo and Vittorio Taviani, 2011), and *Sacro GRA* (Gianfranco Rosi, 2013). For reference, lists of A festivals and the Italian films that have won Best Picture or equivalent at a European A festival since 1946 can be found in the appendices. I include this to help clarify some of the general points I make in the book, including those above. I also hope that this data will facilitate future work on European film festivals and Italian cinema, offering an indication of some of the broad trends in Italian cinema's awarding and representation by European A festivals more generally. (The trends are necessarily superficial but can help to spur for more detailed analyses of the phenomenon.) I also include the synopses of the secondary case studies (Appendix 3) for reference while reading the conclusion.

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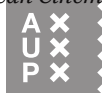
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