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**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON**

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

School of Film

Volume 1 of 1

**Transnational Bulgarian Cinema – Pieces of the Past, Present and Future**

by

**Maya Nedyalkova**

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

September 2015



UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

## **ABSTRACT**

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

Film Studies

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

### **TRANSNATIONAL BULGARIAN CINEMA – PIECES OF THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE**

Maya Todorova Nedyalkova

My thesis investigates issues of sustainability and belonging surrounding the Bulgarian feature film industry. There is a limited body of scholarship on Bulgarian cinema, most of which focuses on film aesthetics and fails to account for the socio-historical and industrial context of local film creation, dissemination and consumption. My work is a continuation of Dina Iordanova's *New Bulgarian Cinema* (2008) which promoted the idea of cross-Balkan creative collaborations. In contrast, I see pan-Balkan alliances as simply one part of the transnational co-operation and appropriation practices that have shaped Bulgarian film culture. I reveal that early productions like *The Bulgarian Is Gallant* (Vassil Gendov, 1915) and *Cairn* (Alexander Vazov, 1936) sought to reaffirm Bulgaria's place in European culture and act as a business bridge between the East and the West. During Communism (1944-1989) the Bulgarian Poetic Realist movement and the detective cycle appropriated narrative and aesthetic ideas from, respectively, the Italian Neorealism and British/American spy movies, achieving sustainability not necessarily reliant on state funding. With the shift to an open market economy, I show how the notion of national cinema changed under different legislation as did the balance between state subsidy and private funding. The tension between the art-house canon and contemporary domestic audiences' idea of Bulgarian cinema is evident in my case-studies of *The World Is Big and Salvation Lurks Around the Corner* (Stephan Komandarev, 2008), *Mission London* (Dimitar Mitovski, 2010) and *Love.net* (Ilian Djevelevkov, 2011). The emergence of the Sofia International Film Festival, digital distribution and piracy further redefined the cinema experience in Bulgaria. The case of Bulgaria illustrates the complexities of describing a small national cinema in an environment of legislative and economic inconsistency. It exposes the need for overcoming stereotypes when examining Eastern Europe and questions the existence of singular definitions when it comes to European film culture.



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# **DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP**

I, Maya Todorova Nedyalkova,

declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

TRANSNATIONAL BULGARIAN CINEMA – PIECES OF THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission

Signed: .....

Date:.....



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# **Definitions and Abbreviations**

BNT – Bulgarian National Television

DMCA - Digital Millennium Copyright Act

EC – European Community

EU – European Union

FIA – Film Industry Act

FIAPF - Fédération Internationale des Associations de Producteurs de Films/International Federation of Film Producers Associations

FIPRESCI - Fédération Internationale de la Presse Cinématographique/International Federation of Film Critics

GATT - General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

IMDb - The Internet Movie Database

JSC - joint-stock company

MEDIA - Mesures pour Encourager le Développement de l'Industrie Audiovisuelle/Measures to encourage the development of the audiovisual industry

MPAA – Motion Picture Association of America

MPEA - Motion Picture Export Association (USA)

NASCAR - The National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing

NDK – Natsionalen Dvorets na Kulturata/Bulgarian National Palace of Culture

NFC – National Film Council (Bulgaria)

SIFF – Sofia International Film Festival

USSR - Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

US/USA – United States of America

VoD – video-on-demand



# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

A cold and dark cinema theatre. An overwhelming smell of stale cigarettes. A small electric heater near the first row of seats. Two visitors, one of whom leaves before the end of the screening, while the other moves closer to the heater. An emotionless Keanu Reeves, negotiating onscreen with a computer leader, Deus Ex Machina, to save the world, as his words are muffled by the poor sound system. Luckily, there are subtitles. This was the cinema experience that the small Bulgarian town of Kazanlak offered in the winter of 2003 when *The Matrix Revolutions* (Andy Wachowski/Lana Wachowski, 2003) was released. The last remaining theatre of seven previously well-kept and consistently populated cinemas which functioned there during Communism (1944-1989), by 2011, Iskra Cinema was no longer in operation, not even for screening Hollywood blockbusters.<sup>1</sup> The case proves indicative of the changes in exhibition that Bulgarian cinema underwent during its transition to open market economy.

During the 1990s and 2000s, post-communist privatisation and restructuring, the decrease in cinema attendance, due to a failing economy, the rise of cable television and piracy, predetermined the concentration of film exhibition in the capital Sofia and big towns where profits could be made.<sup>2</sup> The exhibition crisis formed part of larger national and supra-national developments. In their heyday in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Bulgarian Communist film studios had produced annually twenty-five films for cinema, the same amount for television, twenty-five animated films and over 200 shorts and documentaries. They had featured the latest technology and employed 9,000 qualified professionals.<sup>3</sup> However, with the disintegration of the Eastern Bloc in the years following 1989, the Bulgarian film industry faced a lack of funding and appropriate (enforceable) legislation, a US monopoly over distribution and exhibition outlets, a challenging environment for film debuts and an absence of genre diversity.<sup>4</sup> The beginning of the

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<sup>1</sup> "Stotitsi kazanlachani gledaha kino na pl. 'Sevtopolis'" ["Hundreds of Kazanlak Citizens Watched Films in Sevtopolis Square"], Kazanlak.bg, 23 July 2013. 01 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.kazanlak.bg/page-2920.html>>.

<sup>2</sup> Aleksandar Donev. "Da razprostranyavash balgarski filmi – misiya nevazmozhna" ["Distributing Bulgarian Films – Mission Impossible"]. *Spisanie Kino [Kino Journal]* 6. (2007): 42-44.

<sup>3</sup> Ronald A. Holloway. *The Bulgarian Cinema*. London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, U.S., 31 May 1986, 134-135.

<sup>4</sup> Lyudmila Dyakova. "Novoto Balgarsko Kino – Prepanat Renesans: Ozhivlenie v Pazarni Usloviya" ["The New Bulgarian Cinema – A Stumbled Renaissance: An Uplifting Liveliness in Market Conditions"]. *Spisanie Kino [Kino Journal]* 5-6. (2010): 13–16.

new century brought more optimism for the future of Bulgarian film with changes in legislation and the increasing professionalisation of film industry members. Pictures such as *Dzift* [Zift] (Javor Gardev, 2008), *Svetat e golyam i spasenie debne otvsyakade* [The World Is Big and Salvation Lurks around the Corner] (Stephan Komandarev, 2008), *Misiya London* [Mission London] (Dimitar Mitovski, 2010) and *Love.net* (Iliyan Djevelekov, 2011) achieved domestic box office success. The festival circuit in the country developed as an important business and distribution platform while new technologies created opportunities for independent production, audience development, cheap promotion and innovative distribution.<sup>5</sup>

The domestic film industry has faced a number of challenges during different periods, including limited access to funding, foreign competition, ideological censorship and public disdain. Understanding the nature of feature filmmaking in Bulgaria necessitates a careful examination of the context of its development and of the artistic and business strategies employed by filmmakers in order to deal with industrial problems and re-imagine Bulgarian belonging to European culture. My thesis examines patterns of continuity and disruption between state and private initiatives, local and global business and aesthetic developments. My analysis of local filmmaking trends, national legislation and pan-European collaboration places Bulgaria as re-negotiating its place in relation to Europe (the West), on the one hand, and, Asia and Russia (the East), on the other.

While the Bulgarian film industry experiences issues of sustainability similar to the rest of Eastern European and, indeed, to small Western European countries, its historical and linguistic specificities single it out as a special case-study. Bulgaria was colonised by the Ottoman Empire for close to five centuries, longer than any other country that is currently a member of the European Union.<sup>6</sup> Foreign domination delayed the cultural development of the country during the

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<sup>5</sup> Marijke de Valck. “‘Screening’ the Future of Film Festivals? A Long Tale of Convergence and Digitization.” *Film International* 6.4 (7 Oct. 2008): 15–23; Dina Iordanova and Stuart Cunningham, eds. *Digital Disruption: Cinema Moves On-Line*. United Kingdom: St Andrews Film Studies, 3 Mar. 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Bulgaria was under Ottoman rule from 1396 until 1878. Greece was occupied from 1453 until 1821. The territory of present-day Romania was part of the Ottoman Empire between 1601 and 1878 but preserved its internal autonomy. Serbia and Macedonia share linguistic and historical similarities with Bulgaria but, at the time of writing, they are not members of the European Union (“History of Greece: The Ottoman or Turkish Period.” n.d. 11 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.ahistoryofgreece.com/turkish.htm>>; “Romania - The Ottoman Invasions.” n.d. 11 Sept. 2015. <<http://countrystudies.us/romania/8.htm>>).

Renaissance and Enlightenment periods.<sup>7</sup> Folklore scholars Albena Hranova and Alexander Kiossev locate Bulgarian cultural inferiority complex in the nation-building processes of the nineteenth century. The lack of classical literary traditions or scientific achievements during Ottoman rule rendered Bulgaria invisible to the rest of the world, prompting a desire to re-define Bulgarianness following the Liberation of 1878 and achieve cultural recognition.<sup>8</sup> Bulgaria is also the only country in the politico-economic union that uses the Cyrillic alphabet.<sup>9</sup> The linguistic difference and orientalist legacy, coupled with Bulgaria's Communist past contribute to a sense of cultural isolation from Europe. The development of national cinema was one route to international cultural validation.

In my thesis I expose cultural isolationism as a misconception when it comes to Bulgarian cinema and argue that local film culture has always been part of transnational cinematic developments. At the same time, there is a clearly traceable sense of inadequacy in the collective portrayal of Bulgarian national character. A large proportion of the films discussed in this thesis depict either negative Bulgarian character traits or protagonists, struggling with Ottoman or Communist traumas. I perceive this trend as an attempt to reflect on and redefine Bulgaria's cultural belonging, shaped by historical events, international politics and domestic legislation.

The first domestically funded production *Balgaran e galant* [*The Bulgarian Is Gallant*] (Vassil Gendov, 1915) mocks local bourgeois efforts to appear sophisticated in courtship. It is a self-deprecating comedy, which portrays Balgaran (a derivative of the adjective 'Bulgarian') as a street-smart, unscrupulous character, trying to gain the good favours of a lady by buying her gifts. The subject matter of the film plays on domestic anxieties about ill-mannered Bulgarian nature but the context of the film's creation reflects European filmmaking realities. The picture was produced as a response to the diminishing supply of Western films due to the commencement of

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<sup>7</sup> Donna A. Buchanan. *Performing Democracy: Bulgarian Music and Musicians in Transition*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 20 Mar. 2008, 38.

<sup>8</sup> Albena Hranova and Alexander Kiossev. "Folklore as a Means to Demonstrate a Nation's Existence: The Bulgarian Case." *History of the Literary Cultures of East-central Europe: Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th And 20th Centuries (Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages)*. Ed. Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co, 13 Sept. 2006. 325–334.

<sup>9</sup> Leonard Orban. *European Commission - PRESS RELEASES - Press release - Speech - Cyrillic, the third official alphabet of the EU, was created by a truly multilingual European*. 24 May 2007. 11 Sept. 2015. <[http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_SPEECH-07-330\\_en.htm?locale=en](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-07-330_en.htm?locale=en)>.

World War I.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Alexander Vazov successfully utilised his international contacts to carry out the first co-production activities in 1930s Bulgaria. His picture *Gramada [Cairn]* (1936) focused on a love story situated during the struggle for Bulgarian liberation from Ottoman domination.<sup>11</sup> The film benefited from a historical narrative of local significance, Vazov's filmmaking experience in Germany and the employment of Hollywood-like public relations.<sup>12</sup> During Communism, one of the most critically acclaimed pictures, *Kozijat rog [The Goat Horn]* (Metodi Andonov, 1972), likewise, focused on the personal revenge-drama of a Bulgarian shepherd, whose wife was murdered by Turkish soldiers during colonial rule. A self-orientalising tale of aggression and patriarchal rule, the picture gained extensive festival distribution around the world, transcending the Cold War divide and prompting an international symposium on Bulgarian cinema in 1976.<sup>13</sup> More recently, *The World Is Big and Salvation Lurks around the Corner* addressed traumas of Communist repression through the journey to self-discovery of an amnesiac Bulgarian immigrant in Germany. *Mission London* revived the stereotypical character of Bulgarians in its comic portrayal of Bulgarian immigrants in the UK, lying, scheming and chasing after megalomaniac dreams of royal recognition. The domestic box office success of the latter features not only signified their topics were perceived by contemporary Bulgarian audiences as relevant but also revealed the importance of transnational business and artistic appropriations for their production, marketing and distribution.<sup>14</sup> Thus, I examine Bulgarian cinema as bridging anxieties over an Eastern cultural legacy and an ambition to co-operate with, learn from and receive validation by the West.

Bulgarian cinema illustrates the broader re-structuring of the Eastern European film industries, taking place amidst economic and identity crises, international competition and cooperation. I question shifting identities in order to redefine national cinema within transnational practices and global cinephile culture. While there are historical and linguistic grounds for distinction between Bulgaria and the rest of Europe, I highlight economic and cultural continuities across national contexts as a challenge to the myth of a 'unique Bulgarian experience'. In this way, I hope not only

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<sup>10</sup> Aleksandar Grozev. "Balgaran e Galant – 90 godini sled premierata" ["The Bulgarian is Gallant – 90 Years after the Premiere"]. *Spisanie Kino [Kino Journal]* 1. (2005): 61-64, 61.

<sup>11</sup> Aleksandar Yanakiev, *Sinema.bg [Cinema.bg]*. Sofia: Titra, 2003.

<sup>12</sup> Aleksandar Yanakiev (b). "To Vesuvius and Back." *Cinema and Time: Journal on the History, Theory and Practice of Film and Film Archiving* 2.29 (2007): 51–58.

<sup>13</sup> Evgenija Garbolevsky. "The Conformists: Creativity and Decadence in the Bulgarian Cinema: 1945-1989." PhD Thesis. Brandeis University, 2011, 178-179.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Maxwell et al. "Getting the Audience." *Global Hollywood: No. 2.* Ed. Toby Miller, Nitin Govil, John McMurria, Richard Maxwell, and Ting Wang. United Kingdom: British Film Institute, 26 Apr. 2005. 259–330.

to contribute to English-language scholarship on Bulgarian cinema, but also to challenge the clichéd divide between the East and the West which contributes to a sense of Bulgarian inferiority. My thesis tackles issues surrounding discourses of ‘belonging’ in the post-colonial turn of the century, during the Iron Curtain divide and after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Similar questions have re-emerged with the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the European Union in 2007, the end of the restrictions on free movement of workers in 2014 and the parallel rise of nationalist attitudes.<sup>15</sup> My project ultimately aims to challenge discourses that perpetuate isolationism and cultural prejudice by drawing comparisons across seemingly dissimilar cultural and economic contexts.

The aim of my thesis is to unpack issues of sustainability surrounding the Bulgarian feature film industry, offer a comprehensible analysis of its links with global film culture and portray its dependence on transnational practices. I interrogate an implicit question: to what extent there is or is not an identifiable Bulgarian national cinema. The emphasis is placed predominantly on the context within which cinematic works are produced, conceptualised and consumed. I analyse the involvement of institutional and professional bodies in film production and dissemination, viewers’ responses to selected pictures as well as the influence of distribution networks and new technologies on feature filmmaking. This research project is ultimately based on the premise that stable legislation, state support and international cooperation combined with the appropriation of innovative marketing, distribution and audience development strategies lead to artistic productivity and business viability.

In the following sections, I examine arguments concerning the environment of feature film production and consumption. The discussion focuses on different theoretical approaches to world, European, Balkan and Bulgarian cinema. I seek to prove that reconceptualising Bulgarian film from a perspective that views it as a self-contained entity to one that sees it as a part of the global film industry is justified from historical, economic and cultural points of view. I also

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<sup>15</sup> See: Matthew Taylor. “Romanian and Bulgarian NHS Workers Feel Rising Tide of Patient Hostility.” *The Guardian* The Guardian, 24 Jan. 2014 12 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/jan/24/romanian-bulgarian-nhs-workers-hostility-patients-lifting-restrictions>>; John Palmer. “The Rise of Far Right Parties across Europe Is a Chilling Echo of the 1930s.” *The Guardian* The Guardian, 15 Nov. 2013 12 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/nov/15/far-right-threat-europe-integration>>.

maintain that the category of ‘national cinema’ should include a multitude of perspectives and be defined not only at the level of infrastructure but also with regard to audience perceptions.

## 1.2 The Value and Limitations of ‘National Cinema’

What constitutes national cinema at the level of infrastructure and ideology is not necessarily what local audiences would recognise as indigenous film. Benedict Anderson’s work on nationalism has prompted discussions of national identity as belonging to an imagined community that functions within an assiduously delineated geo-political space. Imagined communities are portrayed by nationalist rhetoric as homogeneous and stable. However, this is rarely an adequate representation, especially given the long world history of colonisation, migration and international conflict. Nationalism postulates that geographical boundaries and indigenous traditions create an experience of unification, where little attention is given to minority and under-represented groups.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the nation appears to be an artificial construct, coined in public debate in order to justify the coherence of the state. This interpretation equates the idea of the ‘national’ with a false sense of integration and union.

Examining cinema solely with regard to the concept of imagined communities proves challenging. As Susan Hayward explains, national cinema does not simply articulate the cultural specificities of a given pre-existing nation. The construction of nations involves, instead, a selective appropriation of history and tradition, coupled with amnesia with regard to difference and diversity.<sup>17</sup> So, in a country like Bulgaria, where tensions between Bulgarians, Roma people, Turkish descendants and Pomaks frequently escalate, mediating the collective image of the ‘national’ remains especially problematic. It is a question revisited by Dina Iordanova, when discussing films from the 1990s and 2000s when ethnic minorities were the focus of many documentaries and features.<sup>18</sup> Bulgaria, like many cliché ‘nations’, illustrates Andrew Higson’s claim that all nations are in some sense

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<sup>16</sup> Benedict O’G R Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1983.

<sup>17</sup> Susan Hayward. “Framing National Cinemas.” *Cinema and Nation*. Ed. Mette Hjort and Scott Mackenzie. New York: Routledge, 2000. 81–94.

<sup>18</sup> Dina Iordanova. *New Bulgarian Cinema*. United Kingdom: College Gate Press, 2008. 21–61.

diasporic, situated between unity and disunity.<sup>19</sup> It also illuminates the problematic link between nation and national cinema.

Based on the hybridity of modern cultural formations, Higson draws a somewhat radical conclusion: “to argue for a national cinema is not necessarily the best way to achieve either cultural diversity or cultural specificity”.<sup>20</sup> However, I believe that the category of the national remains useful in exploring film industries. Mette Hjort and Duncan Petrie maintain that the complexity of national cinema as a formation is based on the key differences and conflicts that shape its history. National production is informed, inspired and/or hindered by questions of political power and censorship, as well as by processes of self-critique that facilitate pluralistic and democratic modes of expression.<sup>21</sup> The ‘national’ is defined through its co-relations with its surrounding others in terms of both cultures and politics.

The ideology behind the concept of ‘national cinema’ is the result of industrial developments and enhanced market competition. In this context, Valentina Vitali and Paul Willemen perceive national film as ‘devised’. They argue that early cinema did not differentiate its products by the country of origins but by the reputation of the production companies. Vitali and Willemen claim that ‘foreign-ness’ was imposed later as competitors sought to monopolise a market by defining it as a ‘national’ one. This tendency was particularly prominent in the US. The authors detect complicity between the industry and the state. Vitali and Willemen see the invention of ‘national cinema’ as a cultural strategy for legitimising protectionist measures in favour of domestic productions.<sup>22</sup> While competition contributed to the branding of film industries as ‘national’, there were factors relating to cultural validation at play as well.

Vitali and Willemen reveal that in the early film histories, the film industry was “a metonym for the industrialisation of culture and a metaphor for modernity itself”.<sup>23</sup> The invention of national

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<sup>19</sup> Andrew Higson. “The Limiting Imagination of National Cinema.” *Transnational Cinema, The Film Reader (In Focus: Routledge Film Readers)*. Ed. Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden. London: Taylor & Francis, 13 Jan. 2006. 15–26, 16.

<sup>20</sup> Id., 23.

<sup>21</sup> Mette Hjort and Duncan J. Petrie, eds. “Introduction.” *The cinema of small nations*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 28 Nov. 2007. 1–22, 17.

<sup>22</sup> Valentina Vitali and Paul Willemen, eds. *Theorising National Cinema*. 1st ed. London: British Film Institute, 5 June 2006, 1–2.

<sup>23</sup> Id., 2-3.

cinema signified technological as well as cultural advancement. Recording and screening equipment evolved together with formal visual experimentation and, as such, cinema represented the ultimate modern form. At the same time, the universal character of film language (and, more specifically, the lack of dialogue in ‘silent cinema’) made differences across national film industries irrelevant and contributed to the economic dominance of some cinemas globally.<sup>24</sup>

The existence of national cinema reaffirms the economic ambitions and progressiveness of a particular state, positioning it as part of transnational trade and art. In an insightful piece on Bulgarian film between the two world wars Dimitrina Ivanova remarks that the creation of a visible domestic cinema was an important step in breaking loose from the “shackles of isolation and Orientalism” after the Ottoman domination and in catching up with the latest advances in European culture.<sup>25</sup> The spread of cinema in Bulgaria signified the end of a culturally and technologically deprived period. In this sense, national identity and cinema aimed to re-instate Bulgarian economic independence and cultural significance in the context of post-colonialist Europe. However, Bulgarian cinema is not just an ideological construct, it develops together with world filmmaking tendencies and audiences predilections. It is essential to contextualise Bulgarian film within larger boundaries.

### **1.3 From National to Transnational Methodology**

My interpretation of Bulgarian film is contextualised in the relatively new field of transnational studies. In my analysis of Bulgarian cinema, the ‘national’ is discussed as connecting the ‘local’ with the ‘transnational’. It is the legal link, epitomised in Bulgarian and pan-European film legislation of the different historical periods, which synchronises indigenous practices with global processes. The ‘national’, as manifested in legislation and diplomatic relations, is informed by and also actively shapes local predilections, practices and realities. It serves to regulate and formalise the relationship between the individual segments that comprise a given film culture as well as to facilitate the intricate links with global business and aesthetic trends throughout the decades. Like

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Dimitrina Ivanova (a). “Evropeiskoto Patuvane Na Balgarskoto Kino Mezhdu Dvete Svetovni Voini” [“The European Journey of Bulgarian Cinema between the Two World Wars”] in *Spisanie Kino [Kino Journal]*. *Spisanie Kino [Kino Journal]* 4. (2005): 36–39.

Toby Miller, I attempt to address both the macro- and micro-scales, including the global as the carrier of capitalist transactions, the national as determining ideology and the local as a productive and interpretative site.<sup>26</sup> I perceive the national and transnational as mutually co-dependent categories. My chosen methodology is utilised to overcome notions of voluntary isolationism and imposed marginalisation and build up a more inclusive idea of European cinema.

The shift towards transnationalism was prompted by scholarly dissatisfaction with the paradigm of the national which proves too limiting in a world of interconnectedness and multiculturalism. Higson maintains that the process of labelling is fetishising. On the one hand, it emphasises distinction between nation-states which might have much in common. On the other, it may “obscure the degree of cultural diversity, exchange and interpretation that marks so much cinematic activity”.<sup>27</sup> I attempt to transcend this limitation by drawing on examples of cross-cultural borrowings and economic cooperation that portray Bulgarian film culture as transnational and in constant fluctuation.

Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim demonstrate that the ‘transnational’ can be both useful and problematic, displaying a liberating but also a limiting influence on the interpretation of diasporic and postcolonial cinemas.<sup>28</sup> Used as “shorthand for an international or supranational mode of film production whose impact and reach lies beyond the bounds of the national”, the concept can be taken to negate the ‘national’ altogether, while, as it has been discussed, the national framework still provides a basic structure for transnational practices to build on.<sup>29</sup> The concept of the ‘transnational’ can obscure the question of imbalances of power in transnational exchange, by assimilating issues surrounding the politics of difference.<sup>30</sup> In other words, it could omit differences in juridical, economic and cultural contexts, defined by national market specificities. Critically engaging with the concepts of ‘national cinema’ and ‘transnationalism’ will help interpret more productively the interface between global and local. In this way we could move

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<sup>26</sup> Toby Miller. “National Cinema Abroad: The New International Division of Cultural Labour, from Production to Viewing.” *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspective (AFI Film Readers)*. Ed. Natasa Durovicova and Kathleen E. Newman. New York: Routledge, 2010. 137–159, 139.

<sup>27</sup> Higson, 2006, 16.

<sup>28</sup> Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim. “Concepts of Transnational Cinema: Towards a Critical Transnationalism in Film Studies.” *Transnational Cinemas* 1.1 (Jan. 2010): 7–21, 7–8.

<sup>29</sup> Id., 10.

<sup>30</sup> Id., 9.

away from a binary approach to national/transnational and from a Eurocentric tendency of how such films might be read.<sup>31</sup> For the case of Bulgarian cinema this would provide an approach that is inclusive both of internal historical and cultural specificities and of persistent intercultural contacts.

Vitali and Willemen offer a functioning definition of ‘national cinema’ based on their observations of its links with, on the one hand, national policies and, on the other, transnational economic flows. Willemen considers national cinema confined to the system of industrial institutions which govern film production and circulation. In order to understand the dynamics behind the creation and management of a film industry, we need to acknowledge the inter-connectedness between the film business and the state institutional network which shapes the opportunities and procedures leading to future developments.<sup>32</sup> Willemen regards national boundaries as holding considerable structuring impact on national socio-cultural formations.<sup>33</sup> As Higson first noted in 1989, all examinations of national cinema should include the range of film activities and the impact of institutions within a nation-state.<sup>34</sup> By accounting for the impact of state institutions and official legislation, I trace shifts in identity definition and co-production practices within Bulgarian cinema. In this way I show how the ‘national’ often shapes the ‘local’ and ‘transnational’, a relationship which is very much reciprocal.

Instead of offering accounts of ‘the nation’ in absolutist terms, Vitali and Willemen claim that films should be perceived as “clusters of historically specific cultural forms... [subject to] the forces at play in a given geographical territory”.<sup>35</sup> Different forms of legislation influence cultural and industrial production and, whether ideologically-charged or not, films represent “the historical conditions that constitute the ‘national’ and ... ‘mediate’ the socio-economic dynamics that shape cinematic production”.<sup>36</sup> According to this definition, the category of ‘national cinema’ is useful not so much in narrative but in economic, historical and social terms. Films are cultural

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<sup>31</sup> Id., 10.

<sup>32</sup> Paul Willemen. “The National Revisited.” *Theorising National Cinema*. Ed. Valentina Vitali and Paul Willemen. London: British Film Institute, 5 June 2006. 29–43. 41–42.

<sup>33</sup> Willemen, 2006, 34–35.

<sup>34</sup> Andrew Higson. “The Concept of National Cinema.” *Screen* 30.4 (1 Sept. 1989): 36–47.

<sup>35</sup> Vitali and Willemen, 2006, 7–8.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

artefacts that reveal the connections between local and global art, business and politics in a particular region at the time of their conception, production and release. That is exactly what I demonstrate through my case-studies on Bulgarian cinema as the focus shifts away from textual to contextual analysis. Stephen Crofts insists that national cinemas are best examined in terms of categories like production, audiences, discourses, the role of the state and the cultural specificity of genres and artistic movements, in order to help draw attention to the political and social circumstances which encourage their development.<sup>37</sup> By acknowledging the sometimes conflicting notions that the plethora of the above perspectives present for Bulgarian film, I illustrate that the definition of national cinema can change depending on the historical moment and the (open or covert) agenda of the institution or person describing it.

Willemen further admits that cinema is a process the boundaries of which are not reducible to those of any national industry. The multiple contexts of distribution and reception, together with technological progress, international trade routes and the transnational dimensions of the cultural industries affect the functioning of any given cinema.<sup>38</sup> Hayward adopts an analogous discourse that resists assimilationist and integrationist imperatives of nationalism and reflects the multicultural tendencies of cinematic production within nation-states and various supranational arrangements.<sup>39</sup> Tim Bergfelder reveals that transnationalism is not the result of the recent increased globalisation but that cinema has been a matter of transnational co-operation from the very outset. He provides case-studies of effective pan-European economic and cultural collaboration in the context of 1950s and 1960s German popular cinema to prove that through international initiatives European cinema has been capable of competing successfully with the global reach and internationalism of Hollywood.<sup>40</sup> In a similar manner, I examine continuities in the development of the transnational film industry in Bulgaria in the form of international co-production and collaboration, artistic borrowing and appropriation of business strategies, which have often gone unacknowledged in English-language and domestic scholarship of Bulgarian cinema.

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<sup>37</sup> Stephen Crofts. "Concepts of National Cinema." *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*. Ed. John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. 385–394.

<sup>38</sup> Willemen, 2006, 41–42.

<sup>39</sup> Hayward, 2000, 89–91.

<sup>40</sup> Tim Bergfelder. "The Nation Vanishes: European Co-Productions and Popular Genre Formulae in the 1950s and 1960s." *Cinema and Nation*. Ed. Mette Hjort and Scott Mackenzie. New York: Routledge, 2000. 139–152.

Beth Tsai and Joy Schaefer observe that while the transnational discourse is taken to include border crossing, migration, diaspora, mobility, and the circulation of cultures and capitals, transnationalism is still a term subject to further discussion and interpretation. It is not interchangeable with ‘globalisation’, even though it is thought to describe cultural and economic forces that transcend national borders. ‘Transnational cinema’ is fluid enough to include films that are not only multinational in terms of financing, production and distribution, but also in terms of reception. It links the local and the national with the global while reflecting and reshaping the national paradigm in the conditions of changing technological and institutional practices.<sup>41</sup> As Mette Hjort suggests, the lack of an exhaustive definition of the ‘transnational’ allows for different models that tie transnationalism to cinematic production, motivated by individual concerns and designed to achieve specific effects.<sup>42</sup> In this context, I recognise as transnational Bulgarian cinema not only international co-productions, but also cultural developments, based on exchange, appropriation and collaboration. Transnationalism can be found at any level of the film industry, not just film production. Indeed, a large part of my thesis discusses the significance of the emergence of transnational film professionals, events and audiences in Bulgaria.

Like Vanessa R. Schwartz in her work on cosmopolitan French film culture, I seek to integrate important economic and legal components in film with a more general social and cultural historical approach. The object of my examination is the transnational space of cultural exchange and influence, whether facilitated by or opposed to specific national politics and economics.<sup>43</sup> I analyse Bulgarian film culture in its complex relation to transnational art, business and politics. I investigate past and current trends in popular global and Bulgarian culture and their relation to state and pan-European legislation. Changes in viewers’ preferences are discussed as predetermining shifts in national identity, mainstream and art-house film production while legislation is often revealed as trailing behind.

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<sup>41</sup> Joy Schaefer and Beth Tsai. *SCMS 2015 Proposed Panel: “Toward a Critical Transnational Cinema.”* 4 June 2014. 13 Sept. 2015. <<http://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/node/57087>>.

<sup>42</sup> Mette Hjort. “On the Plurality of Cinematic Transnationalism.” *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspective (AFI Film Readers)*. Ed. Natasa Durovicova and Kathleen E. Newman. New York: Routledge, 2010. 12–33, 15.

<sup>43</sup> Vanessa R. Schwartz. *It’s so French!: Hollywood, Paris, and the Making of Cosmopolitan Film Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 7 Mar. 2008, 8–9.

## 1.4 The Small (Trans-)National Film Industry in Bulgaria

Issues of sustainability surrounding small national film industries also lead to the necessary adoption of a transnational discourse. The mere definition of a ‘small national cinema’, advanced by Hjort and Petrie, refutes the possibility of film as a viable business venture. Population is the main determinant for the size of the internal market and, thus, an essential indicator of its potential. Countries with less than fifteen to twenty million citizens constitute ‘small markets’. Such territories find it difficult to support a profitable national film industry without government intervention.<sup>44</sup> Geographical scale (in terms of limited availability of natural resources), the low gross national product and frequent struggles for autonomy are also among the characteristics of ‘small nations’.<sup>45</sup>

Bulgaria fits the above description well. Spanning 110,550 square kilometres, with a population of just over seven million people, gross domestic product per capita (as estimated in 2010) of \$14,021 (or €10,789.99) and a history of political and economic struggles, Bulgaria can fairly be considered a country of small proportions and, thus, limited cinematic potential.<sup>46</sup> The limitations of the small market implicitly determine the direction for development of Bulgarian film. As Willemen explains, “[t]he economic facts of cinematic life dictate that an industrially viable cinema shall be multinational or, alternatively, that every citizen shall be made to contribute to the national film industry – mostly by way of tax and/or subsidy legislation – regardless of whether they consume its films or not”.<sup>47</sup> I outline trends in transnational co-operation and the promotion of protectionist measures for Bulgarian cinema in the context of European competition with Hollywood in my discussion of possible routes to financial sustainability as well.

Despite the economic limitations, domestic cinema proves culturally valuable in such niche markets. As Hjort and Petrie explain, “many small nations have emerged out of the twentieth-century processes of decolonisation and liberation struggles and consequently have a strong vested interest in nation-building and the maintenance of a strong sense of national identity

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<sup>44</sup> Hjort and Petrie, 2007, 4.

<sup>45</sup> Id., 5–6.

<sup>46</sup> “Global Finance Magazine - Bulgaria GDP and Economic Data.” Global Finance Magazine, 4 Nov. 2014. 13 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.gfmag.com/global-data/country-data/bulgaria-gdp-country-report#axzz2DcPALjLQ>>.

<sup>47</sup> Willemen, 2006, 34–35.

relevant both internally and externally to the nation...".<sup>48</sup> Cinema proves essential for representation of national identity. The medium's ideological importance is palpable in the context of post-colonial cultural resistance and/or nationalist propaganda. Bulgarian film has served both purposes. Shortly after the Liberation of Ottoman Domination the development of film provided confirmation of catching up with European artistic and technological developments. During Communism the industry served ideological purposes. In the transition to democracy, domestic films problematised cultural, political and business relationships with Western Europe, while resisting or appropriating Hollywood entertainment.

While the concept of 'national cinema' has limitations, it remains valuable for a country with a small market and limited financial resources like Bulgaria. Higson and Crofts admit that in some contexts it may be necessary to challenge the homogenising myths of national cinema while in others, it may be necessary to support them in order to facilitate diversity and enhance opportunities for self-definition.<sup>49</sup> So, despite its tendency for generalisation, it is still useful to employ the category of 'national cinema' in describing the link between nation-preservation strategies and global trade when it comes to the case of the Bulgarian film industry.

The functioning of small (trans-)national cinemas is ensured predominantly through state intervention. In an article on Iceland, Björn Nordfjörd argues that national film production in small countries can never amount to more than a fraction of the exhibition market. Hollywood and foreign films from large European producers like France remain a powerful force and, thus, actively shape domestic film culture. The financial resources needed to compete with American productions are difficult to obtain as the domestic market is too small. State funding and protection remain essential even if quotas on imports are irrelevant (considering the low levels of domestic productivity).<sup>50</sup> As a result, the local film industry is heavily influenced by state support and legislation. By providing state backing to certain projects over others, national institutions actively define what is understood as Bulgarian cinema. In Chapter Three I demonstrate that state funding often perpetuates the art-house canon in Bulgaria. International collaborations and

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<sup>48</sup> Hjort and Petrie, 2007, 15.

<sup>49</sup> Stephen Crofts. "Reconceptualising National Cinema/s." *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 14.3 (Jan. 1993): 49–67, 62; Higson, 2006, 23.

<sup>50</sup> Björn Nordfjörd. "Iceland." *The cinema of small nations*. Ed. Mette Hjort and Duncan J. Petrie. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 28 Nov. 2007. 43–59, 44.

financing prove another vital resource in preserving small national cinemas. As Hjort and Petrie note, small nations are reliant on external cinematic markets for the functioning of their industry.<sup>51</sup> Often Bulgarian co-productions are more mainstream than films solely relying on state support, which illustrates the defining influence of the different sources of finance on the idea of national cinema.

The balance between state and private funding shifted throughout the different historical periods in Bulgaria. My analysis reveals that partial industrial sustainability remains a possibility even for small cinemas if commercially-aware and internationally-oriented practices are cultivated under the right state regulations.<sup>52</sup> In the following chapter I discuss in detail the myth of complete government sponsorship of cinema during Communism.<sup>53</sup> It serves to show that the commercial potential of Bulgarian cinema has often been underestimated, especially during the 1990s and early 2000s. With the rise of young producers and directors, aware of world trends and unafraid to challenge the assumptions surrounding the small national film industry, I maintain that the situation has, potentially, changed. The Bulgarian market and purchasing power are still limited. However, local productions since 2008, attracting more audiences than American imports, have proven that Bulgarian film can be commercially successful, even if within a small profit margin.<sup>54</sup> Acknowledging the historical context and recognising the audience potential of a given film culture prove essential in regulating and promoting local filmmaking activities.

## 1.5 Conceptualising European, Eastern European and Balkan Cinema

Bulgarian film illustrates the traditions that characterise European cinema and the challenges faced by the industry on the Old Continent. That is why I draw parallels between domestic and European aesthetic styles, production modes, distribution networks and exhibition practices. The analysis requires taking into account the political and cultural debates surrounding the expanding European Union and the influence of that expansion on identity-formations. I focus on terms such

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<sup>51</sup> Hjort and Petrie, 2007, 15.

<sup>52</sup> Jonathan Murray. "Scotland." *The cinema of small nations*. Ed. Mette Hjort and Duncan J. Petrie. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 28 Nov. 2007. 76–92, 81.

<sup>53</sup> Garbolevsky, 2011, 6.

<sup>54</sup> For instance, *Mission London* cost just over € 1.3 million to produce, according to data published on the IMDb website but managed to recuperate almost all of its budget from box office sales only (earning € 1,338,338.07 over thirty-two weeks in cinemas).

as ‘Bulgarian cinema’, ‘European co-production’ and ‘Euro-pudding’ in order to clarify what constitutes the specifically national and how divergences from those criteria are evaluated by scholars and critics.

Examining the local as part of the supra-national, Luisa Rivi focuses on geopolitical changes in an attempt to re-define what comprises European film. The author reveals the political and cultural inter-reliance between European nation-states and the European Union. Rivi argues that the fall of the Berlin wall led to shifting perceptions of what constitutes, on the one hand, the nation-state, and, on the other, Europe.<sup>55</sup> She views the fall of the Iron Curtain as the cause for both fragmentation within Eastern Europe and a desire for greater unification with the West.<sup>56</sup> Rivi explains that with the emergence of new nation-states after the disintegrations of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and Yugoslavia, the ex-Eastern bloc appears disjointed but also seeks to fuse with Western Europe. Central and Eastern Europe are no longer amalgamated in the economic and cultural policy of the Soviet Union. Individual countries seek to reinstate their political independence through an emphasis on national identity.<sup>57</sup> At the same time, the East – an ‘Other’ during the Cold War – is no longer the criterion against which Western Europe is defined. Increased immigration and the expansion of the European Union challenge not only the imagined ‘homogeneity’ of the nation but also the delineation of ‘Western’ culture.<sup>58</sup> Rivi notes that these processes raise questions of common European identity, legislation and economy. Globalisation plays a significant part in re-negotiating contemporary questions of cultural belonging. Rivi argues that multinational commercial corporations, borderless telecommunication systems, international division of labour and global mobility render the concept of ‘Europe’ “exceedingly problematic, relative, and provisional at best”.<sup>59</sup> This has challenged the ideas of stable shared identity and national belonging.

There are, however, problems with Rivi’s interpretation of European frontiers and cultural differences. Firstly, despite the notable recent changes in the political system and outlines of

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<sup>55</sup> Luisa Rivi. *European Cinema after 1989: Cultural Identity and Transnational Production*. 1st ed. United States: Palgrave Print, 10 Dec. 2007, 1–2.

<sup>56</sup> Id., 55–6.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Id., 23.

<sup>59</sup> Id., 1–2.

Eastern European countries, borders were permeable even prior to 1989, allowing for cultural and ideological exchanges. French, American and Dutch films were widely distributed in the early periods of Bulgarian cinema.<sup>60</sup> During Communism, ‘spaghetti’ westerns and Indian productions became available and immensely popular while Bulgarian filmmakers themselves were influenced by American/British and Italian cinematic traditions. International festivals, in turn, provided exposure abroad for the Bulgarian art-house movement.<sup>61</sup> These facts challenge the idea that transnationalism is a recent phenomenon and cultural identity was ever stable.

Secondly, Rivi appears to presuppose the very Eurocentrism that she is trying to refute. By referring to the expansion of the European Union as an “enlarged Europe”, she implicitly assumes a primacy of Western over Eastern European culture. She once again introduces the notion of ‘Otherness’ by highlighting the influence of new member states on European identity. Rivi points out that Western Europeans feel threatened by migrant “new Europeans”, further strengthening the cultural prejudice that she attempts to expose.<sup>62</sup> The ‘original’ Europeans seem to be equated with the founding states of the European Union – an idea which fails to account for shared history, economic and cultural exchanges throughout the continent.

Similarly, Rosalind Galt perceives European identity as a question of space. The author notes the difficulties in redefining Europe with the expansion of the European Union to include members (and potential members) as dissimilar as Finland, Bulgaria and Turkey. With the physical and political territory of Europe altering, so does its cultural imagery. Galt argues that European identity struggles between nationalism and homogenisation.<sup>63</sup> She recognises the lingering opposition between Western and Eastern Europe. At the same time, Galt explains that “while conservatives made national sovereignty, immigration, and ethnic minorities into social problems, film cultures evolved an opposing liberal concern with regionalism, minority representation, and transnationalism”.<sup>64</sup> Galt assigns cinema a progressive function, promoting democratic values and challenging nationalist stereotypes. She maintains that the focus of shaping European identity has, in fact, shifted from the centre – “inhabited by French philosophy” - to the “rapidly changing

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<sup>60</sup> Aleksandar Yanakiev. “Kinorazprostranenie Na Balkanite v Nachaloto Na XX Vek” [“Film Distribution on the Balkans at the Beginning of the XX Century”]. *Izkustvovedski cheteniya* [Art Readings] (2008): 197–201.

<sup>61</sup> Garbolevsky, 2011, 5, 25, 147–148, 166.

<sup>62</sup> Rivi, 2007, 9, 142.

<sup>63</sup> Rosalind Galt. *The New European Cinema: Redrawing the Map*. New York: Columbia University Press, Apr. 2006, 1-2.

<sup>64</sup> Id., 2-4.

space of South-[E]astern Europe".<sup>65</sup> Both Rivi and Galt seem to take for granted the primacy of Western European states in defining what constitutes European cinema. In this way they promote the myth of cultural isolation of the ex-Eastern bloc and persistent cultural difference in the present day. Moreover, despite the idealistic spirit of co-operation promoted by European legislation, economic and class differences within the European Union remain. This portrays transnational interactions as unequal and challenges the idea of their implicit virtue.<sup>66</sup> My thesis implicitly targets the erection of this ideological and economic wall of separation between Western and Eastern Europe.

The notion of a singular European identity comes under scrutiny. Based on a survey of the market share of non-national European movies in different countries in the period 2005-2011, Huw D. Jones argues that shared identity is often defined by personal experiences, political contexts and the way the question is phrased. However, there appears to be a correlation between the sense of belonging to Europe and the preference for European cinema. Unlike countries with a strong sense of European belonging, such as Luxembourg, Poland, Finland and Belgium, Bulgaria displays weak links to European identity which is also reflected in the market share of non-national European films in exhibition.<sup>67</sup> I suggest that this is linked to the historical and linguistic specificity that shapes Bulgarian culture as a bridge between the East and the West, focusing on orientalist and communist legacies but also appropriating Western European and American forms of entertainment. Capitalism, consumerism, entertainment and patriotism merge in an unlikely symbiosis, re-defining the function of contemporary Bulgarian film.

As Misha Glenny observes, tracing the identity and culture of individual Balkan states proves complicated since historical, geographical and political borders remain permeable.<sup>68</sup> The homogenising effect stems from the countries' shared history of Byzantine and Ottoman domination, similarities in lifestyle, cuisine and local traditions. Yet, the Balkans includes an array

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Hjort, 2010, 15.

<sup>67</sup> Huw D. Jones. "Does European identity affect the market for European film? |." *Blog. MeCETES*, 3 June 2015. 16 Sept. 2015. <<http://mecetes.co.uk/does-european-identity-affect-the-market-for-european-film/>>.

<sup>68</sup> Misha Glenny. *The Balkans, 1804-1999: Nationalism, War and the Great Powers*. 1st ed. London: Granta Books, London, 1 Nov. 1999, p. xxii.

of different languages, religions and political responses to the Cold War division.<sup>69</sup> Galt notes that outsider representations frequently neglect these disparities. The Western European gaze structures the Balkans as exotic and essentially different, evoking notions of Otherness and Orientalism and resulting in stereotypical representations of national spaces as primitive.<sup>70</sup> Ethnic tensions and military conflicts (such as the Balkan and Yugoslav wars) further contributed to pigeonholing the region as violent and culturally under-developed. The very term ‘balkanisation’ reveals a rhetoric of “pre-modern tribal hatreds, susceptible to endless belligerence and incapable of forming a modern multi-ethnic nation state”.<sup>71</sup> Galt argues that the region falls within the binary opposition between the West (understood as Western Europe) and the East (or Asia).<sup>72</sup> In terms of their mixed cultural lineage, the Balkans remain a ‘no man’s land’, neither here nor there.

Like ideas of nationhood and imagined communities, such stereotypes undermine the complex makeup of the Balkan region. This presents a challenge for cinematic representation. Balkan filmmakers, most notably Emir Kusturica, have been accused of stereotypical depiction of their cultures through the Eurocentric gaze in an effort to cater to foreign markets and audiences.<sup>73</sup> External views on what comprises Balkan culture have been known to extend their influence on production from the region. However, I argue that this can also lead to productive re-imaginings. In a self-colonising manner Bulgarian directors like Stephan Komandarev (*The World Is Big and Salvation Lurks around the Corner*) and Dimitar Mitovski (*Mission London*) appropriate (inter-)national stereotypes in, respectively, examining the Communist legacy on Bulgarian identity and caricaturing Bulgarian and European character traits for the purposes of comedy.

At the same time, Dusan Makavejev and Dina Iordanova comment on the attempts of each Balkan state to re-negotiate its integration into the European community, overcoming its alleged non-Europeanness by “denouncing its affinity with the others in the area and highlighting aspects of its heritage that could affirm its fundamentally Western cultural lineage”.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, as discussed

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<sup>69</sup> Dusan Makavejev. *The Cinema of the Balkans (24 Frames)*. Ed. Dina Iordanova. New York: Wallflower Press, 8 Aug. 2006, 2.

<sup>70</sup> Galt, 2006, 24; Velina P. Petrova. “Are We Going to Have a Race of Angels? Post-Communist Interpretations of Bulgarian Dissident Cinema.” *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 47. (2003): 27–48.

<sup>71</sup> Galt, 2006, 121.

<sup>72</sup> Id., 136.

<sup>73</sup> Petrova, 2003, 29–30.

<sup>74</sup> Makavejev, 2006, 9.

above, the Balkan states seek to re-establish themselves as technologically modern and culturally advanced within the European business and artistic communities. As Aniko Imre notes, the claim for unique national cinema is part of a broader, implicit assertion of national exceptionalism to a regional marginalisation within Europe. It is propelled by a desire for recognition and economic investment.<sup>75</sup> The example of the Balkans demonstrates that geo-political relations affect on-screen representation which results in the need for re-conceptualising what constitutes a Bulgarian film.

Recognising the political and cultural specificities of Eastern Europe is crucial for objectively interpreting its national formations as well as its role in transnational cultural exchange. As Ewa Mazierska, Lars Kristensen and Eva Näripea note, even though the region<sup>76</sup> is not a homogeneous entity, it still displays common political and economic systems that are different from the fully fledged capitalism of the West. Eastern Europe remains a useful category even in the post-Cold War period because of the still palpable influence of Communism.<sup>77</sup> Eastern European states share a common land, history and culture. Not only the Balkans but most of the region has been colonised predominantly by its neighbours rather than by faraway empires and peoples. Ethnic groups and countries living in this area in different times took over each other and shared the experience of being conquered by external forces, like the Germans, Turks or Soviet Union. Consequently, there is a high degree of distrust and contempt between neighbouring countries and the desire to differentiate culturally from each other despite the shared high degree of ethnic and cultural hybridisation.<sup>78</sup> After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the United States was ascribed the role of an imperial coloniser, employing an ideology of free democratic venture to conceal military conquest and economic domination.<sup>79</sup> As a result, the process of de-colonisation of Eastern Europe has been characterised by new forms of economic and cultural dominance, rather than political rule.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Aniko Imre, ed. "Eastern European Cinema from No End to the End (As We Know It)." *A Companion to Eastern European Cinemas*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell (an imprint of John Wiley & Sons Ltd), 14 Sept. 2012. 1–21, 8.

<sup>76</sup> Which spreads "from East Germany in the West to Mongolia in the Far East, from Murmansk in the North to the southern tip of Albania" (Ewa Mazierska, Lars Kristensen, and Eva Naripea. "Postcolonial Theory and the Postcommunist World." *Postcolonial Approaches to Eastern European Cinema: Portraying Neighbours on Screen*. London: I.B.Tauris, 2014. 1–40, 1–2).

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Id., 22.

<sup>79</sup> Id., 3–6.

<sup>80</sup>Id., 13–16.

Mazierska et al. acknowledge that the image of Eastern Europe is constructed as inherently inferior to the West, which assigns itself the position of civiliser.<sup>81</sup> József Böröcz further maintains that the expansion of the European Union in the East serves economic rather than humanitarian purposes. The ‘colonising’ Western Europe benefits from unidirectional economic flows, following the privatisation of post-Socialist government assets, tax incentives for direct foreign investments and no obligations to reinvest generated profits in the poor regions of Eastern Europe.<sup>82</sup> If discussed in such terms, the involvement of the European Union in Eastern Europe seems of questionable character. From the above, we can conclude that Eastern Europe can be perceived as neither intrinsically unified nor an equal member of the European Union. The persistent marginality of the region, examined throughout my thesis, has affected the sustainability and scope of the Bulgarian film industry.

Nonetheless, there is a marked endeavour by scholars such as Rivi to apply an egalitarian view of the European film industry. Rivi highlights what she perceives are the industrial realities of cinematic co-productions – “assorted sources of funding... plural identities [represented]... narrative and images that retain cultural specificity and creative integrity while constituting and representing a transnational, heterogeneous Europe”.<sup>83</sup> She claims that outside of co-productions, European film is meaningless. Rivi argues that the concept of European cinema is a collective and simplified rendition of diverse practices and aesthetic conventions, frequently equated with a denationalised idea of ‘art cinema’ and used to practically differentiate films produced in a context different than Hollywood.<sup>84</sup> The author acknowledges the difficulty of classifying ‘Europeans’ but maintains that they identify with representations in contemporary co-productions.<sup>85</sup> While propagating a politically decentralised European Union and democratic artistic practices, Rivi, however, upholds a very restrictive definition of European film. The film industry on the Old Continent is reduced to transnational co-production practices, leaving no room for purely nationally funded and consumed productions or independent pictures. This, in practice, complicates the cataloguing of European cinema.

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<sup>81</sup> Id., 21–22.

<sup>82</sup> József Böröcz. “Empire and Coloniality in the ‘Eastern Enlargement’ of the European Union.” *Empire’s New Clothes: Unveiling EU-Enlargement*. Ed. József Böröcz, Melinda Kovács, Salvatore Engel-Di Mauro, Anna Sher, Katalin Dancsi, and Peter Kabachnik. Telford: Central Europe Review e-books, 2001. 4–50.

<sup>83</sup> Rivi, 2007, 29.

<sup>84</sup> Id., 39–40.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

While films made in Europe have frequently been co-produced by two or more countries, at least since World War II, I do not perceive national film culture as a myth.<sup>86</sup> I believe the category ‘European cinema’ should be inclusive of practices with both transnational and national funding sources. Otherwise, films coming from parallel contexts and displaying similar values would be classified as unequivocally dissimilar. This would essentially lead to even greater fragmentation within European culture. Purely in terms of their international financing contexts, the Bulgarian popular feature *Mission London* would be considered ‘more European’ than the locally funded *Love.net* or *Zift*, even though the latter two feature transnational references (parts of *Love.net* are in English and situated in the UK while *Zift* employs the neo-noir genre to expose the questionable morale of Eastern Europe’s Communist past). The two pictures also participated in a number of international film festivals as representatives of the Bulgarian and, by extension, European film traditions.

If taken further, Rivi’s views ultimately imply that similarities in artistic movements as well as in production, distribution and exhibition contexts across European states are of no significance. By focusing on the economic side of film production, Rivi denotes that cinema cultures should be examined as self-contained entities unless participating in co-productions. Although promoting cooperation, this presents a limiting account of European cinema and the notion of ‘transnationalism’. This is precisely the kind of isolationism that I oppose throughout my thesis.

I attempt to build on Bergfelder’s work which analyses post-World War Two German popular cinema and European co-productions, placing local developments within the larger parameters of European film history.<sup>87</sup> Bergfelder approaches the 1960s as “a period of intense cultural hybridisation and internationalisation in European cinema... in terms both of production practices and industrial contexts, and of audience preferences”, aiming to “identify transnational processes... at both international and localised level”.<sup>88</sup> While exploring a different moment in

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<sup>86</sup> Mark Betz. “The Name above the (Sub)Title: Internationalism, Coproduction, and Polyglot European Art Cinema.” *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* 16.1 46 (1 Jan. 2001): 1–45.

<sup>87</sup> Tim Bergfelder. *International Adventures: German Popular Cinema and European Co-Productions in the 1960s (Film Europa)*. 1st ed. New York: Berghahn Books, 1 Oct. 2005, 10.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

film history, Bergfelder's work is easily applied to contemporary Bulgarian cinema in defining its place within global film culture. Similarly to post-World War II Germany, the film industry in post-Communist Bulgaria is decentralised and the open market environment implies altered financing mechanisms and heightened awareness of viewers' preferences. The new macroeconomic situation characterised by competition from Hollywood products, facilitates and encourages national producers and distributors to embrace 'internationalist' practices.<sup>89</sup> Hence, like Bergfelder, I deem it essential to consider the reception of indigenous and foreign films when examining the development of Bulgarian film culture.

Rivi's argument also fails to account for the negative value of co-productions. Termed 'Euro-puddings', certain pictures with pan-European financing are target of disapproval because of the artistic compromises they allegedly necessitate. Mariana Liz explains that the term signifies a system which forces filmmakers to shape their projects with a view to gaining access to state subsidies across different countries. Such films most often feature stories which cross borders, an international cast with the highest star quality available, extensive use of English and pan-European funding, thus, exemplifying certain Hollywood characteristics.<sup>90</sup> Liz observes that, in contrast, European scholarly attention privileges co-productions which promote the survival of specific film industries or the career of European auteurs. So, Euro-puddings are assigned negative value in critical discourse because they undermine the stereotypical notions of 'high quality' and 'art', often used to describe European cinema (a point which I discuss in more detail in Chapter Three of this thesis).<sup>91</sup> Liz believes that the connotations that the term carries are, in fact, changeable when it comes to marketing. Critics have also allowed for the so-called 'organic' (sophisticated, high quality) Euro-pudding, which de-constructs European identity and questions Euro-centrism.<sup>92</sup> I avoid using the term extensively throughout my thesis as I believe it is ideologically charged. However, in my analysis of *The World Is Big...* I illustrate the tensions between the art-house canon and mainstream filmmaking in Bulgaria, showing how certain Bulgarian filmmakers aim to transcend this radical division.

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<sup>89</sup> Id., 11–12.

<sup>90</sup> Mariana Liz. "From European Co-Productions to the Euro-Pudding." *The Europeanness of European Cinema: Identity, Meaning, Globalization*. Ed. Mary Harrod, Mariana Liz, and Alissa Timoshkina. United Kingdom: I.B.Tauris, 18 Dec. 2014. 73–85.

<sup>91</sup> Liz, 2014, 77–78.

<sup>92</sup> Id., 84–85.

So far in this section I discussed the multiplicity of interpretations that European cinema lends itself to. As Lucy Mazdon observes, “European cinemas, like national cinemas, are inherently unstable and incoherent, identified as much by difference as by shared attributes”.<sup>93</sup> In her discussion of the variety of Eurimage-supported films, Anne Jäckel confirms: “[t]oday, there is no single accepted discourse of European cinema”.<sup>94</sup> The fluctuating nature of Europeanness presents further problems for Eastern European self-definition. In her case-study on the representation of Eastern and Western mentalities in Russian film, Alissa Timoshkina argues that the ever-changing notion of what comprises Europe conflicts with Russia’s inability to define itself within that context; the urge for Europeanisation clashes with anxieties about preserving national identity.<sup>95</sup> Eastern European countries, including Bulgaria, seem wedged in this in-betweenness. However, throughout my thesis I illustrate that the phenomenon is anything but recent. Unlike Thomas Elsaesser, who ascribes the identity crisis of national and European cinemas to recent major changes in technology, politics and demographics in Europe, I maintain that Bulgaria has been continuously re-negotiating its place in European culture through cinema.<sup>96</sup> The processes of globalisation and the enlargement of the European Union have simply rendered the case of Bulgarian cinema more visible.

## 1.6 Hollywood in Europe: Interaction, Competition and Appropriation

As already established, the ‘national’ audience is exposed not only to domestic, but also to non-indigenous films, especially Hollywood pictures. Higson perceives this as underlining the transnational experience of the ‘imagined community’ and the strong role that American products play in the construction of national cultural identity. Modern communication networks operate on an increasingly transnational basis and cultural commodities are widely exchanged across

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<sup>93</sup> Lucy Mazdon. “Hollywood and Europe: Remaking *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*.” *The Europeanness of European Cinema: Identity, Meaning, Globalization*. Ed. Mary Harrod, Mariana Liz, and Alissa Timoshkina. United Kingdom: I.B.Tauris, 18 Dec. 2014. 199–211, 199.

<sup>94</sup> Anne Jäckel. “Changing the Image of Europe? The Role of European Co-Productions, Funds and Film Awards.” *The Europeanness of European Cinema: Identity, Meaning, Globalization*. Ed. Mary Harrod, Mariana Liz, and Alissa Timoshkina. United Kingdom: I.B.Tauris, 18 Dec. 2014. 59–71, 66.

<sup>95</sup> Alissa Timoshkina. “From Russia to Europe and Back: East Meets West in the Films of Pavel Lungin.” *The Europeanness of European Cinema: Identity, Meaning, Globalization*. Ed. Mary Harrod, Mariana Liz, and Alissa Timoshkina. United Kingdom: I.B.Tauris, 18 Dec. 2014. 227–240.

<sup>96</sup> Thomas Elsaesser. “European Cinema into the Twenty-First Century: Enlarging the Context?” *The Europeanness of European Cinema: Identity, Meaning, Globalization*. Ed. Mary Harrod, Mariana Liz, and Alissa Timoshkina. United Kingdom: I.B.Tauris, 18 Dec. 2014. 17–31.

national borders.<sup>97</sup> This holds especially true when examining the influence of American culture and arts on contemporary Bulgarian popular cinema. Current film production and distribution in Bulgaria forms part of European industrial realities of limited funding and competition from Hollywood which often lead to art-house pictures rivalling popular movies in the race for state subsidies and to constant disputes over what should constitute ‘Bulgarian’/ ‘European’ cinema.

Eastern Europe attracts Hollywood-funded films in production, thanks to the cheap costs of studio rentals and labour. Bulgaria has become part of the so-called ‘international service industry’ which creates short-term employment but also focuses on controlling the distribution and exhibition markets through subsidiaries distributing Hollywood products and their exhibition counter-parts, pre-booking those same films. That is one of the reasons why in the 1990s and early 2000s Bulgarian audiences remained engaged with American productions, synonymous with cinema to most.<sup>98</sup> However, working with Hollywood provided training for film personnel, networking opportunities and successful business appropriations.

The (re-)turn to popular genres after Communism in Bulgaria was marked by the box-office success of the comedy *Mission London*. As Julian Stringer remarks, thanks to the processes of globalisation, world filmmakers, critics and audiences are actively reconstructing the blockbuster as a generic category.<sup>99</sup> Chris Berry goes on to elaborate that the appropriation of blockbuster strategies in South Korea and China, for instance, is in reference to local historical, cinematic and economic circumstances which shape the domestic products in certain different ways from their Hollywood models.<sup>100</sup> The American blockbuster, popular with Bulgarian audiences, was similarly adapted to the Bulgarian realities, creating a new aesthetic category. The box office success of high-budget Bulgarian films with better production values and greater emphasis on marketing has increased the share of the domestic market to levels unprecedented since the fall of Communism.

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<sup>97</sup> Higson, 2006, 17–18

<sup>98</sup> Dina Iordanova. “Bulgaria.” *The cinema of small nations*. Ed. Mette Hjort and Duncan J. Petrie. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 28 Nov. 2007. 93–112, 96.

<sup>99</sup> Julian Stringer, ed. “Introduction.” *Movie Blockbusters*. New York: Taylor & Francis, 2003. 1–14, 9.

<sup>100</sup> Chris Berry. “‘What’s Big About the Big Film?’ – ‘De-Westernising’ the Blockbuster in Korea and China.” *Movie Blockbusters*. Ed. Julian Stringer. New York: Taylor & Francis, 2003. 217–229.

However, Berry warns of critics who remain sceptical of the domestic popular features and accuse them of merely imitating instead of challenging Hollywood's colonial discourse.<sup>101</sup> Like Berry, I believe that the local dimensions of such products are more complex to evaluate. Blockbusters possess no intrinsic cultural status and their social stature is never guaranteed. While a picture may circulate as prestige entertainment depending on the novelty of its star attraction, topicality or special effects, it could be perceived as a devalued object at a different point in time.<sup>102</sup> The social significance of big-budget mainstream films is not a given but a complex construction of production values, marketing strategies and distribution agreements attempting to predict audience expectations. The blockbuster provides national cinema with the industry tools to attract the attention of its spectators but ultimately it is the quality of the individual picture and its ability to relate to local mentality that determines its success.

Appropriating Hollywood strategies for the purposes of the Bulgarian film industry reciprocates Hollywood's fondness of remaking successful European films. Mazdon explains that the remake, together with the sequel and the adaptation, is a well-known Hollywood form of production which attempts to counter the financial uncertainty of the film business. The remake is not necessarily inferior simply because it takes as a starting point a previously existing text. Remaking is a diverse activity which holds the potential to entice artistic and business productivity and overcome cultural differences.<sup>103</sup> Bulgarian cinema has benefited from remaking American/British productions, not only during Communism but also in the present day. The 1970s Bulgarian spy cycle borrowed ideas largely from the James Bond series while contemporary films like *Mission London* and *Love.net* bear striking resemblance to the internationally successful *Love Actually* (Richard Curtis, 2003).<sup>104</sup> This unacknowledged cultural appropriation allows Bulgarian audiences to experience Western entertainment in a local context and informed by the respective political ideology. Robert Stam sees this practice as a cultural translation which encourages new ways to read and interpret an original text.<sup>105</sup> By appropriating foreign texts for the local market, Bulgarian

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<sup>101</sup> Id., 225–226.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Mazdon, 2014, 200, 208.

<sup>104</sup> Ingeborg Bratoeva-Darakchieva. *Balgarsko Igralno Kino: Ot Kalin Orelat Do Misiya London [Bulgarian Feature Film: from Kalin the Eagle to Mission London]*. Sofia: Institut za izsledvane na izkustvata [Institute of Art Studies], 2013, 175.

<sup>105</sup> Robert Stam. "Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation." *Film Adaptation (European Community Law)*. Ed. James Naremore. United Kingdom: Continuum International Publishing Group, June 2000. 54–76.

cinema illustrates its state of cultural in-betweenness. It provides a bridge between Western entertainment genres and domestic tropes, informed by local history and language.

Such informal remakes challenge clear-cut definitions of national cinemas and a straightforward Europe-Hollywood opposition. In this sense, Ian Robert Smith advocates doing away with “reductive value judgments and stale conceptions of textual fidelity [and moving] towards a focus on Bakhtinian intertextuality” since “the blurring of boundaries is ultimately more productive”.<sup>106</sup> This line of reasoning highlights film interconnectedness across borders and cultural traditions. Remakes reveal the importance of appealing to domestic audiences with a mixture of familiar and foreign visual symbols and narratives, creating new modes of identification and cultural belonging. By remaking popular British and Hollywood productions, Bulgarian cinema partakes in the transnational flow of ideas and stories. The practice challenges singular definitions of what constitutes national film and caters to an audience, who is negotiating historical and linguistic specificity with an eagerness to reaffirm a belonging to the Western world. At the same time, the creation of new categories like ‘the Bulgarian spy film/blockbuster’ expands and enriches the original genres that Bulgarian cinema borrows from. Smith insists on conceptualising globalisation “not as a unitary one-way process of cultural homogenisation but as an interstitial process through which cultures borrow from and interact with each other”.<sup>107</sup> Bulgarian cinema is not just passively influenced by Hollywood; it appropriates foreign visual tropes and business strategies for its own purposes. I.Q. Hunter discloses how it is difficult to locate a film that is not reliant on a frame of reference and intertextuality.<sup>108</sup> Appropriation, thus, does not exclude originality and novelty, and should not be evaluated in necessarily negative terms.

Remaking and adaptation also minimise financial risk not just for a small national film industry, constantly facing economic uncertainty. Stijn Joye argues that economic forces impact film content. The process of conglomeration and consolidation within Hollywood, which began in the 1970s, required the development of adequate risk management strategies. These included an increased emphasis on marketing, pre-selling of pictures in foreign markets and borrowing from

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<sup>106</sup> Iain Robert Smith, ed. “Introduction.” *Cultural Borrowings: Appropriation, Reworking, Transformation*. N.p.: Scope: An Online Journal of Film and Television Studies, 2009. 1–5, 1, 4.

<sup>107</sup> Iain Robert Smith. “‘Beam Me Up, Ömer’: Transnational Media Flow and the Cultural Politics of the Turkish Star Trek Remake.” *The Velvet Light Trap* 61.1 (2008): 3–13, 3.

<sup>108</sup> I.Q. Hunter. “Exploitation as Adaptation.” *Cultural Borrowings: Appropriation, Reworking, Transformation*. Ed. Iain Robert Smith. N.p.: Scope: An Online Journal of Film and Television Studies, 2009. 8–33.

pre-existing texts which had previously proved popular.<sup>109</sup> Similarly, Bulgarian features *The World Is Big...* and *Mission London* capitalised on their literary links with successful novels. In this way the pictures benefited from a pre-tested story and a built-in audience that was already familiar with the existing fictional universes.<sup>110</sup> Films based on literary adaptations profit from greater media visibility, the first step towards creating cultural events during their distribution. Throughout my thesis I focus on the productiveness of cross-border appropriation and its significance for the development of the Bulgarian film market.

## 1.7 Cosmopolitanism or Cultural Imperialism

When discussing national and global influences shaping the Bulgarian audience, I maintain that exposure to transnational cinematic products has potentially led to cosmopolitan sensibilities. My thesis is not based on sociological investigation but on analysis of the general response to foreign film distribution and exhibition in Bulgaria, portrayed by attendance numbers and box office figures. I maintain that exposure to Hollywood movies can contribute to the accumulation of cultural competencies which enable individual spectators to intentionally and self-reflexively relate to and appreciate cultural difference.<sup>111</sup> My interpretation of what constitutes a cosmopolitan film culture, thus, challenges one-sided beliefs about the conflict between nationalism and American cultural imperialism.

Gavin Kendall, Ian Woodward and Zlatko Skrbis observe that while cosmopolitanism denotes positive, inclusive values and principles in contemporary scholarship, the precise definition of the term varies from one author to the other.<sup>112</sup> Rainer Bauböck describes the cosmopolitan disposition as openness to other cultures and places, which is related to a Universalist moral

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<sup>109</sup> Stijn Joye. "Novelty through Repetition: Exploring the Success of Artistic Imitation in the Contemporary Film Industry, 1983-2007." *Cultural Borrowings: Appropriation, Reworking, Transformation*. Ed. Iain Robert Smith. N.p.: Scope: An Online Journal of Film and Television Studies, 2009. 56–73.

<sup>110</sup> Id., 61.

<sup>111</sup> Gavin Kendall, Ian Woodward, and Zlatko Skrbis. *The Sociology of Cosmopolitanism: Globalization, Identity, Culture and Government*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 28 Apr. 2009, 11.

<sup>112</sup> Id., 18.

outlook and a willingness to reach beyond the local.<sup>113</sup> Roland Robertson notes that a social order is cosmopolitan when “it operates according to principles of the free flow of information and ideas among its constituent societies”.<sup>114</sup> For Kendall et al., cosmopolitanism is a lifestyle that is constructed over many centuries in particular settings and allows for an individual to adopt an ironic approach to simple loyalties and belonging, at the expense of ambiguity and uncertainty.<sup>115</sup> From the above arguments it can be concluded that a cosmopolitan outlook generally denotes an awareness of transnational mobility, lack of prejudice and a vested interest in different cultures.

Correspondingly, Maria Rovisco describes cosmopolitan cinema as “a mode of production with particular aesthetic and ethico-political underpinnings”.<sup>116</sup> Rovisco’s emphasis falls on the ability of cosmopolitan film to generate public debate about the plight of distant others.<sup>117</sup> While valuable from an ethical point of view, I find such an interpretation limiting because it focuses solely on political films and excludes most other forms and genres. In Rovisco’s own words, cosmopolitan cinema has “a recognisable self-reflexive and multilingual style and often stems from an artisan and collective mode of production that seeks to resist the mainstream”.<sup>118</sup> On the contrary, I argue that even popular entertainment can serve to re-negotiate power relations and promote openness to foreign cultures.

Intentionality seems to play a significant part in definitions of cosmopolitanism. John Urry notes that contemporary media has rendered the consumption of cosmopolitan images a banal activity through the commodification of cultural symbols in advertising, music and television. Such audiovisual forms stage a ‘pre-packaged’ image of global life by promoting unreflexive consumption of food, tourist experiences and ethnic music/fashion. This could still potentially lead to the emergence of a cosmopolitan civil society but does not necessarily do so because it

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<sup>113</sup> Rainer Bauböck. “Political Community Beyond the Sovereign State, Supranational Federalism, and Transnational Minorities.” *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism – Theory, Context, Practice*. Ed. Robin Cohen and Steven Vertovec. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 23 June 2003. 110–136, 112.

<sup>114</sup> Roland Robertson. “European Cosmopolitanism and the Global Field.” *European cosmopolitanism in question*. Ed. Roland Robertson and Anne Sophie Krossa. Houndsill, Basingstoke, Hampshire [U.K.]: Palgrave Macmillan, 25 Feb. 2011. 174–198, 189.

<sup>115</sup> Kendall et al., 2009, 7.

<sup>116</sup> Maria Rovisco. “Towards a Cosmopolitan Cinema: Understanding the Connection between Borders, Mobility and Cosmopolitanism in the Fiction Film.” *Mobilities* 8.1 (Feb. 2013): 148–165, 149.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Id., 153.

lacks the original intention to learn about and appreciate other cultures.<sup>119</sup> The process is linked to increased globalisation and cross media convergence. Kendall et al. explain that,

[o]n the demand side, shifting and ever more complex status systems, fluid forms of identity that increasingly embrace cultural difference and the search for novelty in consumption habits all point to continued demand for cosmopolitan goods. On the supply side, producers are increasingly aware that cultural difference, exoticism and novelty offer powerful framing devices for goods in globally networked markets. The sourcing of objectified cosmopolitan difference by consumers becomes a means of social differentiation and status acquisition underpinned by cultural appropriation.<sup>120</sup>

This argument is illustrated by the consumption habits of Bulgarian audiences post-Communism. The marked preference for Hollywood movies in Bulgaria is not simply the result of increased marketing efforts on behalf of the studios, but stems from genuine fascination with American entertainment and lifestyle.

Sean Cubitt maintains that Hollywood actively constructs a cosmopolitan audience as a step towards the commercialisation of democracy. By selling affordable ‘exotic’ experiences, the entertainment industry democratises elitism, at once expanding and enticing its potential consumer base.<sup>121</sup> Nevertheless, I maintain that the process is not one-sided and global audiences also exert an influence over Hollywood’s expressive vocabulary. Diana Crane comments on American filmmakers’ style that crosses national boundaries easily because it eliminates a great deal of cultural complexity – “[t]he levels of violence, action, sex and fantasy, all of which can be conveyed visually rather than through dialogue, have steadily increased in Hollywood films”.<sup>122</sup> Successful transnational films combine elements of national, international and post-national ideologies, creating a deliberate blend of cultures and intentionally complicating rather than erasing cultural specificity.<sup>123</sup> This generates a multitude of identificatory positions, rendering a picture easier for export. It is a strategy employed not just by Hollywood but by successful French, East Asian and Scandinavian films as well. American cultural imperialism – understood as the transmission of distorted ideas and historical events – remains evident but only in films with a

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<sup>119</sup> John Urry. “The Media and Cosmopolitanism.” *Transnational America Conference*. Munich: n.p., 2000, cited in Kendall et al., 2009, 23.

<sup>120</sup> Kendall et al., 2009, 8.

<sup>121</sup> Sean Cubitt. *The Cinema Effect*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004, 336, 346.

<sup>122</sup> Diana Crane. “Cultural Globalization and the Dominance of the American Film Industry: Cultural Policies, National Film Industries, and Transnational Film.” *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 20.4 (11 Sept. 2013): 365–382, 375.

<sup>123</sup> Isabelle Vanderschelden. “Strategies for a “Transnational”/French Popular Cinema.” *Modern and Contemporary France* 15.1 (2007): 37–50, 38.

sensitive subject-matter. Global blockbusters are less culturally specific, allowing for more or less active interpretation by their spectators.<sup>124</sup>

By introducing the concept of the ‘blockbuster’ globally, American films set standards for success and entertainment. The ‘bigness’ of these pictures is evaluated both in financial terms - the disproportionate amount of box office income that they receive – and through the marketing and aesthetics that proclaim them as special, different and more magnificent than anything ever done before.<sup>125</sup> Such prestigious event movies are associated with the rise of the multiplex and well-recognised stars.<sup>126</sup> An important figure for the Hollywood blockbuster is the producer who secures funding often through marketing strategies devised in pre-production, together with the script, creating consumer products and product placement tie-ins. The careful choice of release date with regard to attracting the optimum number of viewers from the target audience and decisions on saturation marketing and television advertising are also the producer’s responsibility.<sup>127</sup> In short, the blockbuster is an ‘event movie’ that “target[s] the mass audience, making lack of knowledge of [its] existence virtually impossible”.<sup>128</sup> It is easy and pleasurable to ‘consume’ and, because of its popular attraction, has been accused of superficiality by critics, scholars and journalists. Despite controversy over its artistic value, the blockbuster proved essential in reviving popular Bulgarian cinema. Hollywood’s box office success revealed to Bulgarian producers the importance of attention to film as a product, subject to market forces and the creative and financial significance of a business-savvy producer.

Investment in international marketing campaigns and distribution attempts are rewarded with substantial profits. Hence, the Hollywood studios exhibit growing interest in foreign markets and try to tailor production to the intended spectators. Accounting for local differences proves essential in maximising revenue. As *The Economist* notes,

Big noisy spectacle travels best. Jason Statham, the close-cropped star of many a mindlessly violent film, is a particular Russian favourite. Films based on well-known literature (including cartoon books)

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<sup>124</sup> Crane, 2013, 377.

<sup>125</sup> Stringer, 2003, 3–4.

<sup>126</sup> Richard Maltby and Ian Craven. *Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction*. 1st ed. Oxford u.a.: Blackwell Publishers, May 1995, 484; Mark Jancovich and Lucy Faire. “The Best Place to See a Film: The Blockbuster, the Multiplex, and the Contexts of Consumption.” *Movie Blockbusters*. Ed. Julian Stringer. New York: Taylor & Francis, 2003. 190–201, 190.

<sup>127</sup> Douglas Gomery. “Hollywood Blockbusters: Industrial Analysis and Practice.” *Movie Blockbusters*. Ed. Julian Stringer. New York: Taylor & Francis, 2003. 72–83, 76.

<sup>128</sup> Stringer, 2003, 1.

and myths may also fare well. Films that trade on contemporary American cultural references are about as popular abroad as an oil slick on a NASCAR track... Comedy travels badly, too: Will Ferrell and Adam Sandler provoke guffaws at home but incomprehension abroad. As the market swings away from America, funny films are less likely to find financing or broad distribution anywhere.<sup>129</sup>

By taking into consideration what genres and narratives would be best appreciated by foreign audiences, Hollywood ceases to represent simply one national industry. The desire to conquer international markets has transformed it into a transnational enterprise.

Randall Halle observes that America has unjustifiably been ascribed the role of cultural invader of an innocent and fundamental national film culture.<sup>130</sup> As emphasised throughout my thesis, Bulgarian film culture is, in its essence, transnational and, as such, actively participates in cross-border artistic and business exchanges, despite the limitations of its national market. Halle argues that “critical assessments of national film production should not fall into an inconsistent position of being critical of the capitalism of Hollywood and turning a blind eye to the political economy of other national cinemas”.<sup>131</sup> In other words, ‘capitalism’, in general, should not be contracted to ‘American capitalism’ per se. The new media conglomerates – such as those of Rupert Murdoch, Robert Maxwell, Silvio Berlusconi as well as Sony, Disney and Paramount – may have had their origins in a particular national space but currently partake in global economics and communication. New technologies have redefined the relationship between place and space, necessitating a new vocabulary in describing film culture.<sup>132</sup> This allows for a cosmopolitan film audience to develop.

Film may have contributed to the dissemination of American values abroad but its far greater and more enduring contribution has been to the globalisation of culture.<sup>133</sup> Higson observes that as the longest standing and best organised media institution, Hollywood is capable of penetrating even the most heavily policed national spaces. While such transnational reach may displace

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<sup>129</sup> “Bigger abroad.” *The Economist*, 17 Feb. 2011. 19 Sept. 2015.  
<<http://www.economist.com/node/18178291>>.

<sup>130</sup> Randall Halle. *German Film after Germany: Toward a Transnational Aesthetic*. United States: University of Illinois Press, 25 June 2008, 16.

<sup>131</sup> *Id.*, 17.

<sup>132</sup> David Morley and Kevin Robins. “Spaces of Identity: Communications Technologies and the Reconfiguration of Europe.” *Theorising National Cinema*. Ed. Valentina Vitali and Paul Willemen. LONDON: British Film Institute, 5 June 2006. 293–303, 296–298.

<sup>133</sup> Schwartz, 2007, 5.

'indigenous' films, it also contributes to celebrating cultural diversity, transnational experiences and multinational identities.<sup>134</sup> Despite contributing to an environment of competition and emphasising commercial orientation, Hollywood also provides variety and challenges simplistic descriptions of film culture. What has emerged in recent years is a cosmopolitan cinema which implies multinational production involving subjects, themes, plots and industrial strategies that draw attention to a transnational cultural experience and perspective.<sup>135</sup>

Despite anxieties surrounding the increased globalisation of film business, I maintain that the process is neither intrinsically good, nor bad. It is simply a natural continuation of business growth and consolidation as well as of technological advancement. As such, cross-border trade and the growing influence of American entertainment should be examined based on their effect on a particular national context. I argue that exposure to foreign entertainment has contributed to the evolution of a cosmopolitan film culture in Bulgaria while international markets have also influenced the development of Hollywood. Together with Kendall et al., I admit that further empirical research is needed to reconcile the opposition between 'mundane' (or unreflexive) and 'authentic' (or aware and purposeful) cosmopolitanism. What is evident, nonetheless, is that there are different 'cosmopolitanisms' at play and people can be cosmopolitan in different ways.<sup>136</sup> Having clarified that, I focus on the role of transnational film production, distribution and exhibition in Bulgaria for creating the possibility of informed and open-minded global citizenship.

## 1.8 Place in Existing Literature and Original Contribution to Knowledge

To a great extent, I regard my work as a continuation of Dina Iordanova's *New Bulgarian Cinema* – an analysis of the transition years to democracy up to Bulgaria's accession to the European Union in 2007. Focusing on particular films, directors, writers, technical staff and actors, she also examines the social aspects of the changes in film aesthetics in the 1990s and early 2000s. Iordanova is more preoccupied with contextual rather than textual analysis in order to cover a

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<sup>134</sup> Higson, 2006, 18.

<sup>135</sup> Schwartz, 2007, 5.

<sup>136</sup> Kendall et al., 2009, 19, 26.

whole range of socio-political and cultural specificities. Her work, therefore, proves a model for discussing Bulgarian film within broader cultural tendencies. My thesis, produced seven years after *New Bulgarian Cinema*, benefits from the most recent research in Bulgarian film history as well as a retrospective view on the resurrection in domestic film production. Thus, while Iordanova briefly maps out the context of Bulgarian post-Communist cinema and provides a hypothetical prescription for possible successful development, I find myself in an advantageous position from which I can analyse with hindsight the factors behind its progress and draw comparisons with previous periods.

In 2008, Iordanova remained cautious when addressing the possible future success of Bulgarian film, appealing instead for an artistic unification of the Balkan countries. As already discussed, the region remains “marginalized, misrepresented and denigrated in [its] totality (not as individual countries)” within the context of the larger European community.<sup>137</sup> To turn this generalisation from a liability into an asset, Iordanova promoted the idea of cultural exchanges, contacts and co-productions, thus, encouraging pan-Balkan themes and cross-Balkan creative collaborations.<sup>138</sup> Although a thought-provoking prescription, I argue that a pan-Balkan partnership is simply one of the many routes for (trans)national rejuvenation and co-operation that have shaped and continue to influence Bulgarian film culture. Bulgarian cinema has developed in directions, transcending the Balkan or Eastern European context that Iordanova focuses on. By providing an inclusive account of these changes, my thesis endeavours to re-negotiate and update perceptions of Bulgarian culture both at home and abroad.

I make an original contribution in an underexplored area of English-language scholarship. There are few complete works on Bulgarian cinema and even fewer that take into account nuanced socio-historical influences. With the exception of Peter Kardzhilov and Galina Gencheva’s illustrated filmographies, Ronald Holloway’s *The Bulgarian Cinema* and Iordanova’s *New Bulgarian Cinema*, there is remarkably little English-language scholarship in the field. Kardzhilov and Gencheva’s volumes are exhaustive encyclopaedic entries on Bulgarian film history, covering the period between 1915 and 1970. While focusing primarily on film synopses, the books feature

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<sup>137</sup> Dina Iordanova. *New Bulgarian Cinema*. N.p.: College Gate Press, 19 Oct. 2008, 95.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

limited information on the development of the Bulgarian film industry and sporadic accounts of early transnational collaborations (including the first co-productions with Poland and the Soviet Union).<sup>139</sup> Ronald Holloway's work presents a helpful historical outline of the development of the domestic industry. However, its critical evaluation is problematic due to research being carried out in 1980s, under the conditions of Bulgarian communism. As already mentioned, Iordanova's work does not encompass the most recent period of film development in Bulgaria.

Domestic film scholarship during the Cold War lacks critical insight since most of the literature was produced by film critics or filmmakers, who enjoyed special privileges (including access to large film budgets, career opportunities, travel permits, connections abroad and foreign currency) as long as they supported the ideological regime.<sup>140</sup> As a result, works such as Vladimir Ignatovski's *Filmovo desetiletie 1970-1980* [A Film Decade 1970-1980], Bozhidar Mihaylov's *Kino i zritel* [Cinema and Spectator], Emil Petrov's *Byalo i Cherno* [White and Black] and Ivan Stoyanovich's *365 dni kino prez 1975* [365 Days of Cinema in 1975] present in-depth textual analysis of domestic and Soviet film aesthetics but avoid discussing the political or industrial realities shaping them. Film critic and historian Aleksandar Grozev is currently developing a series entitled *Kinoto v Bulgaria* [The Cinema in Bulgaria], set to explore domestic film culture from 1897 until the present day. While presenting an exhaustive and systematic contribution to Bulgarian-language film history, the last volumes of Grozev's study are due for publication after the completion of my thesis. None of the above-mentioned works aimed to consider the place of Bulgarian film within global film culture.

There is still no consensus on the most appropriate approach to exploring Bulgarian cinema. Film critic, scholar and journalist Bojidar Manov notes that it is not necessary to compare Bulgarian cinema with bigger or smaller countries which have different film industry models. Instead scholars should focus on the traditions of Bulgarian national culture while also "keeping an eye on international influences and tendencies".<sup>141</sup> However, Manov's recommendation remains unclear

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<sup>139</sup> Petar Kardzhilov. *Bulgarski Igralni Filmi – Anotirana iliustrovana Filmografiya 1915-1948* [Bulgarian Feature Films – An Annotated Illustrated Filmography 1915-1948]. Sofia: Dr Peter Beron State Publishing House, 1987, 51–52.

<sup>140</sup> Garbolevsky, 2011, 3, 163.

<sup>141</sup> Bojidar Manov. "Chetvartiyat Element ili Za Kinematografichniyat Interfeis" ["The Fourth Element or about the Cinematographic Interface"]. *Spisanie Kino* [Kino Journal] 4-5. (2011): 35–36.

because, in order to situate Bulgarian cinema within transnational trends, a certain level of similarity and contrast with other film cultures needs to be established.

A significant proportion of Bulgarian film publications display theoretical bias in their examination of domestic cinema. Work published in *Spisanie Kino [Kino Journal]*, a bi-monthly cinema journal featuring the most prominent Bulgarian critics, presents the dominant discourses on the legislative, industrial and aesthetic factors governing contemporary Bulgarian cinema. It also showcases the latest from Bulgarian research on world and Hollywood cinema. Despite that, the journal rarely discusses the links between domestic practices and global tendencies. As Iordanova observes, Balkan cinema is still to develop as an area of study, precisely because of this shortage of scholarship that recognises the affinities within the region.<sup>142</sup> There is a further refusal to recognise the similarities between the Eastern European film industries and Canadian and Mexican studios which also work to attract runaway Hollywood productions as well as Korean and Thai filmmakers, who face analogous financial difficulties.<sup>143</sup>

Bulgarian cinema is persistently examined as a self-contained entity as is exemplified in the title of a 2006 academic conference held at the New Bulgarian University – “New Bulgarian Cinema – A Regional Phenomenon or Part of the European Cultural Process”. The opposition in theoretical thought between what is perceived to represent, on the one hand, local traditions and, on the other, international culture becomes palpable. It is likely that the ideology of isolationism imposed by Communism, even though practically impossible, still impacts the mind-set of Bulgarian scholars. Even Iordanova, who supports a methodology that transcends the discrete and “ultimately limited” national frameworks in favour of a transnational account of “multicultural conviviality”, admits: “[i]f we want to primarily study the development of a national cinema in its complexity, we can happily stay within the national framework”.<sup>144</sup> As a result, film scholars so far

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<sup>142</sup> Dina Iordanova. *Cinema of Flames: Balkan Film, Culture and the Media*. 1st ed. London: British Film Institute, 1 Aug. 2001, 20.

<sup>143</sup> Dina Iordanova. “East Europe’s Cinema Industries since 1989: Financing Structure and Studios.” *The Public: Media Ownership and Control in East-Central Europe* 6. (1999): 45–60.

<sup>144</sup> Dina Iordanova. “Migration and Cinematic Process in Post-Cold War Europe.” *European Cinema in Motion: Migrant and Diasporic Film in Contemporary Europe*. Ed. Daniela Berghahn and Claudia Sternberg. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, Sept. 2010. 50–75, 61.

have given little attention to the intricate interconnectedness of Bulgarian and global film cultures.

Bulgarian authors focus on internal problems concerning the criteria for state funding, the narrative and aesthetic choices of Bulgarian directors, and vague notions of what constitutes ‘Bulgarian cinema’. Domestic art-house productions receive significantly more attention than home-grown or foreign popular cinema. Commercial products are perceived as undermining the educational function of cinema because, as Grozev mentions (in a section on early Bulgarian film), they cultivate a spirit of competition and consumerism that is hostile to democratic ideals and Renaissance culture.<sup>145</sup> Grozev’s position illustrates Higson’s remark (made in the context of British cinema) that canons of critically favoured domestic films dominate scholarship while pictures which do not fit the ideological preferences, but still circulate within film culture, remain neglected.<sup>146</sup> This is why Bulgarian scholars mostly fail to account for the social and economic importance of domestic and foreign popular pictures. As Evgenija Garbolevsky observes, this stagnant approach to mainstream culture is a feature shared across all European countries. While both Western and Eastern European filmmakers borrow many of the major popular Hollywood themes, such as the gangster movies or the *femme fatale* image, the idea that America is a dangerous, imperialist country remains relevant across the East-West European divide.<sup>147</sup> This presents a complex phenomenon of cultural appropriation mixed with ideological resistance.

Bulgarian film scholarship is also burdened by a multifaceted relationship to its Communist past. At least until the mid-2000s, there was palpable wistfulness for films produced during Communism. When critics were asked to name the best Bulgarian films of all times, most short-listed titles were from the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>148</sup> These decades marked the awakening of the *auteur* movement in Bulgaria balanced by increased state investment in large-scale popular productions.<sup>149</sup> The transition from vertically integrated to open-market film industry undoubtedly led the quality and reception of new domestic releases downhill. However, it could also be argued that preferences for films made during Communism reveal a certain nostalgia

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<sup>145</sup> Aleksandar Grozev. *Kinoto v Bulgaria: Chast I (1897-1956)* [Cinema in Bulgaria: Part I (1897-1956)]. Sofia: Faber, 2011, 308.

<sup>146</sup> Higson, 2006, 22.

<sup>147</sup> Garbolevsky, 2011, 145–146.

<sup>148</sup> Ronald A. Holloway and Dina Iordanova. *Hoping for a Bulgarian Film Revival*. 2006. 19 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.kinokultura.com/specials/5/holloway-iordanova.shtml>>.

<sup>149</sup> Garbolevsky, 2011, 91, 178–9.

among the intelligentsia for the “loss of structural advantages of the socialist or communist systems, and [indignation] at the subsequent impoverishment of their own lives”.<sup>150</sup> In contrast, I favour a balanced approach that accounts for landmark developments in Bulgarian film before and during Communism but also traces continuities in film culture across ideological periods and geographical boundaries. My thesis forms part of recent academic attempts to overcome the illusion of confinement in Bulgarian film studies.

The first to introduce a new perspective on domestic film culture was Aleksandar Yanakiev who, since the early 2000s, tried to reposition Bulgarian cinema as part of transnational business and cultural exchanges. His work was published in specialised domestic journals such as *Kino i vreme* [*Cinema and Time*], *Balgarski filmi* [*Bulgarian Films*] and *Spisanie Kino* [*Kino Journal*] and sponsored by the national fund for culture and the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.<sup>151</sup> This serves to show that the turn to transnational film studies was acknowledged and supported by the main cultural institutions in the country.

Through immense amounts of archival investigation and contextual interpretation, Yanakiev draws parallels between the development of Bulgarian and world cinema. The author maps out the roots of the Bulgarian film industry and the factors contributing to transnational distribution in the Balkans.<sup>152</sup> He challenges the “masochistic” domestic stereotypes that Bulgaria is “at the [cultural] outskirts of Europe” by revealing that the country has always been up-to-date with the developments in film art and technology.<sup>153</sup> Yanakiev presents case-studies of early filmmakers in order to trace the origins of Bulgarian co-productions and compile a profile of the internationally-oriented domestic producer.<sup>154</sup> He further discusses Bulgarian film diversity and the impact of American cinema on the early domestic market and audiences.<sup>155</sup> By focusing on technical innovations, the emancipation of filmmakers and the differentiation of local intelligentsia

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<sup>150</sup> Fredric Jameson. “Thoughts on Balkan Cinema.” *Subtitles: On the Foreignness of Film*. Ed. Atom Egoyan and Ian Balfour. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 15 Oct. 2004. 231–258, 248.

<sup>151</sup> Yanakiev, 2003, 7–8.

<sup>152</sup> Aleksandar Yanakiev. “20 Years Ago: Directions and Meanders of the Bulgarian Film.” *Peta mladezhka nauchna konferentsiya “Izkustvo i kontekst”* [Fifth Youth Conference “Art and Context”]. Ed. Ruslan Stoychev and Marina Koleva. Haskovo: Institute of Art, 2009. 265–276; Yanakiev, 2008, 197–201.

<sup>153</sup> Yanakiev, 2003, 9–10.

<sup>154</sup> Yanakiev (b), 2007, 51–58.

<sup>155</sup> Yanakiev, 2003, 56, 73.

throughout the different political contexts, Yanakiev reveals continuities in transnational cooperation and modernisation between the different political regimes in Bulgaria. His work has largely remained untranslated to English, despite its usefulness.

Correspondingly, film scholar and critic Ingeborg Bratoeva-Darakchieva (also writing exclusively in Bulgarian) strives to re-assess aspects of the development of Bulgarian cinema from the end of World War II until the globalisation era.<sup>156</sup> Her project rests on the premise that the dynamics of socio-historical processes have caused three notable identity crises in Bulgaria. Bratoeva-Darakchieva offers a re-evaluation of the community values and social norms that followed the establishment of Socialist Realism as the official artistic style of Bulgarian communist art in the 1950s, the tendency for social criticism in films after the Prague Spring of 1968 and the opening of Bulgarian society and film production to the European and world cultural space post-1989.<sup>157</sup> Her main focus, however, remains textual analysis. Bratoeva-Darakchieva situates the aesthetics of domestic filmmaking as part of local identity quests and transnational artistic movements. While the author acknowledges the links between Bulgarian and European film developments, she invests the concepts of 'identity crisis' and 'political change' with meanings that suggest processes of radical discontinuity and disruption, rather than gradual shifts. In contrast, like Yanakiev, I focus on the connections across political and geographic contexts in order to challenge notions of drastic transformation in Bulgarian film culture.

European film theorist working in the US Temenuga Trifonova similarly assesses representations of identity in recent Bulgarian films along the transnational axis. Trifonova perceives national identity as constructed either in terms of a return to rural life (imagined as constituting the nation's roots) or as a movement to 'Europe' ('reclaiming' the nation's European origins). She acknowledges the recent phenomena of migration, immigration and globalization and positions them within the dominant conservative discourse informing post-communist Bulgarian cinema. Trifonova considers obsolete the notion of national identity rooted in the nation's ethno-scape, ethno-history and ethno-memory, which are often regarded as 'corrupted' by post-communist developments. The author criticises the aesthetics of pictures such as *Pismo do Amerika [Letter to America]* (Iglika Trifonova 2001), *Prognoza [Forecast]* (Zornitsa Sophia 2008) and *The World Is Big...* and favours the cosmopolitan space and characterisation of *Iztochni piesi [Eastern Plays]*

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<sup>156</sup> Bratoeva-Darakchieva, 2013, 344.

<sup>157</sup> Id., 344–5.

(Kamen Kalev 2009).<sup>158</sup> Like Bratoeva-Darakchieva, Trifonova prefers to focus on the formal characteristics of Bulgarian film language in the context of European artistic movements. Hence, there is still a significant lack of scholarship that takes into account recent developments in the domestic film industry.

Evgenija Garbolevsky's work proves nearest to the purposes of my project. In her thesis Garbolevsky challenges the stereotypical perception of Bulgarian Communist cinema as art-house and conformist and reveals the nuances of ideological resistance and transnational flows over the Iron Curtain. The author maintains that “[t]he trivial division of the Eastern European film into the categories of propaganda and dissent is too simplistic. The examples of many films show far greater complexity and the presence of an apolitical attitude with political undertones among the artists”.<sup>159</sup> Her research seeks to normalize the Bulgarian case, de-Balkanize the Balkans, transcend the simplistic “pattern of denigration” of the “murky,” “primitive” Balkans and focus on parallels and continuities between the East and the West. The author argues for a universal cultural heritage, particularly relevant within the context of globalization and the advent of a large unified Europe.<sup>160</sup> While Garbolevsky concentrates on a critical reassessment of the culture of the Cold War era, I apply an analogous methodology of transnationalism as awareness of cultural closeness.

## 1.9 Sources and Methods of Categorisation

My research benefits from the archival work conducted by scholars like Yanakiev, Bratoeva-Darakchieva and Garbolevsky, as well as from use of online primary sources. The most useful Bulgarian film statistics website remains [kino.dir.bg](http://kino.dir.bg). It contains weekly information about the top twenty titles in the Bulgarian box office from mid-2002 (with some months omitted and some minor mistakes in the data).<sup>161</sup> It is rumoured to receive its statistics from Alexandra Films, the

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<sup>158</sup> Temenuga Trifonova. “Between the National and the Transnational: Bulgarian Post-Communist Cinema.” *Studies in Eastern European Cinema* 2.2 (26 July 2011): 211–225.

<sup>159</sup> Garbolevsky, 2011, 12–13.

<sup>160</sup> Garbolevsky, 2011, 16–19.

<sup>161</sup> There is, for instance, no information on four contemporary films, supported by the Bulgarian National Film Centre – *Pohishtenieto* [The Abduction] (Plamen Maslarov, 2010), *Ratsi* [Crabs/Crayfish] (Ivan Tcherkelov, 2009), *Staklenata reka* [The Glass River] (Stanimir Trifonov, 2010) and *Ako nyakoi te obicha* [If Somebody Loves You] (Kiran Kolarov, 2010), the last two distributed by Pro Films. As Aleksandar Yanakiev

biggest distributor in Bulgaria, part of Alexandra Group which controls about 80 per cent of the Bulgarian exhibition market. Therefore, despite the occasional inaccuracies, it presents a good indication of the processes, ratios and tendencies in contemporary film distribution and exhibition. The second online database is [boxofficemojo.com](http://boxofficemojo.com), an IMDb spin-off owned by Amazon.com, which focuses on yearly revenue as well as weekly statistics and proves an excellent resource for cross-checking official data. In addition, it features profiles with individual information on the international box office earnings of pictures which receive distribution beyond the boundaries of Bulgaria. Both online sources provide valuable information on film performance and cinema-going tendencies in the context of political, legislative and social transformations. Attendance figures are often cross-referenced with the Lumiere European film data base, a project of the European Audiovisual Observatory, which purportedly uses statistics provided by the Bulgarian National Film Centre and MEDIA Salles. While a prominent source of information in Europe, its accuracy has been disputed by Bulgarian scholars.<sup>162</sup>

Appendix A features a copy of the most recent Bulgarian film legislation, the Film Industry Act of 2003, which was also made available on the National Film Centre website ([www.nfc.bg](http://www.nfc.bg)). In Chapter Three I discuss how certain provisions of the law serve to shape the idea of Bulgarian national cinema and help or hinder the development of a viable domestic film industry. Table 1 of Appendix B features data on the Bulgarian film market in the period 1994–2013, available from the MEDIA Salles projects *European Cinema Yearbook 2012*, *European Cinema Yearbook 2013* and *European Cinema Yearbook 2014*. It also includes information from the Strategy for the Development of the Audiovisual Industry in Bulgaria and the Bulgarian National Film Centre with regard to state subsidies for cinema.<sup>163</sup> The above-mentioned film databases have been utilised in

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explains the reasons for the lack of information might be: the producers and distributors are hiding the data (and, hence, the revenues); the films were never really shown in cinemas or were screened in theatres that no longer function as such; the films were distributed by their producers and not the traditional distributor who would have sent the data in; or they simply did not make the top twenty for the week in which they premiered (Aleksandar Yanakiev. "Sluchi Se!" ["It Happened!"]. *Spisanie Kino [Kino Journal]* 4-5. (2011): 49–53).

<sup>162</sup> During a 2015 conference entitled "Bulgarsko kino – 100 godini sled nachaloto" ["Bulgarian Cinema – 100 Years after the Beginning"] Bulgarian scholars and professionals discussed discrepancies in the box office information available about the film *The Abduction*. According to the Lumiere database, it attracted a substantial audience in Poland but almost no viewers in Bulgaria or any other country. What this official statistics fails to acknowledge is that the Bulgarian picture likely benefited from the promotion of the American feature *The Abduction* (John Singleton, 2011), distributed in Poland at the same time, and that the attendance numbers were likely mixed up.

<sup>163</sup> Georgi Cholakov. *Strategiya za razvitie na audiovizualnata industriya v Bulgaria* [Strategy for the Development of the Audiovisual Industry in Bulgaria]. 2012. 21 Sept. 2015. <<https://ia700406.us.archive.org/18/items/DevelopmentStrategyOfAudiovisualIndustryInBulgaria/titulna.pdf>>.

compiling a list of the most successful Bulgarian film productions for the period 2003–2013, available in Table 2 of Appendix B. The percentage of state subsidy received is an estimate, based on official reports by the National Film Centre.<sup>164</sup>

Measuring the popularity and impact of a picture is just as complex as defining its national belonging. During Communism cinema attendance was high and successful domestic titles would attract more than a million spectators (or one eighth of the population) on regular basis.<sup>165</sup> However, in the post-1989 conditions of open market economy and increased Internet distribution the balance has shifted. My reference system for contemporary films' performance is based on Yanakiev's rating of the Bulgarian film market. In light of the recent box-office performance of domestic titles, the critic determines as 'poor' films with less than 6,500 viewers. Pictures with 6,500 to 13,000 spectators have a 'mediocre' performance. Productions with an audience of 13,000 to 26,000 are 'good'. Films with up to 52,000 viewers prove to be 'successful' in this context. 'Very successful' is a film that has attracted between 52,000 and 104,000 spectators and an 'extremely successful' production should have more than 104,000 tickets sold. In defining my key terminology I subscribe to the European criterion for success (number of spectators) instead of the American one (revenue).<sup>166</sup> The reasons behind this are differences in scale and Hollywood's international box office dominance. Negotiating the cultural status of national popular pictures is subject to unequal power relations.<sup>167</sup> The terms for success in a small national market are, therefore, different. I measure popularity through the warmth of the audience reception and I also attempt to take into account the response of festival cinemagoers, television viewers and internet users (when applicable and possible). Even if I define Bulgarian films by audience numbers, I still examine their financial achievements as part of issues justifying investment and models of sustainability. Box office figures are unadjusted for inflation.

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<sup>164</sup> The Film Industry Act of 2003 prohibits more than 80 per cent state involvement in a given Bulgarian film. The minimum state funding for an approved project specified by the law is thirty percent. However, filmmakers have been known to apply for funding with larger predicted budgets and, as a result, some of the productions enjoyed subsidies well over the specified maximum.

<sup>165</sup> Yanakiev, 2003, 297–311.

<sup>166</sup> Yanakiev, 2011, 49–51.

<sup>167</sup> Julian Stringer, ed. "Neither One Thing, Nor the Other: Blockbusters at Film Festivals." *Movie Blockbusters*. New York: Taylor & Francis, 2003, 202–214.

## 1.10 Chapter Breakdown

My chapters are both temporally and thematically structured as I believe that with the historical transformation of the audiovisual context, aesthetic and industrial changes follow. I examine the economic and social setting as well as the political reality in which Bulgarian film culture has evolved throughout the decades. I argue that there are continuities across the different periods and across national borders. As such, Bulgarian cinema proves a complex phenomenon that should not be examined in historical or geographical isolation. Like Aniko Imre's edited volume *A Companion to Eastern European Cinemas*, my project offers a revisionist methodology.<sup>168</sup> My thesis accounts for the inter-relations and power imbalance in Europe placing post-Socialist transformations in the larger context of a retrospective historical revision. While based on a case-study of Bulgarian film, this project repeatedly challenges nationalistic demarcations of film culture. My main preoccupation is the influence of film legislation and audience predilections on the formation of a Bulgarian national cinema in discourse.

My reconsideration begins by revealing the transnational character of (Bulgarian) motion pictures since the very beginning of cinema. In Chapter Two I discuss *The Bulgarian Is Gallant* (1915) and *Cairn* (1936) which serve to show that early Bulgarian cinema built on pre-existing local art forms as well as international appropriations. Later in the same chapter, I challenge the notion of limited artistic interactions between Western and Eastern Europe during the Cold War and re-evaluate Bulgarian state censorship and transnational collaboration in the context of the Eastern bloc. I reveal that Bulgaria was not as culturally or politically isolated during Communism as previously alleged. The Bulgarian Poetic Realist movement and the detective cycle appropriated narrative and aesthetic ideas from, respectively, the Italian Neorealism and British/American spy movies. As my analysis of *Na malkiya ostrov* [*On a Small Island*] (Rangel Vulchanov, 1958), *Privarzaniyat balon* [*The Attached Balloon*] (Binka Zhelyazkova, 1968) and *Kozijat rog* [*The Goat Horn*] (Metodi Andonov, 1972) shows, local filmmakers built upon existing styles and conventions in order to expand their repertoire and present topics of national interest.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> See: Imre, 2012, 7.

<sup>169</sup> Holloway, 1986, 84, 86; Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell. *Film History: An Introduction*. 3rd ed. New York, NY: McGraw Hill Higher Education, 1 May 2009, 265–268.

The subsequent part of my thesis is dedicated to examining the current transnational influences on the domestic industry, revealing intricate inter-connectedness with the global market which becomes evident as innovative production and promotional practices evolve and spread. In Chapter Three I draw parallels between the domestic industry and broader tendencies in European filmmaking to suggest that Bulgaria faces similar challenges as the rest of Europe in adopting appropriate film legislation, facilitating international networking and business collaboration and finding successful strategies for attracting audiences. By examining three of the most profitable recent features – *The World Is Big...*, *Mission London* and *Love.Net* – I reveal the transnational plots, financing and marketing appropriations which have contributed to the recent revival in domestic cinema attendance.

Alternative distribution and the progressively active role of film audiences are international phenomena facilitated by the rise of new technologies and detectible in Bulgaria as well. I allow special attention for the film industry and institutions within which movies have been made, disseminated, exhibited and consumed. Chapter Four examines the festival alternative network of distribution, technological synergy and instant access as likely contenders for taking over not just the domestic but the global film market in general. The proliferation of festivals like the Sofia International Film Festival (SIFF) is discussed as a positive phenomenon – an opportunity for audiences to experience films that would not normally find theatrical distribution in their country and a business opportunity for young filmmakers.<sup>170</sup> Similarly, my case-study on netcinema.bg examines the potential of video-on-demand services to change the distribution landscape in Bulgaria. Last but not least, I focus on *Love.net* as an example of the opportunities and anxieties surrounding the influence of the web on the international entertainment industry.

Thus, my thesis is a natural continuation of recent theoretical projects in transnationalism. It attempts to bring into view a Europe-wide circulation and dialogue of films and ideologies, foregrounding the theoretical importance of Eastern European cinemas, and Bulgarian film, in particular, for a more comprehensive understanding of local and global film processes. I offer an original revisionist reading of feature film history and I contribute to the better understanding of

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<sup>170</sup> Dimitris Kerkinos. "Programming Balkan Films at the Thessaloniki International Film Festival." *Film Festival Yearbook 1: The Festival Circuit*. Ed. Dina Iordanova and Ragan Rhyne. St Andrews: St Andrews Film Studies (with College Gate Press), 30 May 2009. 168–178.

contemporary film culture in Bulgaria, which remains rarely addressed by English-language scholarship. I also investigate the transformation of national cinema, prompted by legislation and cross-border collaboration.



## **Chapter 2: A Transnational Past Revisited and Revised**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Researchers emerging from different political regimes have disagreed over what constituted the formal ‘beginning’ of cinema in Bulgaria. Many placed an emphasis on local film production or the system of government instead of on the early distribution and exhibition practices which shaped the cinematic environment.<sup>171</sup> While the political and ideological contexts affecting Bulgarian film culture through the decades hold undeniable authority over practices of production, distribution and exhibition, the transnational nature of cinema persistently challenges any notions of absolutes. Like Yanakiev, I argue that there is not a single event or venture which can be identified as a starting point.<sup>172</sup> Unlike political coups and abrupt changes in governments, the development of film art and business in Bulgaria is a continuous process, part of technological and economic advances and, thus, inevitably influenced by foreign entrepreneurship and international relations. Further, the notion of national cinema has changed gradually under different legislation, together with the shifting balance between state subsidy and private funding and audience predilections.

In a similar vein, I attempt to outline the environment of communist filmmaking and challenge the myth of Bulgarian media isolation during the Cold War. There are differences with regard to the exact periodization of Communist cinema, confusion over its main characteristics, enquiries into the influence of institutional changes on film aesthetics and an array of methodologies, focusing more on style and ideology and less on reception, repertoire and distribution.<sup>173</sup> I place my interpretation in the context of state intervention and transnational artistic and business tendencies. I view Bulgarian communist film culture as belonging to the period between 1948 and 1990, a timeframe which loosely reflects the changes in political regimes and subsequent legislation. While 9<sup>th</sup> September 1944 is acknowledged as the victory date for Communist partisans, Yanakiev is right in noting that the creation of the State Cinematography was a steady process which followed the gradual establishment of the socialist cinema model in the late 1940s

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<sup>171</sup> Yanakiev, 2003, 15, 177.

<sup>172</sup> Id., 15.

<sup>173</sup> Id., 167.

and early 1950s.<sup>174</sup> Aesthetic changes occurred as film practitioners continually adjusted to the shifting filmmaking environment, professionalised and sought expressive means which would fit the new ideology. Similarly, communism in Bulgaria formally ended on 10<sup>th</sup> November 1989 but the totalitarian state structures and policies took years to re-organise which inevitably had an impact on film economics and aesthetics.<sup>175</sup>

In this chapter I provide a brief overview of the evolution of domestic film, linking local traditions with international business practices. I maintain that Bulgaria has been the site of transnational film production, distribution and reception from very early on, through the years of censorship and Communism to the present day. Thus, notions of self-sufficiency and seclusion should be eliminated from Bulgarian film scholarship. At the same time, I illustrate that industrial sustainability was a possibility during Communism not simply because of state funding but because of the vertically integrated system of production, distribution and exhibition. I examine the progress of domestic film culture and the influence of international contacts in their interconnectedness.

## **2.2 Transnational Roots: *The Bulgarian Is Gallant* and Cultural Modernisation in Bulgaria**

The first Bulgarian film *Balgaran e galant* [*Bulgaràn Is a Gallant/The Bulgarian Is Gallant*] (Vassil Gendov, 1915) refers to a popular folklore topic and an indigenous literary work through an internationally established silent cinema genre. It merges the local and global characteristics of film culture, embodying the complexity of transnational Bulgarian film. Vassil Gendov portrays a character named Bulgaràn, the stereotypical Bulgarian, an elegant *nouveau riche*, seeking some excitement in the city. He starts flirting with a young lady (Mara Miyateva-Lipina) who decides to punish him for his arrogance. The lady asks Bulgaràn to accompany her on her shopping spree where he gratuitously ends up paying for her purchases and carrying them to impress her. At the end, she meets her husband and the two of them leave in a taxi, tipping Bulgaràn as a porter, much to his unpleasant surprise and humiliation.

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<sup>174</sup> Id., 168.

<sup>175</sup> Id., 167–169.



Figure 1. Vassil Gendov, director of the first Bulgarian film.

Based on the French farces popular at the time, *The Bulgarian Is Gallant* was produced and marketed with an emphasis on its link to domestic culture.<sup>176</sup> The title is a humorous reference to the Bulgarian (and, indeed, Balkan) failure to appear culturally refined, an indication of the low national self-esteem shortly after the Liberation of Ottoman domination. After five centuries of being colonised by the Ottoman Empire, Bulgarians were eager to prove their culture belonged to Europe but also highly aware of the remnant Orientalist legacy. The main character in *The Bulgarian Is Gallant* relates to the tale of Bay Ganyo, a literary prototype of Balkan opportunism, vulgarity and cynicism, created by writer Aleko Konstantinov shortly after the Liberation and reincarnated in many jokes and films to follow.<sup>177</sup> Thus, the film exposes the regressive mentality associated with the post-colonial Balkans by appropriating a popular genre like farce. As discussed

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<sup>176</sup> Grozev, 2005, 61–65.

<sup>177</sup> Sylvia Choleva. *Bay Ganyo of the Balkans*. 1 June 2008. 20 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.vagabond.bg/features/item/514-bay-ganyo-of-the-balkans.html>>.

in the Introduction, in this context cinema proves a means to question and renegotiate national identity as well as evidence, in itself, for the advancement of Bulgarian culture and technology.

The film posed a challenge to the idea that local culture would remain underdeveloped. *The Bulgarian Is Gallant* was reviewed as a valuable cultural contribution, bringing Bulgaria closer to the achievements of European film art. In an article following the film's premiere, *Vestnik Dnevnik* [*Dnevnik Newspaper*] urged audiences in the Danube town of Rousse to go to the screenings for a "rare" opportunity to "follow the first footsteps of Bay Ganyo in rivalry with the Western European [comic] giants".<sup>178</sup> It is evident that the description relied on drawing parallels between the film and national literature, on the one hand, and popular foreign comedies, on the other. *The Bulgarian Is Gallant* was positioned both within well-established cultural traditions and on the threshold of something excitingly new – learning from and competing with Western cinematic art. Moreover, the review reverses the role of the main character; instead of a reason for shame, Bay Ganyo is redeemed as a collective symbol of local humour in the race with foreign entertainment. I argue that the character was later revived in the renegotiation of contemporary (trans-)national identity in *Mission London*.

As already discussed, the existence of local production in this context was deemed important by the press for displaying the progress of the newly liberated state and its attempts at integration with the rest of Europe. However, it was early distribution and exhibition that prompted the transnational nature of Bulgarian film culture in the first place. The Bulgarian market has attracted international entrepreneurs since the late nineteenth century when Georg Kuzmicz (né Yuray Kuzmik) brought the phonograph (and, a year later, the cinematograph) to the town of Veliko Tarnovo. Kuzmicz's origins remain uncertain, however, evidence supports the idea that he emigrated from Slovakia to Dalmatia (Croatia) where he acquired his skills and equipment. His adventurous travel to Bulgaria was driven by heightened competition in early film exhibition, as more enthusiasts gained knowledge about the craft, provoking a desire to explore new, unexploited markets.<sup>179</sup> Similarly, the first public film screening in Bulgaria was, reportedly, set up by Johan Fisher from Vienna in 1897 in the town of Rousse. Fisher later toured the country with a

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<sup>178</sup> Grozev, 2005, 63.

<sup>179</sup> Yanakiev, 2008, 197–198.

short programme, featuring a moving train, the welcoming of a Russian tsar in Paris and other tourist attractions.<sup>180</sup> From this early episode in Bulgarian film culture it becomes evident that cinema favoured an environment of free movement and trade. The pictures were introduced in Bulgaria through the initiatives of foreign enthusiasts, capitalising on the thrills of new technology and distant locations. Like *The Bulgarian Is Gallant*, those early ventures attracted Bulgarian spectators through a mixture of local/familiar and foreign/exotic topics and genres. International involvement and viewers' interest in foreign lands remain characteristic of Bulgarian film culture through the decades.

*The Bulgarian Is Gallant* has been interpreted, retrospectively, by Grozev and Holloway either as the only possible business response to the drying supply of Western films (due to the commencement of World War I) or as Gendov's opportunity to impress the daughter of the Modern Theatre cinema hall proprietor.<sup>181</sup> The film was equally likely to be the result of the changing transnational distribution environment and individual motives. It presents an example of how national filmmaking initiatives are linked to both local (sometimes, deeply personal) and global factors. As Yanakiev notes, conditions for transnational trade existed earlier than the European Union when the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires facilitated access to Central Europe, the Balkans and the Middle East.<sup>182</sup> The fortuitous geographical location of Bulgaria predetermined its involvement in international film exchange. The country became an extremely favourable market for film trade after Western European distribution agencies, supplying products to Balkan countries, set up their representative offices in Sofia.<sup>183</sup> The distribution network in Bulgaria formed part of international structures and lured foreign investment. As a result, the country could be interpreted as a business bridge between the East and the West.

Cinema in Bulgaria came to represent a transformation in local culture and business practices. The name of the first Bulgarian purpose-built cinema – Modern Theatre – positioned it as linking traditional cultural forms with 'modern' entertainment and technology. The result of an alleged one million leva investment, the grandiose picture house project was only feasible if supported by

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Holloway, 1986, 77; Grozev, 2005, 61.

<sup>182</sup> Yanakiev, 2008, 198–199.

<sup>183</sup> Id., 199.

international sponsors.<sup>184</sup> Created by Italian entrepreneur Carlo Alberto Vaccaro, in partnership with Austro-Hungarians Albert Österreicher (possibly, né Aladar Ottay) and Sigmund Silagi, the theatre was a transnational enterprise of modernisation.<sup>185</sup> It lived up to its aspirations by participating in all film-related activities in the Balkan region and beyond. From its creation in 1908, Modern Theatre acted as official representative of the French production and technical equipment company Pathé Frères for Bulgaria and Macedonia. In addition, it sold projectors by Gaumont and offered pictures by the Danish film studio Nordisk, the Italian Ambrosio Film, the French Gaumont and Éclair, as well as by a number of American companies.<sup>186</sup> The early Bulgarian audience was familiar with a variety of filmic traditions, including Chinese and Japanese productions and stars.<sup>187</sup> While French cinema was prominent worldwide in this early stage, the Bulgarian market featured a diversity of film material available from over the globe.<sup>188</sup> The emphasis on the particular companies instead of on the films' countries of origins once again confirms Vitali and Willemen's observation that 'national cinema' evolved as a later construct.<sup>189</sup> Due to the lack of dialogue in a specific language, the shortness and the sensationalist attractiveness of the format, early films demonstrated limited links to a particular nation, emphasising, instead, the production qualities of their respective manufacturing companies.<sup>190</sup> In the early film period, in Bulgaria, much like in the rest of the world, distribution and exhibition were predominantly transnational in nature. Both the investment and the product responsible for the development of film trade in Bulgaria originated from abroad. What was significant about the case of Bulgarian cinema was its artistic and business functioning between the East and the West.

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<sup>184</sup> Yanakiev, 2003, 19.

<sup>185</sup> Vaccaro had previously displayed significant interest in pan-European trade and the industrialisation of Bulgaria. He introduced the first thresher (manufactured in the UK) in the country, organised the export of agricultural products to Italy, France and Africa and participated in the electrification of Sofia (Penka Kalinkova. *Za famozniya Vaccaro Bulgaria stava sadba [For Far-Famed Vaccaro Bulgaria Becomes Destiny]* 18 Aug. 2012. 20 Sept. 2015. <<http://duma.bg/node/37700>>); Yanakiev, 2003, 21.

<sup>186</sup> Yanakiev, 2008, 200–201.

<sup>187</sup> Andronika Martonova. "About the Films on 'Silk Reel': Chinese Silent Cinema in the Bulgarian Press." *The Silk Road: Papers from the International Conference*. Ed. Ivaylo Marinov. Sofia: Confucius Institute, 2011. 66–72.

<sup>188</sup> On the French domination of early cinema, see Kristin Thompson. *Exporting Entertainment: America in the World Film Market, 1907–1934*. 1st ed. London: British Film Institute, 1 Jan. 1985; Yanakiev, 2008, 200–201.

<sup>189</sup> Vitali and Willemen, 2006, 1–2.

<sup>190</sup> See also Tom Gunning. "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde." *Wide Angle* 8.3&4 (1986): 63–70.

By 1915 Modern Theatre could afford to invest in the production of *The Bulgarian Is Gallant* because it had already secured valuable distribution and exhibition contacts in Eurasia. The company had grown to become a significant film distributor in the Balkans and in the Middle East, branching out to Alexandria, Bucharest, Istanbul, Thessaloniki, Izmir, Belgrade, Skopje and Athens. It had created a common distribution and exhibition network which facilitated easier access to new productions.<sup>191</sup> In addition, Vaccaro and his son had expanded their domestic exhibition to the town of Plovdiv and established a travelling cinema which toured Bulgaria and nearby countries.<sup>192</sup> Despite competition from businessmen such as Nikola Spasic (a Serbian representative of Gaumont, Éclair and the Italian production house Savoia Film) and Marco Schlachter (selling innovative cinematographers with petrol and diesel engines), between the two World Wars Modern Theatre's capital grew exponentially.<sup>193</sup> This fact reveals the business potential of the early Bulgarian market, its interconnectedness with European and world entrepreneurship and its important location in terms of global trade.

*The Bulgarian Is Gallant* was not the only initiative resulting from distribution and exhibition expansion in Bulgaria. Exposure to foreign industry practices benefited local artists and entrepreneurs by introducing them to new genres and competitive techniques. During the early period the market proved appealing to the expanding US distribution business. Since then Hollywood has been a constant presence in the transnational Bulgarian film environment. In the mid-1920s, American titles formed just under thirty per cent of all pictures exhibited in the country. The lack of direct connections with Hollywood had resulted in new films taking years to reach the Bulgarian market with increased costs, attributable to European intermediaries.<sup>194</sup> American 'prestige' productions were rarely exhibited in this period with only low-grade silent westerns, melodramas, and action pictures representing US film.<sup>195</sup> As a result, the Bulgarian intelligentsia viewed Hollywood production with suspicion and contempt (a tendency that can be traced up to the present day). However, when Paramount Pictures, First National and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer formed a syndicate to represent their shared interests in Central and Eastern

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<sup>191</sup> Yanakiev, 2008, 200–201.

<sup>192</sup> Kalinkova, 2012.

<sup>193</sup> Yanakiev, 2008, 200–201.

<sup>194</sup> Yanakiev, 2003, 73–75.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid; Thomas Schatz and Steven Bach. *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Film-Making in the Studio Era*. London: Faber and Faber, 22 June 1998, 22.

Europe, American films gradually gained a larger exhibition share and more local admirers.<sup>196</sup> US film representatives introduced an innovative, aggressive style of promotion, including preliminary screenings for the press, writers and artists and an emphasis on Hollywood's star system. In 1926 they organised a beauty pageant across Central and Eastern Europe, promising an acting contract for the winner.<sup>197</sup> This interactive approach shaped the development of modern film marketing in Bulgaria, while also establishing America as the land of opportunities in the collective subconscious. Setting up businesses representing Hollywood in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century not only enriched the repertoire of domestic film distribution but also introduced new standards in promotion and exhibition, shaping the expectations of local audiences.

## **2.3 National Legislation and International Collaboration as a Way to Overcome Local Limitations: *Cairn***

Despite the emphasis on domestic cinema as a mark of cultural and technological progress, the period of Bulgarian filmmaking up until 1930, when the first national film law was ratified, was characterised by lack of appropriate state legislation and regulation. As a result, while in Europe and America film art turned into a powerful industry with big revenues, in Bulgaria it remained an individual creative act. No decent production basis (affecting both the quality and the quantity of the films produced), a small market of about seventy cinema halls and lack of free capital for investment characterised this period in Bulgarian film.<sup>198</sup> When film legislation was eventually implemented in Bulgaria, there were controversies over whether it truly provided adequate incentives and protection for local producers.

The first draft film law intended to invest Bulgarian cinema with the responsibility of promoting education and moral progress. The first article of the proposed bill specified:

School and portable cinematographs are intended to supplement the knowledge of students and the general population of sciences and the arts, to promote national, religious, moral, family and civic virtues, and to maintain and strengthened the relationship between school and family. Portable

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<sup>196</sup> German films dominated the domestic box office at the time due to the country's industrial growth (helped by post-World War I inflation) and strengthened cultural and business exchanges between Berlin and Sofia (Yanakiev, 2003, 74).

<sup>197</sup> Id., 76–77, 80–81.

<sup>198</sup> Ivanova (a), 2005, 36–37.

cinematographs have the task of introducing mainly rural population to the practical use of advancements in science and culture, in view of bettering their livelihoods.<sup>199</sup>

It is evident that at the time the Bulgarian government perceived cinema as, primarily, an educational tool. Its universal reach was intended to help instruct the mostly rural population of the country in their daily lives and work. There was no mention of entertainment or private venture in this early draft law. The issue of sustainability, however, came in sight as the draft bill proposed tax exemptions for all school and travelling cinemas. School cinema theatres were supposed to hand over five percent of their profits and travelling cinemas gave up all their income in order to finance a national film library and any materials needed for the development of the sector.<sup>200</sup> While this arrangement would have ensured the viability of the national film distribution network, it, strikingly, made no mention of Bulgarian film production.

At the same time, article two of the draft law proposed that the Ministry of Education control the establishment of new school and travelling cinemas, essentially, creating a monopoly over the sector. This article was included in the first Bulgarian film legislation, ratified in 1930, and hindered the development of private travelling cinemas.<sup>201</sup> In the report accompanying the official legislation the Minister of Education at the time, Nikola Naydenov, recognised the social impact of film and insisted that cinema should be regulated by the state.<sup>202</sup> This illustrates the involvement of national legislation in shaping domestic film practices and reveals that even before communism the Bulgarian government attempted to impose ideological control over the film industry.

The 1930 Law of the Cinematographs acknowledged the need to address film production. Article seven of the bill defined as ‘Bulgarian’ films produced in the country by Bulgarian companies or foreign companies with Bulgarian artists and plotlines. Such pictures, if recognised by the Bulgarian Ministry of Education as educational, scientific or cultural films, would be exempt from excise duty. This provided a thirty per cent tax exemption for films with “outstanding technical and performance achievements, handling Bulgarian subjects”.<sup>203</sup> There was clearly an emphasis on portraying local culture; however, the wording was vague enough to allow for preferential

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<sup>199</sup> Yanakiev, 2003, 147.

<sup>200</sup> Id., 148.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Id., 150.

<sup>203</sup> Ivanova (a), 2005, 36–37.

treatment and ideological censorship by the state committee that evaluated the submitted projects.<sup>204</sup> Disagreement arises between scholars Aleksandar Yanakiev and Dimitrina Ivanova on the usefulness of this first legislation. According to Yanakiev, it favoured local production as almost all feature films, made in the 1930s enjoyed tax incentives.<sup>205</sup> Ivanova, however, directs attention towards ideological censorship, disguised as ethical recommendations. She gives as an example the anti-fascist *Bezkrastni grobove [Unmarked Graves]* (Boris Grezhov, 1931) which was purged of its critical agenda when the state committee insisted on a happy finale for the film.<sup>206</sup> Thus, early film legislation in Bulgaria proved ambiguous enough to serve censorship purposes, making it problematic to evaluate its precise merits.

This reveals the interconnectedness between state intervention and the progress of a small national cinema. As discussed in the Introduction, protectionist measures have been deemed essential in supporting local production in an environment of free market competition. In this line of reasoning, it could be argued that the lack of appropriate state intervention in the early period of Bulgarian cinema prevented it from fulfilling its potential to fully liberate local culture from the restraints of post-colonial humiliation. Financial and creative support for the film industry would have potentially facilitated more serious exploration into post-colonial traumas, issues of belonging to Europe and national inferiority complexes. Instead individual filmmakers had to focus on coining their own international creative and business links to secure the completion of their projects.

As a result of their dire financial circumstances, Bulgarian filmmakers learned to creatively exploit opportunities for co-operation and alternative funding. The idea of an international co-production as a way of securing the budget of financially ambitious projects was tested in Bulgaria in the late 1920s and early 1930s with Aleksandar Vazov's documentary *V tsarstvoto na rozite [In the Rose Kingdom]* (1928), featuring German producers and cinematographers, and Petar Stoychev's *Pesenta na Balkana [The Song of the Mountains]* (1934), benefiting from the involvement of

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Yanakiev 2003, 153.

<sup>206</sup> Dimitrina Ivanova (b). 'Nashite maiki vse v cherno hodyat': Bezkrastni grobove – parviyat balgarski anti-fashistki film ['Our Mothers Keep Wearing Black': Unmarked Graves – the First Bulgarian Anti-Fascist Film]. 22 Sept. 2005. 20 Sept. 2015. <<http://old.duma.bg/2005/0905/220905/kultura/cul-5.html>>.

Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia.<sup>207</sup> Both titles give the impression that a particular emphasis was placed on the role of nature in an attempt to provide both national self-identifiers and exotic staples for export. Hence, early Bulgarian co-productions were created with consideration for not only financing but also marketing opportunities. At the same time, pan-European collaboration actively shaped what constituted topics of interest for such initiatives.

International contacts grew indispensable as domestic cinema evolved. Filmmaker and script-writer Aleksandar Vazov provides the perfect illustration of this. Son of a famous Bulgarian military general and nephew of a renowned writer, Vazov must have developed an acute understanding of national issues and culture from an early age.<sup>208</sup> After completing his education in aviation in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, he turned to photography and cinema in Germany. There Vazov forged important connections, reportedly, meeting Expressionist director Fritz Lang who introduced him to new cinematic techniques.<sup>209</sup> In Western Europe Vazov was involved with all types of performance and visual arts until his father's death in 1934.<sup>210</sup> Cosmopolitan education, experience of working abroad and interest in artistic experiments proved useful for Vazov's domestic career.

Networking and cross-border cooperation resulted in better quality domestic productions. The popularity of such pictures was once again determined by the successful combination of local sensitivity and transnational artistic and business practices. After having worked in documentary and dubbing, Vazov completed his first film *Gramada [Cairn]*, based on a poem by his uncle, in 1936. Thanks to his international connections and awareness, the director managed to attract seasoned cameraman Stefan Mišković, a Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer newsreel correspondent from Yugoslavia.<sup>211</sup> Mišković focused on spectacular compositions and lighting as well as seamless camerawork to recreate the action surrounding the dramatic escape of two doomed Bulgarian

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<sup>207</sup> Yanakiev, 2003, 104.

<sup>208</sup> Yanakiev (b), 2007, 52.

<sup>209</sup> A lot of the information on Aleksandar Vazov's biography comes from his own stories about his life abroad. His contemporaries often doubted the adventures he recounted and the acquaintances he claimed to have. There is no archival data available to prove whether Vazov and Fritz Lang truly met but the Bulgarian director still displayed strong links with German distributors at the time (Yanakiev, 2003, 107).

<sup>210</sup> Yanakiev (b), 2007, 53.

<sup>211</sup> Yanakiev 2003, 117.

lovers during the Russo-Turkish War.<sup>212</sup> *Cairn* follows the story of Kamen (Stefan Savov) and Tsena (Nevena Milosheva) – a couple in love, despite the disapproval of her rich father and Ottoman ally Tseko (Konstantin Kisimov). When they run away, Tseko elicits the help of Turkish soldiers to find them. He wounds Kamen and gives Tsena to an Ottoman harem. Resentment towards Tseko grows among the people in the village. They curse him, throwing stones in a big pile, and Tseko falls ill as a result. Later, a healed Kamen joins Bulgarian volunteers and Russian soldiers in liberating the village and setting Tsena free. The plot was obviously based on local history and literature but, whether intentionally or not, *Cairn* echoed the linear narration and ‘invisible style’ of Classical Hollywood.<sup>213</sup> This was in stark contrast with the work of Boris Grezhov, for example. Grezhov, the first Bulgarian director with formal film education, was reviewed by his contemporaries and by current scholars as expressionist and ‘European’ when it came to the mise-en-scene, acting and editing of his films.<sup>214</sup> This difference in directing styles could suggest the influence of transnationalism in aesthetic appropriations in Bulgarian filmmaking. Gabrolevsky reminds that during the 1920s the Bulgarian market was dominated by German and American films.<sup>215</sup> So, there is evidence to suggest that audiences and filmmakers had been acquainted with those competing aesthetic styles.

The warm critical reception and popularity of *Cairn* should similarly be examined within broader economic and historical contexts. As script-writer, director, producer and editor of the picture, Vazov successfully incorporated PR activities during the production process by using the national print press to report on the progress of his work.<sup>216</sup> I suggest that it was an idea borrowed from the Hollywood publicity system which ensured media visibility for upcoming projects by providing a constant flow of skilfully regulated information.<sup>217</sup> In other words, Vazov ensured positive coverage for his film in progress by supplying updates on it himself. This innovative approach was, perhaps, the result of emulating the aggressive strategies of Hollywood distribution branches which had appeared earlier in Bulgaria. Vazov’s publicity initiatives raised curiosity and

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<sup>212</sup> Id., 117–118.

<sup>213</sup> David Bordwell Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson. *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, May 1985, 24.

<sup>214</sup> Andronika Martonova. “Balgarskoto kino prez 1929: Uspehi i provali” [“Bulgarian Cinema in 1929: Success and Failure”]. Glasove.com, 21 Dec. 2015. 17 Jan. 2016. <<http://glasove.com/categories/istoriqta-na-1-snimka/news/bylgarskoto-kino-prez-1929-uspehi-i-provali>>.

<sup>215</sup> Gabrolevsky, 2011, 25.

<sup>216</sup> Yanakiev, 2003, 124, 161.

<sup>217</sup> Anne Helen Petersen. “The Rules of the Game.” *Virginia Quarterly Review*. 2013. 20 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.vqronline.org/articles/rules-game>>.

expectations, and, upon its release, *Cairn* attracted 65,450 of the 300,000 citizens of Sofia at the time. The film was considered an enormous success, despite competition from titles like the American *Modern Times* (Charles Chaplin, 1936), the French *Mayerling* (Anatole Litvak, 1936) and the Italian *Casta Diva* (Carmine Gallone, 1935), a few of the 101 American and 122 European pictures screened that year.<sup>218</sup> Through its innovative aesthetics and advertising *Cairn*, thus, took a prominent place in the vibrant transnational early film culture in Bulgaria.



Figure 2. Still from Alexander Vazov's *Gramada* [*Cairn*] (1936).

While Vazov certainly relied on business and artistic appropriations from Western Europe and Hollywood, there was a reciprocal flow of ideas and products in the opposite direction. German distributors allegedly expressed an interest in acquiring Vazov's subsequent pictures – a fact which confirmed the director's close links with Western Europe and fostered his ambitions to co-produce an adaptation of the well-known Bulgarian novel *Pod igoto* [*Under the Yoke*] with German participation.<sup>219</sup> Despite his recent success, Vazov was acutely aware of the limitations of the Bulgarian national market. Therefore, he sought to secure the advance sale of his future super-production in Yugoslavia, Switzerland, Italy and Austria in order to guarantee a big budget and, later, recuperate costs.<sup>220</sup> The negotiation for international distribution for Vazov's picture

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<sup>218</sup> Yanakiev, 2003, 124, 161.

<sup>219</sup> Yanakiev (b), 2007, 53–54.

<sup>220</sup> Id., 55–56.

reveals that early Bulgarian cinema was not isolated but part of cross-border business and artistic dealings.

Potential transnational distribution could present obstacles and influence the filmic life cycle of certain works as well. For instance, it was international diplomatic relations that hindered the commencement of the ambitious project to film *Under the Yoke* with Turkey strongly opposing the depiction of life under Ottoman rule. As a result, the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs vetoed the continuation of the project.<sup>221</sup> This serves to show that local filmmaking was necessarily shaped by factors beyond the national. In a similar vein, when in 1942, due to World War Two, the import of American, British and Soviet films was banned and production in occupied territories like France was significantly challenged, *Cairn* was re-released with success.<sup>222</sup> According to Yanakiev, the film conveyed patriotism and a democratic spirit, markedly different from films of the Fascist regimes. Its appeal to universal values like love and freedom attracted the domestic audience. The production and distribution of *Cairn* reveal interdependence between local filmmakers and the transnational distribution network, evident in the early periods of Bulgarian film. The success of national production proved contingent upon innovative marketing strategies as well as a sensitivity for the international political circumstances and local predilections.

While the structure of the film industry changed dramatically with the transition to Communism, the same factors played role in shaping the Bulgarian film industry. In the next section I examine the importance of film legislation in defining national cinema, the place of international co-operation and similarities across national borders. My analysis draws implicit parallels with the earlier period in Bulgarian cinema.

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<sup>221</sup> Id., 131–132.

<sup>222</sup> Id., 127.

## **2.4 The Myth of Communist Isolation in the “Rosy Land of Scent and Honey”**

In a 1965 travelogue by British Pathé Bulgaria is described through a riddle - “a land of simple happiness” that produces “rose perfume, famous all around the world” (and grossing over forty million pounds a year); a country of contrasts, ruled by Communist ideology but holding in high esteem Orthodox monks, similar to Russia in language and to Ireland in terms of size. Under an idyllic soundtrack of flutes, accordion and violins, the narrator reveals: “[t]he fact that Bulgaria is what they call a ‘socialist state’ makes it a surprise to us in the West to find that it’s a rosy land of scent, and honey, and the luxuries of life, like strawberries which are exported from here to countries all over the continent”.<sup>223</sup> In this short travelogue the country is implicitly linked both to the East (in terms of “ancient attractions”) and the West (in terms of “modern conveniences” and industrial progress). It is explicitly compared to the Cold War Eastern enemy but also to a part of the UK, thus, revealing a complex marketing approach of positioning Bulgaria between ‘other’ and ‘self’. The transnational dimensions of export and tourism, discussed in this travelogue, challenge the misconception that Bulgaria was isolated during Communism. The special emphasis, placed on the fact that the first television tower in Sofia was “largely British built”, serves to reveal that co-operation in media, in particular, had transcended the Iron Curtain.<sup>224</sup> The tone of the piece is patronising, revealing a belittling attitude towards Eastern Europe as an uncultivated ‘other’. Nonetheless, Bulgaria is clearly situated as the meeting point between the East and the West – the result of international business interests and cultural curiosity on both sides.

What this travelogue hints at is that, while the state played a crucial role in the development of the Bulgarian film industry, film culture remained part of transnational tendencies and subject to frequent co-operation. This was possible because, unlike the countries that formed part of the Soviet Union, Bulgaria enjoyed certain trade and intellectual liberties. In an attempt to highlight the complexities of defining ‘Eastern Europe’, Mazierska et al. acknowledge that Russia exercised varying degrees of political, economic and cultural control throughout the different parts of the Eastern bloc. The authors observe that “[i]n some countries in certain periods of post-war history the Soviet presence was hardly felt and, if it was, it was not an experience of being crushed by a

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<sup>223</sup> British Pathé. “Bulgaria (1965).” *YouTube*. YouTube, 13 Apr. 2014. 20 Sept. 2015. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UpnAdVhfosY&feature=youtu.be>>.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

colonial power, but rather of living with an ‘inferior’ partner and being in a position to exploit it”.<sup>225</sup> Despite the communist system of government, Bulgarian film culture during Communism enjoyed exposure to Western products and capitalised on cross-border exchanges. Influenced by multinational productions and partaking in transnational distribution, the domestic film industry was not as isolated from the rest of the cinematic world as previously suggested.

As the British Pathé travelogue pointed out, Bulgaria presented a mixture of the East and the West. This was particularly evident in the organisation of domestic cinema which featured both progressive and conservative elements. The regime nationalised all industries (including the film one), imposing ideological control through censorship mechanisms but also introducing key film legislation and regulation, and providing annual funding for cinema’s development. The Bulgarian Cinematography Law of 1948 replaced the Law for the Cinema Culture of 1946. The latter had focused on establishing state control over film distribution, imports and exports but allowed private film production and exhibition ventures. It had acquired 95 per cent of the profits from distribution and invested the remaining five percent in the development of art and culture.<sup>226</sup> The new legislation engaged exclusively with the nationalisation of the Bulgarian film industry and, according to article two, its main aim was to facilitate its central planning, artistic and business leadership. The Bulgarian Cinematography was established as a self-supporting structure, much like other nationalised industries under the Law of Self-Supporting State and State-Autonomous Enterprises. Movies sold in Western countries provided ‘hard currency’, thirty-two percent of the domestic and international market proceeds were re-invested in new productions and the rest of the income was re-distributed through the state budget as subsidies.<sup>227</sup> While the vertically integrated system created the possibility of self-sustainability, it also featured drawbacks.

Like all the other economic and cultural sectors, Bulgarian cinema was guided not by laws, but by Party decrees and singular decisions.<sup>228</sup> Because of the vagueness of the law, which did not specify the basis on which ideological control would be exercised, film professionals and projects were

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<sup>225</sup> Mazierska et al., 2014, 8.

<sup>226</sup> Radoslav Spasov. “Darzhavata i balgarskoto kino” [“The State and Bulgarian Cinema”]. *Kultura*. Kultura newspaper, 16 Apr. 1999. 20 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.kultura.bg/bg/article/view/2345>>.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Yanakiev, 2003, 215.

often at the mercy of the people in power.<sup>229</sup> As a result, interpretations of what should constitute Bulgarian national cinema not only changed but became more subjective and ideologically driven than ever before. I evaluate the elements of Bulgarian Cinematography at length in the following pages and through my case-study films.

The centralising of resources had positive impact on the development of Bulgarian film production. Thanks to the focus on film art, in 1962 the national film studio Boyana was founded and became responsible for the production, distribution and exhibition of all Bulgarian films created under the regime. In its heyday, the studio produced annually twenty-five films for cinema, the same amount for television, twenty-five animated films and over 200 shorts and documentaries. It featured the latest technology and employed 9,000 qualified professionals.<sup>230</sup> Thus, the vertically integrated structure of Bulgarian state cinema reduced the risk of competition and financial losses which, in turn secured a stable basis for the national film industry and expanded employment. The organisation bore resemblance to the Golden Age of Hollywood studios where the big companies held a monopoly over production, distribution and exhibition.<sup>231</sup> The structure of Bulgarian cinema during Communism was, therefore, transnational in borrowing from the experience of other countries with a successful film business, regardless of their political ideology.

The involvement of the government in film-related activities did not completely obliterate the role of creativity. As Radoslav Spasov points out, the Bulgarian film industry was organised around state-owned creative companies that administered different parts of the production, distribution and exhibition cycles.<sup>232</sup> More specifically, these included: the Boyana Feature Film, the Sofia Animation Film Studio, the Vreme Popular Science and Documentary Film Studio, the Film Laboratory and Bulgariafilm, an import-export and PR service, printing a news bulletin in English, Spanish, French and German eight times a year.<sup>233</sup> The latter organisation clearly exhibited a transnational focus, signifying the importance of trade with Western Europe and the rest of the

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<sup>229</sup> Id., 216.

<sup>230</sup> Holloway, 1986, 84, 134–135.

<sup>231</sup> Bordwell et al., 1985.

<sup>232</sup> Radoslav Spasov. “Ubiistvoto Na Balgarskoto Kino” [“The Murder of Bulgarian Cinema”]. *Spisanie Kino [Kino Journal]* 1. (2003): 35–39.

<sup>233</sup> Holloway, 1986, 134–135.

world. In addition, by the mid-1980s there were approximately 3,600 state-owned cinema halls in the country and each movie-goer attended screenings ten to thirteen times a year (among the highest attendance figures in Europe at the time).<sup>234</sup> Hence, state intervention created favourable conditions for the expansion and diversification of domestic film culture.

In its organisation, the Bulgarian film industry of this period followed the development of Eastern European cinema at the time but also displayed links with the Western world. Although not as popular in the international press as West European studios Cinecitta, Ealing, Pinewood and Babelsberg, filmmaking facilities in the Eastern part of the continent were of similar size and potential. Iordanova observes that Eastern European studios proved suitable for the production of historical epics by providing inexpensive extras and cavalry.<sup>235</sup> As in Poland, production in Bulgaria was confined to film units which, in spite of their dependency on the state, bore resemblance to contemporary Western European independent production companies formed around individual *auteurs*, such as Lars von Trier's *Zentropa*, Pedro Almodovar's *El Deseo* and Wim Wenders' *Neue Road Movies*.<sup>236</sup> The establishment of such film units was the result of de-Stalinisation and allowed for a greater degree of creative freedom.<sup>237</sup> Coupled with international cooperation, this expanded both the expressive and distribution possibilities under the regime.

Imre notes that co-productions within the region and over the Iron Curtain persisted throughout the Socialist period and flourished from the late-1970s onwards, during the period of ideological and economic softening.<sup>238</sup> Suitable examples of these collaborative endeavours are the adventure picture *Das Vermächtnis des Inka [Legacy of the Incas]* (Georg Marischka, 1965), produced by Spain, Italy, Bulgaria and West Germany and the political parable *Vtackovia, siroty a blazni [Birds, Orphans and Fools]* (Juraj Jakubisko, 1969), a co-production between France and Czechoslovakia. Bulgaria also invested in common film projects with Hungary as well co-productions with the Soviet Union.<sup>239</sup> While collaborations across the Eastern bloc validated the

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> Iordanova, 1999, 53.

<sup>236</sup> Imre, 2012, 13.

<sup>237</sup> Dorota Ostrowska. "An Alternative Model of Film Production: Film Units in Poland after World War Two." *A companion to Eastern European cinemas*. Ed. Aniko Imre. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell (an imprint of John Wiley & Sons Ltd), 14 Sept. 2012. 453–465.

<sup>238</sup> Imre, 2012, 5–6.

<sup>239</sup> Id., 12–14; Iordanova, 1999, 45–60, 53; Yanakiev, 2003, 170–171; Garbolevsky, 2011, 27–28.

political and ideological unity of the region, transnational co-productions with Western Europe contributed an aura of cosmopolitanism and international prestige, in addition to technical expertise and networking opportunities.<sup>240</sup> A number of Bulgarian film professionals received their formal training in Moscow, Paris, Warsaw and Prague which provided them with exposure to a variety of artistic movements and international contacts.<sup>241</sup> Cross-border cooperation put domestic filmmaking practices on a par with European aesthetic developments.

## 2.5 Ideological Censorship and New Film Aesthetics: *On a Small Island*

At the same time, the domestic cinema experience was highly regulated with students, soldiers, foremen and employees at cultural institutions attending mandatory collective screenings of ‘ideologically correct’ Bulgarian and Soviet films. In addition to serving propaganda purposes, such organised events helped reach attendance targets set by the Communist Party Politburo.<sup>242</sup> Thus, evaluating the impact of Communism on Bulgarian cinema remains a complex task. On the one hand, the totalitarian state provided stable legislation, funding and infrastructure needed for the creation of a viable national film industry. On the other, it refused freedom of expression, thus, undermining one of the main principles governing artistic creativity and suppressing intelligent spectatorship.

Ideological censorship contributed to the coining of new expressive aesthetics in Eastern Europe. The use of cinema as a propaganda tool had been endorsed by communist revolutionary and politician Vladimir Lenin as early as 1922 when he famously remarked that “of all the arts for us the cinema is the most important”.<sup>243</sup> The power of film to stir emotions and influence personal convictions was put in practice across different political regimes. As Garbolevsky explains,

The idea of using culture as a propaganda tool was not new. It was successfully exploited by many dictatorial regimes coming to power in Europe during the 20th century. The goal of politicization of the media was particularly successful in the Mussolini and Hitler regimes. In fact, the effect of a film

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<sup>240</sup> Garbolevsky, 2011, 28.

<sup>241</sup> Yanakiev, 2003, 186–189.

<sup>242</sup> Tsvetan S. Todorov. *Balgarskoto kino pred i sled 1989 – kakvo se promeni?* [Bulgarian Cinema Before and After 1989 – What Changed?] News Glas - Glasat na Lovech, 29 July 2010. 20 Sept. 2015. <<http://nglas.wordpress.com/>>.

<sup>243</sup> Richard Taylor. *The Politics of the Soviet Cinema 1917-1929*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 30 Oct. 2008, 29.

screening on a poorly educated and, in many cases, illiterate inhabitant of a small Balkan village is not to be underestimated.<sup>244</sup>

The accessibility and persuasive power of the film medium was internationally acknowledged. The Bulgarian state recognised the propaganda potential of locally produced pictures and utilised it to convey its ideology to the wide audience.

The predominant mode of the Communist brand, Socialist Realism, sought to convince viewers of the virtues of the existing political order and often proved too moralistic and restrictive for humanist-oriented local filmmakers.<sup>245</sup> When artists openly challenged Communist values, their films were condemned by the censorship apparatus of the Bulgarian Politburo and banned from distribution.<sup>246</sup> Directors from East Germany to the USSR turned to metaphoric language (similar to 1930s French Poetic Realism), creating a lyrical and sometimes avant-garde style of film expression which focused on the individual with his or her emotions, struggles and dreams.<sup>247</sup> In accord with *auteur* theory, Bulgarian Poetic Realism revealed a personal creative vision.<sup>248</sup> It presented a subversive style of filmmaking which bore resemblance to Western European film movements at the time.

Rangel Vulchanov's *Na malkiya ostrov [On a Small Island]* (1958) tells of the personal struggles of four anti-fascist political prisoners, planning their escape from island exile. Sea wolf Costa Rica (Stefan Peychev), carpenter Zheko (Konstantin Kotsev), the Student, a young poet (Ivan Andonov) and the Doctor, a philosopher at heart (Ivan Kondov) not only represent different social strata but are individualised. Costa Rica dies first as a result of the Student's innocent mistake. To redeem himself, the Student attempts to swim to the mainland and find support for their exodus but drowns. Zheko is shot as he tries to flee on a training raft. The Doctor organises a mass escape but falls and breaks his leg. To avoid slowing down his comrades, he uses a hand grenade to attack the prison guards at the same time blowing himself to pieces. The picture is a parable of the imprisoned minds of the characters, similar to The Allegory of the Cave by Plato, in which the

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<sup>244</sup> Garbolevsky, 2011, 40.

<sup>245</sup> Crofts, 1993, 51.

<sup>246</sup> Preslava Preslavova. *Demokratsiyata ekshumira zabranenite filmi na komunizma [Democracy Exhumed the Banned Films of Communism]*. frognews.bg, 17 Nov. 2009. 20 Sept. 2015.

<[http://frognews.bg/news\\_17195/Demokratsiata\\_ekshumira\\_zabranenite\\_filmi\\_na\\_komunizma/](http://frognews.bg/news_17195/Demokratsiata_ekshumira_zabranenite_filmi_na_komunizma/)>.

<sup>247</sup> Holloway, 1986, 84, 86; Thompson and Bordwell, 2009, 265–268.

<sup>248</sup> Id., 381–383.

sacrifice of the intellectual brings light/freedom to the masses. Garbolevsky further compares the bleak, desolate mise-en-scene of the island in the film to that of Roberto Rossellini's *Stromboli* (1950) in order to reveal that Vulchanov employed transnational film language to create an apolitical text with deeply embedded social criticism.<sup>249</sup> In this way, the universal humanist message remained absolved of censorship but decipherable by the intelligent spectator.

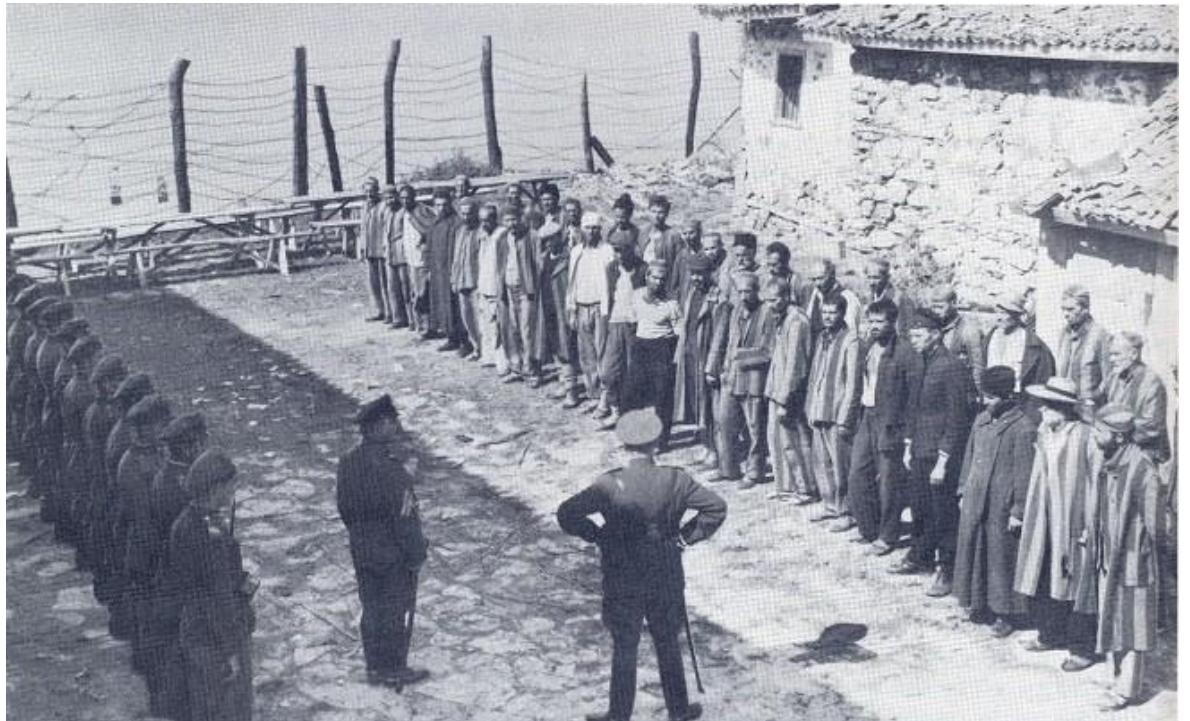


Figure 3. Still from *Na malkiya ostrov* [On a Small Island] (Rangel Vulchanov, 1958).

Vulchanov was among the first representatives of Poetic Realism in Bulgaria, together with Binka Zhelyazkova and Vulo Radev. The genre was undoubtedly influenced by Italian Neorealism. The works of Vittorio De Sica, Luchino Visconti, Roberto Rossellini and Frederico Fellini were readily available on Bulgarian screens at the time.<sup>250</sup> By including characters and topics with purely local dimensions, the Poetic Realist directors reinvented transnational film tropes. While sometimes subject to state censorship, Vulchanov, Zhelyazkova and Radev convincingly positioned Bulgarian film as part of broader aesthetic movements on the Old Continent and laid the basis for future developments in the Balkans.

<sup>249</sup> Garbolevsky, 2011, 80.

<sup>250</sup> Yanakiev, 2003, 238–239, 243–244.

## 2.6 Artistic Borrowing and Exposure to Foreign Production: *The Attached Balloon*

Allegorical language, political metaphors and emotionally-charged imagery characterised Binka Zhelyazkova's *Privarzaniyat balon* [*The Attached Balloon*] (1968). The film is a comedy-drama with fantastic elements and follows the story of a runaway barrage balloon during the Second World War. The anthropomorphised balloon stops above a mountain village in Bulgaria. As the villagers decide to take it down, an armed group from another village prevents them. The idea of ownership over the balloon escalates frictions and causes a melee until the police step in. The satirical plot was interpreted by state censors as undermining the ideological orientation of the people. The villagers were, reportedly, represented as politically primitive.<sup>251</sup> As a result of its social criticism, the school of Poetic Realism did not enjoy special privileges during the Communist regime. Creativity was often restricted through the state monopoly on distribution. As a result of its social critique *The Attached Balloon* was completed but withdrawn from circulation.<sup>252</sup> This served to confirm the power of metaphorical language and formal experimentation, deemed dangerous to the regime.

What remains significant, nonetheless, is the place of Poetic Realism in Bulgarian cultural life. Zhelyazkova incorporated a dreamlike sequence in her picture to produce a sense of entrapment and hopelessness, thus, commenting on the ruined Communist ideals. In it a young woman (Janet Miteva) is being chased across a flower field by German shepherds. The dogs continue barking and threatening her even after she jumps in a trench. Gabrolevsky observes that “[t]he scene's mood is postmodern, completely disconnected from the major narrative and, like a nightmare; its visions come from and go to nowhere incoherently”.<sup>253</sup> The unsettling imagery uncovers a moral panic – the communist system is threatening to the most vulnerable members of society and its omnipotent reach cannot be avoided. This absurdist moment reveals both despair and an implicit concern for the plight of women, similarly to Mikhail Kalik's *Cholovek idyot za solntsem* [*Sandu*

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<sup>251</sup> Bratoeva-Darakchieva, 2013, 138.

<sup>252</sup> Id., 140.

<sup>253</sup> Garbolevsky, 2011, 93.

*Follows the Sun*] (1963).<sup>254</sup> Film critic Znepolski wrote that Zhelyazkova appeared to be influenced by the international avant-garde school, comparing her to Jean-Luc Godard, Marguerite Duras, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Bernardo Bertolucci, and Andrei Tarkovsky.<sup>255</sup> Zhelyazkova's fondness for metaphoric language and rebellion against narrative logic has led Bratoeva-Darakchieva to draw associations with François Truffaut's parable form of narrative in *Fahrenheit 451* (1966) and the emergence of Emir Kusturica's 'magical realism'.<sup>256</sup> There is no evidence suggesting that Zhelyazkova would have seen the work of the above filmmakers or that Kusturica was aware of *The Attached Balloon*. The fact that Bulgarian film critics insist on contextualising her work as part of transnational film movements, however, reveals a desire to portray national cinema as contributing to the development of European film aesthetics. As explained in the Introduction, Bulgaria's place between the advanced Western Europe and the Orientalist Asia rendered questions of identity difficult to negotiate. By interpreting Poetic Realism in the context of European *auteur* cinema, Bulgarian critics lay implicit claims to belonging to Europe despite geographical and ideological rifts in the past.



Figure 4. Still from *Privarzaniyat balon* [*The Attached Balloon*] (Binka Zhelyazkova, 1967).

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<sup>254</sup> Holloway, 1986, 90–91.

<sup>255</sup> *Privarzaniyat balon*. Darzhavna Agentsiya 'Arhivi' [State Archive Agency]. (1984):383, 55.

<sup>256</sup> Bratoeva-Darakchieva, 2013, 137.

At the same time, *The Attached Balloon* could have been the result of some exposure to Western European productions. Despite the Cold War divide, distribution boundaries during Communism were permeable and the film repertoire in Bulgaria typically followed the tendencies of world cinema. Early attempts to foster isolationism failed as Soviet films of the 1950s proved of limited quantity and poor quality. Russian cinema at the time drifted between a focus on a small number of high-quality ideologically-charged productions (*malokartinie*) and a subsequent emphasis on increased productivity. The fluctuating Soviet state demands caused filmmakers to switch between abstract experimentation and hastily filmed Social Realist theatre plays. As Yanakiev observes, neither of the two directions in the development of Russian cinema appealed to the general Bulgarian audience.<sup>257</sup> Consequently, the Bulgarian Communist regime attempted to diversify the repertoire of exhibited films both qualitatively and geographically.<sup>258</sup> Openness to Western European and American imports was necessary primarily for economic and political reasons. However, the Party declared that art must continue to be ideologically driven, adding that the Communist and bourgeois ideologies could coexist peacefully.<sup>259</sup> While this principle undermines the idea of complete Eastern European cultural isolation, its practical application proved problematic.

Foreign films challenging the dominant ideology, understandably, did not receive distribution in the Communist country. However, the titles that were allowed circulation also appeared to be selected arbitrarily. Yanakiev appropriately criticises the unjustified focus on certain directors and countries. Most well-represented of the Western European cinematic cultures at the time was France, even though the Nouvelle Vague only featured on Bulgarian screens with one film – *Les Quatre Cents Coups [The 400 Blows]* (François Truffaut, 1959).<sup>260</sup> Thus, this particular movement could not have influenced Zhelyazkova's repertoire, unless the director travelled extensively on the other side of the Iron Curtain.

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<sup>257</sup> Yanakiev, 2003, 234–235.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

<sup>259</sup> Garbolevsky, 2011, 89–90.

<sup>260</sup> Some notable French films approved for circulation included *Françoise ou La vie conjugale [Anatomy of a Marriage]* (André Cayatte, 1964), *Un homme et une femme [A Man and a Woman]* (Claude Lelouch, 1966), and the co-productions *Le journal d'une femme de chambre [The Diary of the Chambermaid]* (Luis Buñuel, 1964) and *Homenaje a la hora de la siesta [Four Women for One Hero]* (Leopoldo Torre Nilsson, 1962) (Yanakiev, 2003, 236–237).

The predominant types of French pictures circulated in Bulgaria were comedies, melodramas, literary adaptations, psychological and crime films, which, in Yanakiev's opinion, lacked intellectual stimulus.<sup>261</sup> Domestic viewers often misconstrued the role and place of particular titles and genres within the development of world cinema. For instance, since the classic American Western was never exhibited in Bulgaria, spectators were incapable of recognising its variations and parodies. Due to their wide distribution and popularity, Sergio Leone's 'spaghetti' westerns became the genre archetype in Bulgaria.<sup>262</sup> Without appropriate contextualisation the Bulgarian audience failed to recognise the innovation in and deviation from genre standards. Likewise, delayed exhibition diluted the function and meaning of film cycles. British New Wave films criticising social order and class divisions such as *The Entertainer* (Tony Richardson, 1960), *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (Karel Reisz, 1960), *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (Tony Richardson, 1962) and *This Sporting Life* (Lindsay Anderson, 1963) were circulated in the country years after their premieres and separate from each other. In Yanakiev's opinion this prevented the Bulgarian audience from comprehending the context and purpose of the pictures as well as the ideological links between them.<sup>263</sup> It remains unclear whether this was the result of a political agenda or a genuine oversight.

These domestic distribution and exhibition practices undoubtedly distorted the cinema experience and challenged cinephile knowledge. However, local audiences were still keen on watching foreign movies. Even if sometimes delayed, Bollywood melodramas, Italian comedies, American super productions and Czech New Wave pictures attracted a substantial following.<sup>264</sup> Although subject to state control and suffering from poor organisation, film culture in Communist Bulgaria remained multifaceted and internationally-oriented. As a result, Bulgarian filmmakers did benefit and learn from exposure to foreign production.

The appropriation of Western cinematic forms and narratives in the 1960s and 1970s was not confined to art-house movements and *auteur* cinema. Mainstream productions in Bulgaria clearly adapted foreign genre conventions. In an attempt to attract a wider audience for ideologically-

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<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

<sup>262</sup> Id., 239.

<sup>263</sup> Id., 240.

<sup>264</sup> Id., 237, 239, 241, 242, 245.

charged pictures, Bulgarian directors reinvented the crime series in accordance with the Cold War divide. Films like *Sledite ostavat* [The Traces Remain] (Petar B. Vasilev, 1956), *Noshtta sreshtu 13-i* [On the Eve of the 13<sup>th</sup>] (Anton Marinovich, 1961) and *Zlatniyat zab* [The Golden Tooth] (Anton Marinovich, 1962) introduced local main protagonists and portrayed the West as the common enemy, aiming to destroy the Communist order.<sup>265</sup> Capitalising on ideas from British and Hollywood films of the period, the Bulgarian spy genre gained popularity partially due to the fact that the originals were subject to censorship and, thus, not available for distribution. The abovementioned films attracted between 2 and 3.5 million domestic viewers and received distribution in East Germany, Italy and Poland.<sup>266</sup> So, the pictures reinvented the genre for the purposes of the domestic market but that resulted in profitable international distribution. This serves to show that the pictures were not only transnational in terms of their plot borrowings but also with regard to their circulation and consumption.

Genre films gained popularity in Eastern Europe during the Cold War for multiple reasons. As Imre suggests, they were able to convey subtle political messages while fusing mythical, fictional and actual historical events and figures, which proved instrumental in forging nationalism.<sup>267</sup> Film adaptations of classic literary works conveyed an air of internationalism while still complying with Socialist ideological requirements. Imre discusses these films as “part of the international circulation of heroic masculine media images that included [Andrzej] Wajda’s trilogy [A Generation (1955), Kanal (1957) and Ashes and Diamonds (1958)], Tarzan, French adventure series, Robin Hood, the East German Indianerfilme featuring the dashing Serbian actor Gojko Mitić as the Indian”.<sup>268</sup> The focus on universal topics and patriarchal values rendered Bulgarian cinema close to its Western counterparts, reaffirming a cross-border continuity in subject-matter and on-screen ideals.

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<sup>265</sup> Bratoeva-Darakchieva, 2013, 174–175.

<sup>266</sup> Yanakiev, 2003, 297, 298; *Sledite Ostavat* (1956). n.d. 20 Sept. 2015. <[http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0253718/releaseinfo?ref\\_=tt\\_dt\\_dt#akas](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0253718/releaseinfo?ref_=tt_dt_dt#akas)>; *Noshtta Sreshtu 13-I* (1961). n.d. 20 Sept. 2015. <[http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0300309/releaseinfo?ref\\_=tt\\_dt\\_dt#akas](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0300309/releaseinfo?ref_=tt_dt_dt#akas)>; *Zlatniyat Zab* (1962). n.d. 20 Sept. 2015. <[http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0344599/releaseinfo?ref\\_=tt\\_dt\\_dt#akas](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0344599/releaseinfo?ref_=tt_dt_dt#akas)>.

<sup>267</sup> Imre, 2012, 11.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

Shortly after the period of political liberalisation in Czechoslovakia, known as the Prague Spring of 1968, a new cycle of films developed in Bulgaria, featuring the secret agent Emil Boev. *Gospodin Nikoy [Mr Nobody]* (Ivan Terziev, 1969), *Nyama nishto po-hubavo ot loshoto vreme [There Is Nothing Finer than Bad Weather]* (Metodi Andonov, 1971), *Golyamata skuka [The Great Boredom]* (Metodi Andonov, 1973), *Sinyata bezpredelnost [The Blue Infinity]* (Milen Getov, 1976), *Rekviem za edna mrasnitsa [Requiem for a Tramp]* (Milen Getov, 1976), *Umiray samo v kraen sluchay [Die Only as a Last Resort]* (Milen Getov, 1978) and *Tayfuni s nezhni imena [Typhoons with Tender Names]* (Milen Getov, 1979) mimicked the James Bond series both in name and in topic.<sup>269</sup> Names and nationalities were converted but the purpose of the main protagonist remained the same: to save the world from the evil plan of the Cold War villain. Bratoeva-Darakchieva rightly points out that the James Bond/Emil Boev characters and their antagonists were mirror images of each other in terms of depiction and development.<sup>270</sup> Furthermore, the Bulgarian spy cycle formed part of transnational tendencies of appropriation, remaking and exploitation. Hunter describes films which “explicitly imitate other movies, cannibalising their titles, concepts and publicity gimmicks” as exploitation pictures.<sup>271</sup> By changing the subtext of the originals, such unlicensed adaptations appeal to local audiences and fit the ideological framework of Communist cinema. The popularity of both the Emil Boev and James Bond cycles with their respective audiences confirmed that Bulgarian cinema portrayed similar dynamics to Western media.<sup>272</sup> The spy film genre epitomised prevalent cultural anxieties on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

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<sup>269</sup> Through its metaphoric reference to anonymity, the overwhelming power of nature, short-lived romance and (im)mortality, the list of films sounds familiar to James Bond titles like *Dr. No* (Terence Young, 1962), *Thunderball* (Terrence Young, 1965), *You Only Live Twice* (Lewis Gilbert, 1967), *Live and Let Die* (Guy Hamilton, 1973) and *The Spy Who Loved Me* (Lewis Gilbert, 1977).

<sup>270</sup> Bratoeva-Darakchieva, 2013, 175.

<sup>271</sup> Hunter, 2009, 9.

<sup>272</sup> “The James Bond Films: UK Audience Facts and Figures.” *Euston Films*. 9 Feb. 2012. 20 Sept. 2015. <<http://eustonfilms.blogspot.co.uk/2012/02/the-james-bond-films-uk-audience-facts.html>>; Yanakiev, 2003, 300–302, 304–305.



Figure 5. Still from *Umiray samo v kraen sluchay* [Die Only as a Last Resort] (Milen Getov, 1978).

It becomes evident that, despite its apparent isolation from Western culture during the Cold War, Bulgarian film exploited similar genres and topics to Western European cinema and Hollywood with the only difference remaining the overarching ideological system. Probable reasons for these appropriations could have been political relaxation and the desire to neutralise the growing influence of capitalism by providing analogous home-grown entertainment. Domestic cinema managed to appropriate what was originally perceived as a threat to the dominant ideology, resulting in a coined symbiosis of regulated transnational film forms and modernised Communist rhetoric. In the next section, I illustrate how this combination worked to attract not only domestic audiences but also international recognition for Bulgarian film.

## 2.7 Local Sustainability and International Recognition: *The Goat Horn*

Domestic and international success were not mutually exclusive during Communism. Exported local productions left their mark both on Bulgarian and European film culture from the period. *Kozijat rog* [*The Goat Horn*] (Metodi Andonov, 1972) was one of those significant pictures. It is a drama set in the 18<sup>th</sup> century when Bulgaria was still part of the Ottoman Empire. The storyline roughly outlines the political situation in the Balkans during the period while focusing primarily on

the characters' internal struggles and psychological portraits. After his wife is brutally raped and murdered by Turkish soldiers, the main protagonist – the shepherd Karaivan (Anton Gorchev) – trains his young daughter, Maria (Katya Paskaleva), to fight and kill in order to avenge her mother's death. As she gradually discovers her femininity and falls in love for the first time, their revenge mission is endangered. Karaivan attempts to bring Maria back through more violence with disastrous results. The film ends with both protagonists committing suicide.

By focusing on an individual story set in the context of colonisation, the drama portrayed both the personal and transnational aspects of Eastern European history. The film implicitly introduces issues surrounding the complicated idea of national belonging during colonial rule, the generational gap, minority (mis-)representation and the stringency of patriarchal norms. While portrayed in local and personal terms, these topics proved to resonate with the wider European cultural context. As a result, *The Goat Horn* appealed to a variety of different audiences. The film was not only viewed by approximately one-third of the Bulgarian population in only three months after its release but was also bought for distribution by 62 countries (56 of which were capitalist). The picture won awards at the film festivals in Chicago, Belgium, Panama and Karlovy Vary, proving popular both with international audiences and critics.<sup>273</sup> Together with the films previously discussed in this chapter, *The Goat Horn* helped attract critics' attention worldwide, which culminated in the International Federation of Film Critics (FIPRESCI) symposium on Bulgarian cinema held in 1976.<sup>274</sup> The event demonstrated a growing interest in local film culture and acknowledged its artistic and business potential.

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<sup>273</sup> Garbolevsky, 2011, 178–179.

<sup>274</sup> Aleksandar Yanakiev (a). "Myths and Reality Expecting Their Producer." *ProArt*. Sofia: Delta Entertainment PLLC, 2007. 129–138.



Figure 6. Katya Paskaleva in *Koziyat rog* [The Goat Horn] (Metodi Andonov, 1972).

The domestic success of *The Goat Horn* was potentially due to its national sensitivities – the Ottoman domination was still a painful part of Bulgarian history. On the surface, the picture was politically safe, conforming to the traditional standards of the national as a homogenous whole during Communism. It imposed identification with the Bulgarian national ideal for liberation from the oppressors and refused an autonomous viewpoint for the marginalized Turkish and Pomak minorities in Communist Bulgaria. Nonetheless, it was also the first domestic picture with nude scenes and an explicit treatment of sexuality, undermining the USSR's motto: "In our country there is no sex, there are morals!"<sup>275</sup> So, it is likely that a proportion of the viewers attended domestic screenings out of curiosity for the onscreen depiction of nudity.

The international success of the film was likely the result of Cold War ideological relaxation during the 1970s but also of the self-orientalising representation of violence. During the so-called *détente*, diplomatic relationships between the Soviet Union and the United States improved to counter the increasing threat of nuclear warfare.<sup>276</sup> So, the Silver Hugo for Best Film that *The Goat Horn* won at the 1973 Chicago International Film Festival could be the result of increased political co-operation over the Iron Curtain. In addition, the director Metodi Andonov, allegedly, wanted to

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<sup>275</sup> Pencho Kovachev. "Koziyat rog: za parvi pat chisto gola zhena na ekrana" ["The Goat Horn: A Naked Woman On Screen for the First Time"]. 24 Chasa Newspaper. n.d. 20 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.24chasa.bg/Article.asp?ArticleId=394183>>.

<sup>276</sup> Gabrolevsky, 2011, 159.

portray a wild, primal and dark Bulgaria, which, coincidentally, corresponded with the stereotypical images of the Balkans, discussed in the Introduction.<sup>277</sup> So, action and violence in *The Goat Horn* catered to typically Western ideas of what comprises local culture and, as a result, the film was easy to export.

*The Goat Horn* is significant not only because it portrays the popularity of Bulgarian cinema at home but also since it reveals how Eastern European cinema travels. As mentioned in the Introduction, small national cinemas are frequently discussed in economic terms of government protectionist measures and subsidies. In light of these arguments, I suggest that the potential of the Bulgarian film market might have been underestimated. Spasov challenges the assumption that Bulgarian cinema thrived under Communism simply because it was state-sponsored. Once the exhibition infrastructure was in place, partial sustainability in film production was achieved through a fund, powered by taxes on attendance and distributors' revenue, which was supplemented by a modest government subsidy (less than two per cent of the whole film financing budget).<sup>278</sup> The system in place allowed industrial sustainability with little government support.

The domestic market together with international sales and festival distribution contributed to a viable business development. Between 1956 and 1970, film spectators in Bulgaria averaged around 10.8 million per year.<sup>279</sup> It was also not uncommon for a Bulgarian film during Communism to attract a big domestic audience and receive international exhibition. Historical epics *Pod igoto [Under the Yoke]* (Dako Dakovski, 1952) and *Geroite na Shipka [Heroes of Shipka]* (Sergey Vasilyev, 1955) were viewed by more than five million Bulgarians each.<sup>280</sup> The former, likely, received distribution in East Germany, Poland and Sweden while the later was translated for the markets in Belgium, Spain, Finland, France, Greece, the Soviet Union and USA.<sup>281</sup> Bulgarian comedies like *Hitar Petar [Sly Peter]* (Stefan Surchadzhiev, 1960) broke records at home with 6.5 million tickets

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<sup>277</sup> Kovachev.

<sup>278</sup> Spasov, 2003, 37.

<sup>279</sup> Tsentralen Darzhaven Arhiv [Central State Archive]. (1971):383, 97.

<sup>280</sup> Yanakiev, 2003, 297.

<sup>281</sup> *Pod Igoto* (1952). n.d. 21 Sept. 2015.

<[http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0234484/releaseinfo?ref\\_=tt\\_dt\\_dt#akas](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0234484/releaseinfo?ref_=tt_dt_dt#akas)>; *Heroes of Shipka* (1955). n.d. 21 Sept. 2015. <[http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0047021/releaseinfo?ref\\_=tt\\_dt\\_dt#akas](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0047021/releaseinfo?ref_=tt_dt_dt#akas)>.

sold.<sup>282</sup> They also enjoyed theatrical and television exhibition across the Eastern bloc.<sup>283</sup> Film adaptation *Tyutyun [Tobacco]* (Nikola Korabov, 1962) not only attracted four million domestic viewers but was also featured in the 1963 Cannes Film Festival.<sup>284</sup> A notable example proved Radev's *Kradetsat na praskovi [The Peach Thief]* (1964) which follows the doomed love between the wife of a Bulgarian colonel (Nevena Kokanova) and a Serbian prisoner of war (Rade Markovic). In addition to casting a Serbian actor for one of the leading parts, the production featured dialogue in French and was set against the backdrop of World War I. This served to contextualise the love story within global politics and bring an air of cosmopolitanism to the rural local setting. Described by French critic Albert Servoni as "beautiful, complex and tragic" and similar to Jean Renoir's *Le Grand Illusion [Grand Illusion]* (1937), the picture was seen by more than 2.5 million domestic viewers and received distribution in East Germany, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Poland, the USA and the UK.<sup>285</sup> Similarly, socialist drama *Avantazh [Advantage]* (Georgi Djulgerov, 1977) which won the Silver Bear at the 1978 Berlin International Film Festival, was viewed by close to a million domestic viewers.<sup>286</sup> The abovementioned films illustrate that the Bulgarian film industry was not solely reliant on state funding but enjoyed box office success at home and recognition abroad.

While television had an impact on cinema going habits in the late 1960s and early 1970s, popular films easily attracted a million viewers each at home in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>287</sup> According to data gathered by Gabrolevsky, the state income from film screenings in 1980 was 38.9 million leva while the expenses for the maintenance of the film industry for the same year were 38.5 million. A Bulgarian film cost 1.1 million leva on average.<sup>288</sup> In the early 1980s, Bulgaria's cinematography was in the European top ten in terms of number of films produced and festival awards received with 767 international awards and 800,000 domestic viewers annually. Notably, about 80 per cent of Bulgarian feature films were bought and distributed in the theatres and on the television

<sup>282</sup> Yanakiev, 2003, 298.

<sup>283</sup> *Hitar Petar (1960)*. n.d. 21 Sept. 2015.

<[http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0342533/releaseinfo?ref\\_=tt\\_dt\\_dt#akas](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0342533/releaseinfo?ref_=tt_dt_dt#akas)>.

<sup>284</sup> Yanakiev, 2003, 298; *Tyutyun (1962)*. n.d. 21 Sept. 2015.

<[http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0173374/releaseinfo?ref\\_=tt\\_dt\\_dt#akas](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0173374/releaseinfo?ref_=tt_dt_dt#akas)>.

<sup>285</sup> Yanakiev, 2003, 299; Garbolevsky, 2011, pp. 105–107; *The Peach Thief (1964)*. n.d. 21 Sept. 2015.

<[http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0058277/releaseinfo?ref\\_=tt\\_dt\\_dt](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0058277/releaseinfo?ref_=tt_dt_dt)>.

<sup>286</sup> Yanakiev, 2003, 303; *Avantazh (1977)*. n.d. 21 Sept. 2015.

<[http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0077190/releaseinfo?ref\\_=tt\\_dt\\_dt#akas](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0077190/releaseinfo?ref_=tt_dt_dt#akas)>.

<sup>287</sup> Yanakiev, 2003, 299–305.

<sup>288</sup> Garbolevsky, 2011, 6.

channels of more than 80 other countries.<sup>289</sup> As Iordanova points out, there was an established system of film exchange between countries of the Eastern bloc which secured international exposure and guaranteed further profits for small national cinemas.<sup>290</sup> International festivals proved a way to reach beyond the Iron Curtain divide. This fact serves to show that socialist film cultures were not isolated in spite of their political regimes. Communist film executives managed to maintain contact with the international filmmaking community which encouraged transnational trade.<sup>291</sup> Hence, under the conditions favouring domestic production, Bulgarian cinema was profitable despite its market limitations, thanks to cross-border interactions.

The Bulgarian state further displayed its cultural ambitions when it focused on the presence of domestic cinema at international film festivals. From 1952 onward, a Bulgarian delegation was always invited to the French film festival in Cannes.<sup>292</sup> Schwartz points out that since its beginning, the Cannes Festival has embodied the shared film culture in which nations coexist, cooperate and coproduce.<sup>293</sup> Realising the economic importance of the festival, since 1955 the Bulgarian State Cinematography started financing advertising and publicity campaigns specifically designed for Cannes. It was an investment of time, talent and impressive resources.<sup>294</sup> This presented a conscious attempt by Bulgarian filmmakers and intellectuals to overcome the isolation imposed by the East-West divide and cultivate an internationally oriented film culture.

Bulgarian participation in international festivals promoted artistic innovation and political nonconformity at home. The critical acclaim that films received abroad helped secure their exhibition at home. The chief executive of Bulgarian Cinematography in 1970s, Pavel Pisarev, for instance, admitted that he often tricked head of state Todor Zhivkov by sending films to international festivals without first showing them to him. After the films had received prestigious awards, it was easier to convince the Party leaders that they should be made available for

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<sup>289</sup> Aleksandar Aleksandrov. "Neka Badem Blagosklonni Kam Balgarskoto Kinoizkustvo" ["Let's Be Benevolent Towards the Bulgarian Film Art"]. *Spisanie Kino [Kino Journal]* 2. (2005): 30–31.

<sup>290</sup> Iordanova, 2007, 94.

<sup>291</sup> Iordanova, 1999, 53.

<sup>292</sup> Garbolevsky, 2011, 54.

<sup>293</sup> Schwartz, 2007, 14–15.

<sup>294</sup> Garbolevsky, 2011, 69.

screening in Bulgaria.<sup>295</sup> Festivals provided an alternative network of exhibition with more relaxed political regulation and, in a way, predestined the rise of freedom of expression in Bulgaria.

International festivals also helped establish dissident cinema as a staple for Eastern European production abroad. The communist neglect of the individual in the late-1980s was at the centre of a series of dark socially critical films.<sup>296</sup> They embodied the subversive stance of the Hungarian uprising of 1956, the Prague Spring of 1968, and the Solidarity Movement in Poland in the 1980s.<sup>297</sup> On the one hand, films like Hristo Hristov's *Edna zhena na trideset i tri* [A Woman at 33] (1982), Eduard Zahariev's *Skapa moy, skapi moy* [My Darling, My Darling] (1986), Lyudmil Kirkov's *Petak vecher* [Friday Night] (1987), Ivan Andonov's *Vchera* [Yesterday] (1987) and Nikolai Volev's *Margarit i Margarita* [Margarit and Margarita] (1989) were representative of their time, revealing moral resistance and indignation in the face of fading socialist ideals in Bulgaria.<sup>298</sup> On the other, they fit into the democratic ideology of the countries which hosted festivals on the other side of the Iron Curtain. As a result, Imre observes that

[r]ecognisable products of Eastern European cinema were almost invariably dark and revolved around the crippling impact [of Communism] on people's bodies and minds, particularly those of intellectuals, speaking in a double language to evade censorship. Such films were typically made on modest state budgets, often employed experimental and avant-garde aesthetics, and were treated by Western critics and film buffs as 'strange and foreign'.<sup>299</sup>

This, in turn, created a new sense of division and disparity. Because of the critical attention that they received, festival pictures with bleak subject matters and disillusioned artistic outlook became signature traits for Eastern European cinema in the late Communist and early democratic period.

Films that were marginalised in terms of international media attention were domestic comedies like *Dami kanyat* [Ladies Choice] (Ivan Andonov, 1980), *Gospodin za edin den* [King for a Day] (Nikolai Volev) and *Opasen char* [Dangerous Charm] (Ivan Andonov, 1984) as well as historical epics – *Aszparuh* (Ludmil Staikov, 1981), *Boyanskiyat maystor* [Master of Boyana] (Zahari

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<sup>295</sup> Id., 166.

<sup>296</sup> Iordanova, 2008, 51.

<sup>297</sup> Garbolevsky, 2011, 12–13.

<sup>298</sup> Iordanova, 2008, 51; "The Polish Film of Moral Anxiety." *River Film Fest 2010*. n.d. 21 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.festivalnadrekou.cz/en/programme/main-cycles/the-polish-film-of-moral-anxiety/>>.

<sup>299</sup> Imre, 2012, 1–2.

Zhandov, 1981) and *Boris I* (Borislav Sharaliev, 1985). This illustrated a general trend in European cinema. Since popular non-English language films seldom travel well beyond their national boundaries, when they do, they are generally repackaged as art cinema.<sup>300</sup> Mazdon clarifies that the cultural specificities of, for instance, a French popular film could be undecipherable to foreign audiences which is why international distributors would market it as art-house, shifting its identity via the act of cultural transposition.<sup>301</sup> This abduction of a cinema to art-house when it travels abroad is not unique to Bulgarian film or to the specified historical period. However, it exemplifies the multiple discourses which defined Bulgarian cinema during Communism.

On the one hand, ideological restrictions influenced the topics and aesthetics of Bulgarian films from the period. On the other, the international festival network prompted a reductive interpretation of Eastern European cinema as politically dissident and rebellious. Still, film culture in Bulgaria was diverse enough to transcend state censorship and festival typecasting, boasting high attendance numbers and links with local and international mainstream genres. The possible readings of Bulgarian national cinema further multiply when we take into account its system of sustainability and the changes it underwent during the transition to democracy.

## **2.8 Crisis, Adaptation and Restructuring in the Conditions of a Free Market Economy**

The unstructured changeover to an open market economy which began in 1989 sent the Bulgarian film industry into a serious crisis, creating administrative and institutional chaos and leaving domestic film in an unequal competition with Hollywood. Without state regulation, appropriate film business education and international contacts, Eastern European professionals proved ill-equipped to face the international commercialisation trends governing global film trade. For the rest of this chapter, I outline problems with production, distribution and exhibition both at national and transnational levels in the 1990s and early 2000s.

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<sup>300</sup> Richard Dyer and Ginette Vincendeau, eds. "Introduction." *Popular European Cinema*. New York: Routledge, 1992. 1–14.

<sup>301</sup> Lucy Mazdon, ed. "Introduction." *France on Film: Reflections on Popular French Cinema*. London: Wallflower Press, 2001. 1–10.

The balance between state and private funding shifted with the change in political regime in Bulgaria. Together with the disintegration of the vertically integrated film industry, this affected the possibility for financial sustainability of the sector. With the change to an open market economy, Bulgarian filmmakers had to learn to compete for state funding via the scarce budget of the newly set up National Film Centre.<sup>302</sup> An executive agency of the Bulgarian Ministry of Culture, the institution remains responsible for administering funding and supporting national film culture.<sup>303</sup> However, in its early stages, the National Film Centre had limited finances, raised from the central state budget, and reduced jurisdiction which rendered filmmaking in Bulgaria a sporadic, sparsely regulated process (See: Table 1 in Appendix B). The volatile political environment during the transition influenced film industry productivity in Eastern Europe. As a result, film production levels throughout the region declined rapidly. For instance, in 1985 the number of feature films produced in Czechoslovakia was fifty, in Bulgaria – forty, in Poland – thirty-seven and in Yugoslavia – thirty. In comparison, 1992 saw the premiere of just fifteen Czechoslovak pictures, three films from Bulgaria, eight from Poland and three from Yugoslavia.<sup>304</sup> Central European countries generally adjusted more quickly to new production practices and pan-European sources of funding, coping with political insecurity and corruption, and introducing new film legislation. The timescale in which a state joined the European Union also had an impact on the development of its film business and culture. In all these respects, the Balkans (and Bulgaria, in particular) trailed behind.<sup>305</sup> These facts reveal that similar challenges were faced by Eastern European countries during the period of economic restructuring and ideological renegotiation, but individual countries dealt with them in different ways and at different time.

The most challenging aspects of the transition to democracy for the Bulgarian film industry included the loss of domestic infrastructure and funding. Between 1990 and 1993, eighty per cent of film professionals in Bulgaria were made redundant.<sup>306</sup> The lack of a government-ruled system

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<sup>302</sup> Bojidar Manov "Bulgarian Cinema Today: Seventeen Years after the Changes." *Kino Kultura*. 7 Nov. 2006. 21 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.kinokultura.com/specials/5/manov.shtml>>.

<sup>303</sup> "About us." *National Film Centre*. n.d. 21 Sept. 2015. <[https://www.nfc.bg/en/\\_a\\_an.html](https://www.nfc.bg/en/_a_an.html)>.

<sup>304</sup> Iordanova, 1999, 45.

<sup>305</sup> Iordanova, 2007, 93.

<sup>306</sup> Bilyana Tomova and Diana Andreeva. "Balgarskata kino industriya v usloviyata na pazarna transformatsiya" ["The Bulgarian Film Industry in the State of Market Transformation"]. *National Film Centre*. 2013. 21 Sept. 2015. <[http://ncf.bg/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/film\\_industry\\_observatory.pdf](http://ncf.bg/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/film_industry_observatory.pdf)>.

of production, distribution and exhibition meant that “private producers with little experience and funds emerged in an environment lacking any enforceable legislative framework”<sup>307</sup> Eighty-eight major cinema halls were sold, maintaining cinema-related activities for not more than five years and swiftly being turned into bingo halls and shopping malls.<sup>308</sup> After privatisation, the national market fell under the control of newly-established exhibition companies Rainbow, Sunny and Alexandra Films, which favoured Hollywood productions.<sup>309</sup> The festival circuit provided exposure to critics’ circles but rarely secured distribution within the country.<sup>310</sup> National cinema lost its secure vertically integrated structure without regaining adequate alternative sources of funding or models for functioning. As a consequence of major changes in the distribution network, Bulgarian film disappeared from cinemas, ultimately losing its audiences. Filmmakers had to learn new skills in fundraising and guerrilla distribution. Unsurprisingly, some of the veterans and the members of the middle generation, who had come to the profession just before the ‘perestroika’ period found it extremely difficult and made hardly any films after the end of Communism, while the directors of the generation that came to film in the 1990s only received recognition if they worked for television.<sup>311</sup> This caused significant changes in film formats and distribution strategies.

Television provided structure and stability to the film business in an environment of little administrative and regulative support. Domestic film circulation in the 1990s and 2000s was largely confined to video, DVD and the satellite channel, which broadcast classics from earlier periods and, thus, allowed diaspora access to older films. According to the Bulgarian Law on Radio and Television of 1998 and in agreement with the European Convention on Transfrontier Television of 1989, ten per cent of the government subsidy for Bulgarian National Television (BNT) had to be devoted to domestic television films and co-productions.<sup>312</sup> The incorporation of film production, distribution and exhibition under the umbrella of one institution was similar to the

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<sup>307</sup> Manov, 2006.

<sup>308</sup> Spasov, 2003, 38; Table 2, Appendix B.

<sup>309</sup> Dina Iordanova. “Canaries and Birds of Prey: The New Season of Bulgarian Cinema.” *Bulgaria in Transition: Politics, Economics, Society & Culture After Communism*. Ed. John D. Bell. Boulder, CO: Westview Pr (Short Disc), 14 June 1998. 255–280.

<sup>310</sup> Iordanova, 2008, 9–11.

<sup>311</sup> Id., 12–14.

<sup>312</sup> Bulgaria joined the Television Without Frontiers Directive (1989) and later ratified the European Union’s Convention On Transfrontier Television (1997). While Bulgarian legislation is closely aligned with European regulations, legal loopholes allow exploitation of filmmaking funds for entertainment programmes and news reportages (Zelma Almaleh. “Televiziyat: Vechnite Problem” [“Television: The Eternal Problems”]. *Spisanie Kino* 4. (2003): 25–28).

model of Bulgarian Cinematography during Communism. Even if the structure remained the same, the scale of the market shifted. As Spasov maintains, it proved inappropriate to make films for a small market such as television instead of uniting funds with external bodies to make more big-budget films that could recuperate their investment through theatrical screenings and then, again, become part of the television programming.<sup>313</sup> The practical application of this principle saw mainstream films such as *Mission London* and *Love.net* benefit both from television support and cinema circulation, achieving a successful box office and television run. In Chapter Four I suggest that multi-platform distribution could be an effective strategy for reaching a maximum number of viewers.

In the 1990s countries throughout Europe struggled to find the balance between protectionist measures and a free economy within the context of growing global trade. As the major American studios adopted aggressive import and export strategies with investment in local multiplexes and co-productions in order to ensure Hollywood access to European screens, institutions on the Old Continent exhibited concern for political integration and preservation of cultural identity.<sup>314</sup> In the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) negotiations of 1993, discussing the regulation of international trade, France, champion of European film, firmly refused to accept that cinema be included in the list of products and services that were subject to liberalisation. European activists argued that audiovisual culture represented national art and heritage and, as such, had to be protected by the state. US advocates of free trade perceived cinema as an entertainment industry, part of a free market economy and subject to its forces. Amidst much controversy, a decision was reached for a so-called ‘cultural exception’ which allowed each national government to impose restrictions and regulations on film trade in order to ensure the preservation of its indigenous industry.<sup>315</sup> The agreement acknowledged the value of cinema as a tool of identity-formation and formalised the relationship between European and Hollywood cinema. By delaying the ratification of a formal law on the domestic film industry (until 2003), however, Bulgaria failed to take advantage of the settlement and did not impose adequate protectionist measures on film production and distribution.

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<sup>313</sup> Spasov, 2003, 38.

<sup>314</sup> Marc Silberman. “Popular Cinema, National Cinema, and European Integration.” *German Pop Culture: How “American” Is It? (Social History, Popular Culture, and Politics in Germany)*. Ed. Agnes Müller. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2004. 151–164.

<sup>315</sup> Divina Frau-Meigs. “‘Cultural Exception’, National Policy and Globalization: Imperatives in Democratization and Promotion of Contemporary Culture.” *Quaderns del CAC* 14 (2002): 3–18.

Unobstructed access to American entertainment characterised Bulgarian television distribution as well. In principle, the Television without Frontiers Directive of 1989 (now renamed as the Audio-Visual Media Services Directive) ensured “the free movement of European television programmes within the internal market and the requirement for TV channels to reserve, whenever possible, more than half of their transmission time for European works”.<sup>316</sup> The initiative has been influential in integrating and deregulating television programmes within the European Union, while also setting policies to appease factions that want to protect national industries from corporatisation.<sup>317</sup> It aims to create a unified European market, promoting internal partnership and contributing to a stronger sense of European belonging. In practice, however, Bulgaria delayed the application of the principles of mutual assistance and audiovisual co-operation. Instead of using the legal opportunity to place an emphasis on national and European production, in the early 2000s BNT decided to limit the broadcasting of Bulgarian films to its satellite channel in order to save on paying for copyrights.<sup>318</sup> The other two television channels with a national scope – bTV and Nova Television were not only uninterested in participating in film production, but also broadcast a lot fewer European films than the legal requirement and no Bulgarian titles.<sup>319</sup> Anne Jäckel rightly noticed that in Eastern European countries struggling through deep economic crises, investing in cultural production and the enforcement of cultural legislation was originally not a priority.<sup>320</sup> Talk and late-night shows and reality formats based on American models proved a preferable venture for national broadcasters instead.

Without appropriate state regulation, US product dominated the Bulgarian audio-visual market, introducing new rules for success and changing expectations. American productions topped the box office, even though annual cinema attendance in Bulgaria between 1980 and 1999 had dropped fifty times.<sup>321</sup> *Titanic* (James Cameron, 1997) grossed \$1,024,062 while *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace* (George Lucas, 1999) and *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*

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<sup>316</sup> “Television broadcasting activities: ‘Television without Frontiers’ (TVWF) Directive.” *Europa.eu*. n.d. 21 Sept. 2015. <[http://europa.eu/legislation\\_summaries/audiovisual\\_and\\_media/l24101\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/audiovisual_and_media/l24101_en.htm)>.

<sup>317</sup> Imre, 2012, 5.

<sup>318</sup> Almaleh, 2003, 25.

<sup>319</sup> Ognyan Gelinov. “Osobenostite Na Natsionalniya Filmov Pazar” [“The Specificities of the National Film Market”]. *Spisanie Kino [Kino Journal]* 5. (2007): 14–21.

<sup>320</sup> Anne Jäckel. *European Film Industries*. London: British Film Institute, 2003, 57.

<sup>321</sup> Iordanova, 2007, 101.

(Peter Jackson, 2003) garnered, respectively, \$487,200 and \$609,501 in Bulgarian cinemas.<sup>322</sup>

These films set the standards for success at the Bulgarian box office. In comparison, the most popular Bulgarian title of that time, *Pismo do America*, gathered a domestic audience of 12,000, earning under \$40,000.<sup>323</sup> As I discuss later, through its vision and marketing Hollywood fascinated the Bulgarian audience. The enormous difference in the performance of Hollywood and domestic films was also due not only to a changed distribution and exhibition domestic environment and discrepancies in production, but also to narrative topics and marketing strategies.

The change in ideology and economy after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 had brought a radical transformation of film aesthetics. With the lack of a state censorship apparatus, filmmakers were free to discuss their disillusionment with the system and to represent the new social order with brutal realism. A lot of directors were preoccupied with rethinking the legacy of the communist past.<sup>324</sup> Violence, poverty and hopelessness formed the main focus of domestic filmmaking in the 1990s and early 2000s. Practising their art within “an unsettling cruel reality [with] fertile soil for raging violent crime and general moral and cultural decline”, filmmakers depicted the rise of post-communist mafia and wide-spread lawlessness.<sup>325</sup> Ivan Andonov’s TV mini-series *Dunav most [Danube Bridge]* (1999) portrayed the illegal business schemes and moral regression of the *nouveau riche* in the port town of Rousse. *Ogledaloto na dyavola [Devil’s Mirror]* (Nikolai Volev, 2001) told of an anti-mafia corps captain and his personal and professional struggles as he realises that his wife is cheating and his boss is corrupt. Ilian Simeonov’s *Yarost [Rage]* (2002) followed a simple working class man in his doomed attempts to save the prostitute he loves from both pimps

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<sup>322</sup> *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy is, in fact, a co-production between New Zealand and Hollywood; “Titanic (1997) - International Box Office Results.” n.d. 21 Sept. 2015.

<<http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=intl&country=BG&id=titanic.htm>>; “Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace (1999) - International Box Office Results.” n.d. 21 Sept. 2015.

<<http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=intl&country=BG&id=starwars.htm>>; “The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King (2003) - International Box Office Results.” n.d. 21 Sept. 2015.

<<http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=intl&id=returnoftheking.htm>>.

<sup>323</sup> Ingeborg Bratoeva-Darakchieva. “Igralnoto Kino: Otsastviya I Prisastviya” [“Feature Films: Absences and Presences”]. *Spisanie Kino [Kino Journal]* 4. (2003): 14–19.

<sup>324</sup> Georgi Djulgerov’s *Lagerat [The Camp]* (1990), Ivan Andonov’s *Vampiri, talasami [Vampires, Spooks]* (1992), Evgeni Mihailov’s *Sezonat na kanarchetata [Canary Season]* (1993) and Hristiyan Nochev and Ilian Simeonov’s *Granitsa [Border]* (1994) provided anti-utopian accounts of the totalitarian period (Iordanova, 2008, 54).

<sup>325</sup> Id., 64.

and corrupt policemen. Social inequality and ideological disillusionment were persistent topics in films of the period.

The idea of a collective national image came under scrutiny as well. A preoccupation with the plight of under-privileged ethnic minorities in Bulgaria can be seen from a number of films made in 1990s. Rumyana Petkova's *Gori, gori, oganche [Burn, Burn, Little Flame]* 1994, Dimitar Petkov's *Tsigani ot vsichki strani, saedinyavayte se! [Gypsies of the World, Unite!]* (1994), Georgi Djulgerov's *Chernata lyastovitza [The Black Swallow]* (1997) and Krassimir Krumov's *Pod edno nebe [Under the Same Sky]* (2003), among many others, reflected upon the discrimination and poverty that affects Pomaks, Turks and Roma people in Bulgaria.<sup>326</sup> While the filmmakers tended to paint a sympathetic portrait of marginalised groups such as ethnic minorities, street children, impoverished pensioners and illegal immigrants, the mainstream media often betrayed hostility and insensitivity towards such disenfranchised groups. It was a depressing period in Bulgarian cinema which led to a re-examination of artistic values and national identity.<sup>327</sup> Much as in the early period, this entailed a growing desire to once again redefine Bulgaria as belonging to the 'European family', both through cultural and technological advances. Similarly, it was crucial to realise that Bulgaria had become part of cosmopolitan film culture, shaped by global economic and artistic forces and interacting with Hollywood product.

The crisis in Bulgarian filmmaking resulted in increased transnational investment and further blurring of national boundaries when business ventures were concerned. As Iordanova observes, the film industry in Eastern Europe was differentiated in two 'parallel economies':

On the one hand, there is a well-developed and often profitable operation in place to attract and service large-scale international productions, with a stream-lined system of studios, service companies, facilities and below-the-line personnel. On the other hand, there is the sphere of domestic filmmaking, with a much smaller technical and production base that is set up ad hoc on a per project basis; the local creative 'above-the-line' talent is engaged mostly here... It is in the context of this second film industry that films claiming to represent the national identity discourse are made today.<sup>328</sup>

In other words, transnational initiatives attracted local professionals and dominated commercial filmmaking in the Eastern bloc in the 1990s and early 2000s. As Imre suggests, the changing

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<sup>326</sup> Id., 30–39.

<sup>327</sup> Id., 50, 64.

<sup>328</sup> Iordanova, 2007, 95.

politico-economic imperatives of an increasingly globalised media industry challenged the notion of centrality and periphery in business. Eastern European countries found themselves competing for transnational investments that foreign productions ensure.<sup>329</sup> This facilitated a newly coined symbiosis between the East and the West. Thanks to its international scope and audience, the so-called ‘service system’, occupied a significant share of the filmmaking activities on the territory of Bulgaria as well. This provided opportunities for international collaboration, helping film practitioners adapt to a more competitive and demanding system of production. Exposure to runaway productions as well as experience across the different media contexts contributed to the professionalisation of film crews.

The Boyana film studio was privatised and bought by the American film company Nu Image, which specialises in action movies. Nu Boyana Films has been capitalising on the portable industry shifts that brought runaway European and Hollywood productions to the much cheaper Balkan studios.<sup>330</sup> Bulgaria attracted pictures such as: the American *Crisis in the Kremlin* (Jonathan Winfrey, 1992), *War, Inc.* (Joshua Seftel, 2008), *Conan the Barbarian* (Marcus Nispel, 2011) and *The Expendables 2* (Simon West, 2012); the Italian *Elvis and Marilyn* (Armando Manni, 1998); the co-production between Italy, France, Liechtenstein and the UK *Little Buddha* (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1993); and UK-Norway-Denmark-Germany-Sweden enterprise *Kon-Tiki* (Joachim Rønning/ Espen Sandberg, 2012).<sup>331</sup> This clearly illustrates the development of a viable service industry in Bulgaria. While the focus was international, up until 2013 Nu Boyana Film Studios had also been involved as co-production partner in over twenty local productions. Some of the films included *Prognoza [Forecast]* (Zornitsa Sophia, 2008), *Kozelat [The Goat]* (Georgi Djulgerov, 2009), *Stapki v pyasaka [Footsteps in the Sand]* (Ivaylo Hristov, 2010), *Faith, Love and Whiskey* (Kristina Nikolova, 2012).<sup>332</sup> This demarcates the fluid interaction between the national and international film production realms in Bulgaria. The two exist in an unequal symbiosis which alters the nature of the film industry as well as its audiences.

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<sup>329</sup> Imre, 2012, 1–2.

<sup>330</sup> Iordanova, 2008, 11.

<sup>331</sup> Iordanova, 1999, 51–52; “Movie reel.” *NuBoyana Film Studios*. 17 Feb. 2014. 21 Sept. 2015. <<http://nuboyana.com/movie-reel/>>.

<sup>332</sup> Anita Dimitrova. *Kinoto ni se otrovi ot skandali za pari – intervju s Dimitar Dereliev [Our Cinema Is Poisoned by Money Scandals – an Interview with Dimitar Dereliev]*. SEGA Online, 5 Sept. 2013. 21 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.segabg.com/article.php?id=664545>>.

## 2.9 *I Want America: The Role of Television for Identity-Formation*

The burden to renegotiate the value of a newfound identity within an increasingly global cultural community fell on the younger generation – a target audience for popular entertainment. In contrast with Bulgarian films, American culture provided a model of resilience and hopefulness, a response to the glum transitional period on the Balkans. As Martin Dale argues, the general assumption has always been that Hollywood films are life-empowering because they transmit “a burst of energy through an ironic view on life that features dramatic moments interspersed with humour while European films focus on and encourage sensations of despair”.<sup>333</sup> While I disagree with Dale’s generalisation of European cinema, I recognise the resilience with which American ideology is invested. In the Introduction, I argued that Hollywood’s ability to transgress borders stems from its de-localised narratives and universal values. American blockbusters emulate cultural symbols in an attempt to enhance their global appeal. At the same time, they provided an example of capitalist venture and competitiveness for a country that had just exited Communism.

Ideologically, Hollywood’s saturation of the domestic market created something resembling a ‘brand image’ for America: a portrayal of affluence, opportunity, excitement, technological progress and an open liberal democracy. It is a self-perpetuating image which has sold both American values and American goods.<sup>334</sup> Economically, the blockbuster concept raised the cost of popular movies to unprecedented levels, at least initially, excluding most European countries with their delicate balance of state funding, television production money and a weak box office for their audio-visual sector from being able to afford a commercial film industry.<sup>335</sup> It took a few decades for Bulgarian filmmakers to adjust to the new environment and learn to compete with Hollywood.

The availability and aggressive promotion of Hollywood products secured them exposure and shaped early democratic values, contributing to a collective fascination with the ‘American dream’

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<sup>333</sup> Martin Dale. *The Movie Game: The Film Business in Britain, Europe and America*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1997, 52.

<sup>334</sup> David Puttnam. *The Undeclared War: The Struggle for Control of the World’s Film Industry*. London: HarperCollins Publishers, 22 May 1997, 351.

<sup>335</sup> Thomas Elsaesser. *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood*. Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press, Dec. 2005, 308–309.

in Bulgaria. Intentionally or not, Kiran Kolarov's tragicomedy *Iskam Amerika [I Want America]* (1991) proves an ironic comment on ideological change in Bulgaria. The picture portrays life on and off the set of a film shoot. A film crew arrives in a seaside town in Bulgaria to make a movie about the life of the director's father, an anti-fascist fighter. Layers of reality, memories and fantasy intertwine. Confronted with the traumas of his childhood, encounters with old friends and his first love (Nevena Kokanova), the director (Stefan Danailov) realises that he cannot complete the film after all. The life of his family and close ones is painfully depressing and stagnated. The Hollywood-esque caption "The End" with which the film concludes signifies less than a happy ending. At the same time, symbols of ideological change and potential escapist dreams are interspersed throughout the narrative. The director's red Ford (a brand, typically representative of American industrialisation and entrepreneurship) provides stark contrast with the typical Russian cars in Bulgaria at the time. The car, together with recollections of a childhood game of spinning the globe, provokes one of the main protagonists (Anton Radichev) to shout: "I want America!" at the very beginning of the film. This exclamation comes as a surprise in light of the fact that, just five years before, Kolarov had completed a state commissioned epic about the early life of Communist party leader Zhivkov.<sup>336</sup> *I Want America*, thus, exposes the difficult reconciliation of the Communist legacy with the new democratic identity. Despite the apparent change of the political system, ideological and economic transition in Bulgaria during the 1990s proved tumultuous.

It was political and economic turmoil that provided fruitful soil for Hollywood distribution in foreign countries during different periods. With the support of successive American governments, the Motion Picture Export Association (MPEA) had taken advantage of the absence of import restrictions in the defeated countries of WWII.<sup>337</sup> Unobstructed access to the markets of Germany and Italy allowed Hollywood to interact with local audiences. This had led to fears that with the American imports, American ideology was also transmitted, promoting capitalism and ruthless individualism.<sup>338</sup> While viewers' responses admittedly varied, it was often the case that urban youth culture embraced American-style consumption as a protest against social conventions and in search of a transformed identity. Bergfelder points out that in the 1950s German youths actively engaged with American popular culture, epitomised by rock'n'roll, specific fashion and

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<sup>336</sup> Todorov, 2010.

<sup>337</sup> Bergfelder, 2005, 30–31.

<sup>338</sup> Id., 29.

rebel icons, such as Elvis Presley, James Dean and Marlon Brando. Cinematic cosmopolitanism helped negotiate a new identity in order to deal with post-war guilt and shame.<sup>339</sup> In a similar manner, the Bulgarian generation born in the late 1980s and early 1990s had to adapt to new social, economic and education systems while renegotiating the recent communist past.



Figure 7. Still from *Iskam America* [*I Want America*] (Kiran Kolarov, 1991).

Thanks to cable television and the rise of the Internet, the young generation had direct access to American fashion and slang. During Communism, there were only two state-controlled channels available in the country. With the change to democracy, public, private and cable television channels competed for a share of the small domestic market. In the early stages of their existence new commercial broadcasters had very little guaranteed revenue from advertising. As a result, there was a natural tendency for stations to seek out the cheapest possible programming. In most cases, that meant buying programmes from Hollywood, which could be obtained for a fraction of the cost of domestic production.<sup>340</sup> The added lack of appropriate legislation and state funding for

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<sup>339</sup> Id., 45.

<sup>340</sup> Putnam, 1997, 338.

Bulgarian film and television in the 1990s further contributed to creating favourable conditions for the distribution of American production.

As John Sinclair argued, the proliferation of cable programming challenged the medium of television as an instrument for creating imagined communities on the national level. Increased choice of entertainment and availability of formats promoted fragmentation and social differentiation.<sup>341</sup> Just as in France in the 1980s and 1990s climate of political and cultural anxieties, Americanisms, the use of slang words and local colloquialism proliferated in Bulgaria.<sup>342</sup> They were also indicative of the appropriation of American ghetto culture to a Bulgarian reality of material deprivation and general disillusionment.

American fashion and modes of expression were adopted both as an escapist method of dealing with the domestic environment and as an attempt to transform it. For instance, Bulgaria was not just a post-communist country in turmoil; through the appropriation of American modes of expression and fashion it was declared by its young adults to be part of international youth culture. In this context, the exclamation “I want America!” is no longer simply an indicator of ideological shifts or geographical moves; it becomes an active claim to transnational identity and cultural belonging. American cultural products have been adopted and transformed to serve local purposes, resulting in the creation of cosmopolitan culture of transnational exchange and appropriation.

Indeed, part of global tendencies, Hollywood had triggered cultural transformations across European countries. Post World War II Germany saw the generation of Wim Wenders, Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Werner Herzog grow up with American cinema, AFN radio and Disney comics. Popular entertainment provided them with an alternative to the repressive and hypocritical atmosphere of the parental home during the Adenauer years. Even though Wenders later recognised America as a coloniser of the German subconscious, he also called rock’n’roll his

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<sup>341</sup> John Sinclair. “Into the Post-Broadcast Era.” *Contemporary World Television*. Ed. John Sinclair and Graeme Turner. London: BFI Publishing, 2004, 43.

<sup>342</sup> Anne Jäckel. “*Les Visiteurs*: A Feelgood Movie for Uncertain Times.” *France on Film: Reflections on Popular French Cinema*. Ed. Lucy Mazdon. London: Wallflower Press, 2001. 41–50.

‘lifesaver’ as an adolescent.<sup>343</sup> Similarly, Hollywood’s influence was crucial for French artists. In the early 1960s the directors of the Nouvelle Vague developed the *auteur* theory not for themselves, but for the Hollywood directors whom they admired. Their idols John Ford, Howard Hawks and Sam Fuller were “used as sticks to beat their own well-mannered gentleman directors with”.<sup>344</sup> This reveals the dual nature of American influence. The US is not perceived one-sidedly by European filmmakers or audiences as a cultural colonising force but often construed as a liberating influence providing alternative ideals, challenging creativity and cogitation in an environment of political, artistic and/or intellectual stagnation. In the subsequent chapter I examine the productiveness of Bulgarian appropriations, prompted by the new atmosphere in domestic popular entertainment.

## 2.10 Conclusion

Since the beginning of cinema in Europe, Bulgaria has formed an essential part of its dissemination, serving as a geographic and cultural bridge between the East and the West. The development of Bulgarian national cinema reaffirmed the country’s status as culturally and technologically advanced in the post-colonial era. Pre-communist legislation invested national cinema with moral responsibility while the Communist state saw it as an ideological tool. Despite the shifting discourses on national cinema, there were transnational continuities across production, distribution and exhibition practices which prompt the need for a more inclusive outlook on the history of local film culture. My ultimate aim was to challenge the myth of cultural and economic isolation, often employed in describing national cinema, by positioning Bulgaria as part of transnational industrial developments. The vibrant, multi-cultural character of local film business shortly after the Liberation, during Communism and after the fall of the Berlin wall illustrate my view. Since the examples discussed are not unique to Bulgarian cinema, they serve to show that visual culture and media evolve in an exclusively transnational environment and should as such challenge radically nationalist and separatist arguments. The subsequent chapter investigates political, economic and aesthetic advances in local cinema in the period 2003–2013.

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<sup>343</sup> Elsaesser, 2005, 303–304.

<sup>344</sup> Id., 41



## **Chapter 3: Adapting to a Transnational Present**

### **3.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter I outlined the general development of Bulgarian cinema as part of Balkan, Eastern European and European cinemas, demonstrating how the enthusiasm of earlier filmmakers, appropriate levels of state involvement as well as transnational cooperation shaped what constituted the national film industry. Here I discuss the challenges that filmmakers still face in the context of global and local developments in legislation and economy. I focus on the period between 2003 and 2013 to examine corresponding practices in the domestic and the international filmmaking spheres. The implementation of appropriate national legislation in 2003, regulated participation in international co-production. Bulgaria's 2007 accession to the European Union secured the free flow of capital and labour, which proved essential for revitalising domestic filmmaking. As a result, a new generation of commercially-savvy and internationally-oriented filmmakers emerged, attracting both mainstream and festival attention with their works. Theoretical debates on the role of cinema as art or entertainment have practical consequences when state financing is distributed. I maintain that updated criteria for government support and diversified sources of funding are needed in order to respond effectively to the change in artistic generations and the proliferation of filmic forms in contemporary Bulgarian cinema. By outlining the present state of the audio-visual environment and the role that Western Europe and the USA have played in business initiatives, I aim to reaffirm Bulgaria's cultural, artistic and economic belonging not only to the European Community but to global film culture in general.

The Bulgarian popular features that I examine here are diverse in subject matter but all of them touch on issues surrounding globalisation and renegotiation of national identity. *The World Is Big...* (2008) tells of amnesia-ridden Alex from Germany and his tandem bicycle journey across Europe (and down memory lane), back home to Bulgaria with the help of his grandfather, backgammon champion Bai Dan. It is a story about reconnecting with one's roots but also renegotiating the Communist past in light of a new-found belonging to the European community. A co-production between Bulgaria, Germany, Slovenia and Hungary, the film benefits from shooting locations across different countries and employing actors of different origins. It raises the question of what constitutes national identity in a Europe of open borders but persistent language and cultural differences. *Mission London* (2010) follows the comic mishaps of the

Bulgarian ambassador in London, Varadin, mistakenly hiring impersonators of famous people while trying to host a reception with Her Majesty Elizabeth II for the authoritarian wife of the Bulgarian president. Through ironic turns of events and sarcastic commentaries, the comedy exposes blind ambition to succeed, servility, immigrant life, culture gaps but also shared flaws between the Bulgarians and the British. The film remains relevant in the context of constantly renegotiated European Union values and regulations. *Love.net* (2011) portrays love on the web through the interactions of a plethora of characters, involved in virtual communication, casual flirtation or serious infatuation. A part of the plot is, again, set in the UK in an attempt to draw parallels across cultures and subtly reinstate Bulgaria's belonging to European heritage.

Importantly, all three films gained a significant proportion of their budgets through state subsidies (see Table 2, Appendix B). They exemplify the delicate balance between state and private funding, necessary for the production of successful mainstream films in contemporary Bulgaria. I discuss these three films not only because they are among the most commercially successful productions of the democratic era in Bulgaria but also because each one of them has contributed to innovation in production, distribution and exhibition. I focus on the economic dimensions constituting their development and success, examining the particular environment of their emergence as well as their similarities to the Hollywood blockbuster. I pinpoint the combination of government support, independent and co-production financing (secured by commercially-savvy producers) and the appropriation of Hollywood models of development, marketing and distribution as essential for the films' commercial success. Mixed with Bulgarian literary traditions and topics of domestic interest, they contributed to the revival of domestic interest in Bulgarian film, re-defining once again the meaning of national cinema.

### **3.2 Regulation and Development of the Bulgarian Film Market**

While previous film legislation conceptualised Bulgarian cinema as an educational, moral or ideological mechanism, the Film Industry Act (FIA) of 2003 set much stricter definitions of what constitutes a Bulgarian film and specified in law the idea of European cultural belonging. FIA was an attempt to bring some order to the complex, deregulated audio-visual process in post-communist Bulgaria. It outlines the institutional parameters governing national film production and dissemination and secures financial support for a small number of new projects. The so-called

'new wave' in Bulgarian cinema has often been linked by critics to the stabilising force of the law which ensured a yearly government subsidy calculated through a special formula.<sup>345</sup> Filmmaking turned from an accidental activity with one or two films released annually to a regulated process with its own internal laws. However, inadequate management and corruption interfered with the consistent application of the law and have since undermined its authority in professional circles.

The Film Industry Act (available in Appendix A) specifies that the Bulgarian National Film Centre is responsible for supporting the making, distribution and showing of Bulgarian films. This provided clarity after a period of industrial and administrative uncertainty in Bulgarian cinema. The state subsidy is distributed through the National Film Centre. According to article 26, each year funds are allocated to support Bulgarian film-production, distribution, promotion and exhibition as well as co-productions with members of the European Union and other international partners. In this way the legislation puts domestically financed films on a par with co-productions. The law importantly transcends essentialist ideas about the uniqueness of Bulgarian cinema and promotes all film activity in the country. Moreover, Article 27 explicitly states:

Projects applying for state subsidy shall be ranked according to:

1. their artistic potential within the context of the European cultural diversity;
2. their commercial potential and opportunities for international recognition;
3. the economic justification of the proposed budget;
4. the thoroughness of the strategic plan submitted by the producer with regard to the management and promotion of the project...

The fact that displaying a European heritage comes as a first criterion in the evaluation of Bulgarian film projects is no coincidence. In 2003, when the law was ratified, Bulgaria was in the middle of accession negotiations with the European Union.<sup>346</sup> Bulgarian film was explicitly positioned by the state as carrier of European cultural values (as elusive to define as those can be) in order to promote the idea of cultural belonging to Europe. While the legal definitions of Bulgarian film during tsarist and Communist rule focused on its local educational and ideological purposes, democratic Bulgarian cinema was envisioned as a tool to overcome the small nation inferiority complex, cultural and business isolationism.

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<sup>345</sup> Tomova and Andreeva, 2013.

<sup>346</sup> "European Commission - Enlargement - Bulgaria - EU-Bulgaria Relations." *EC Europa EU*. 23 Nov. 2006. 22 Sept. 2015. <[http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/archives/bulgaria/eu\\_bulgaria\\_relations\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/archives/bulgaria/eu_bulgaria_relations_en.htm)>.

Article 27 also reveals that the Bulgarian state recognizes all the different aspects of the film process. Concern for distribution, promotion and exhibition is an acknowledgement of the business element related to sustaining national film. FIA presents a move away from European *auteur* ideology by considering film as a product in a free market environment. Support for popular genres was evident when the legislation secured state funding of one million leva (or approximately 500,000 euro) each for the production, promotion and distribution of *The World Is Big..., Mission London* and *Love.net*.<sup>347</sup> Despite the mainstream character of the pictures, it was recognised that, due to market limitations, they needed state backing. FIA reveals that the importance and competitiveness of Europe's film industries in national terms is still deemed economically relevant and culturally significant. However international the film business in Bulgaria may have become, there is a long tradition of state support. National contexts still define industry practice and determine cultural policy. Even if long delayed, the Bulgarian film legislation reveals that local production is too socially important to be left to market forces alone.<sup>348</sup>

For state protectionist measures to take effect, FIA attempted to define in practical terms what constitutes a Bulgarian and, by extension, a European film. Section 1 of the Additional Provisions states:

'Bulgarian film' shall be defined as a film that meets at least one of the following conditions: (a) collects at least 15 points under Annex 1; (b) has an original version in Bulgarian and at least two of the authors are Bulgarian citizens, one of whom is the script writer or the director; (c) the financial participation of the Bulgarian producer is no less than 20 per cent of the budget of the film in case of co-productions between two countries and no less than 10 per cent in case of co-productions between three and more countries, and the Bulgarian elements total at least 10 points under Annex 1.

The emphasis in defining Bulgarian cinema is, thus, placed on authorship, language, financing and narrative. According to Annex 1, a film can receive up to eight points for the group of artists who are right holders under the Law of the Copyright and Related Rights and an extra point each if the sound and mixing, editing, set and costumes, studio or place of filming, and place of post-production operations are Bulgarian. Annex 2 uses similar criteria for evaluating the 'Europeanness' of a given production.

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<sup>347</sup> See Table 2 in Appendix B.

<sup>348</sup> Jäckel, 2003, 1.

Bulgarian film legislation is not unique in its evaluation of national belonging through a points system. The British Film Institute similarly assigns points through the cultural test on cultural content, cultural contribution, cultural hubs and cultural practitioners.<sup>349</sup> In France, a picture receives points for featuring French language, creative and technical personnel and facilities.<sup>350</sup> An Italian film is, likewise, evaluated based on its story/screenplay, characters, production team, location and editing facilities.<sup>351</sup> In other words, Bulgarian legislation mirrors other contemporary European film laws. Films, recognised as belonging to a particular national culture, are then entitled to apply for state/regional funding or tax breaks under the jurisdiction of the respective country. While reflecting a particularly national or European reality and values can be a subjective criterion, the rest of the requirements employed in evaluating the cultural belonging of a picture are typically industrial. This presents a revised discourse on the legal definition of Bulgarian cinema by placing an emphasis on the context and reality of its production.

However, upon closer analysis, the document also causes confusion and prepares the ground for possible opposition between art-house and commercial filmmakers. Article 27 specifies that the projects submitted for approval are evaluated according to: (1) their artistic potential within the context of the European cultural diversity; (2) their commercial potential and their likelihood of reaching international recognition; (3) the economic justification for the proposed budget; and (4) the exhaustiveness of the producer's strategic plan for the management and promotion of the project. These provisions reveal the conflicting ideology behind the Bulgarian state funding system. In principle, FIA inspires both art-house and mainstream productions, implicitly encouraging genre diversity. In practice, each project is evaluated according to all the listed criteria.<sup>352</sup> The lack of differentiated categories, in which art-house and commercial projects can compete for funding, has escalated tensions within the domestic filmmaking community, as I discuss later in this chapter.

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<sup>349</sup> "Summary of points – cultural test for film." British Film Institute, 2 July 2015. 22 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.bfi.org.uk/film-industry/british-certification-tax-relief/cultural-test-video-games/summary-points-cultural-test-film>>.

<sup>350</sup> "BONZA - French Cinema." n.d. 22 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.bonzadb.com.au/static/fr/funding/index.html>>.

<sup>351</sup> "Is an offshore trust right for your client?" 23 July 2015. 22 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.jordantrustcompany.com/thinking/-/blogs/italian-law-credit-law-tax-credit-granted-to-film-production-companies->>.

<sup>352</sup> Tomova and Andreeva, 2013.

The potential of a project needs to be evaluated with regard to the particular distribution and exhibition framework within which it is created. What constitutes a promising art-house production rarely corresponds to the elements of a good commercial picture. A project which attempts to satisfy both criteria could end up with no clear sense of business perspective. Accordingly, film scholars like Vladimir Andreev argue that the Bulgarian funding system needs urgent re-appraisal. A possible future model to emulate could be the Norwegian Film Fund which accepts applications for art and commercial films in two separate categories. Projects with popular appeal are evaluated in artistic committees comprising individuals with different film and business-related professions while art submissions are approved by the director of the fund.<sup>353</sup> Applied to the Bulgarian funding context, this idea could alleviate pressure to justify projects as both artistically and commercially viable and ensure that their target audience is clear from the earliest stages of development.

FIA also exposes Bulgaria's inability to ensure a diversification of film funding resources. As Jäckel points out, in the 1960s and 1970s European governments preferred an approach based on selective funding for projects rather than companies in the past. Nonetheless, as arguments for the development of a strong economic sector intensified, new investment incentives and funding mechanisms for production companies have been introduced. Government support in the form of automatic and selective aids, tax breaks (including VAT exemption) and soft loans have, thus, become more important in developing a sustainable national film industry than subsidies.<sup>354</sup> Such provisions are still notably missing from Bulgarian legislation. Reliance on funding from the state budget hinders the professional and artistic development of filmmakers, slowing down the production process, carrying unnecessary bureaucracy and often, when government funding becomes limited, jeopardizing whole projects.<sup>355</sup>

Disagreements with regard to the ideology of national cinema production trigger legislative problems. The power and privilege of the *auteur* have influenced the legal and institutional framework governing European film production. A firm supporter of popular filmmaking and an

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<sup>353</sup> Vladimir Andreev. "I Kinoto E Kato Vsichko Po Nashite Zemi" ["Cinema Is Like Everything Else Here"]. *Spisanie Kino [Kino Journal]*. 6. (2011): 2–6.

<sup>354</sup> Jäckel, 2003, 46.

<sup>355</sup> Tomova and Andreeva, 2013.

ex-CEO of Columbia Pictures, producer David Puttnam claims that, with the compliance of relevant state committees, government support in some countries is assigned specifically to the director, without regard for the production company or the distributor. Thus, certain film projects were publicly funded regardless of whether they exhibit any interest in capturing an audience. Puttnam insists that, by the early 1990s, it was estimated that almost half the films produced in Germany never received any type of theatrical release.<sup>356</sup> This serves to fuel arguments that popular appeal and commercial success are often neglected by national funding bodies in evaluating new projects.

The funding sessions in the Bulgarian National Film Centre have raised similar concerns. In 2010 script-writer Vladimir Ganev published an open letter in *Kino Journal* addressing the lack of transparency in the distribution of the film subsidy. Nine representatives of the film community formed the committee that evaluated the projects applying for development support that year. However, it was speculated that professional guilds and associations had been formed with the sole purpose of ensuring they would have participants in the committee when one of their members applied with a project. Understandably, guild agents lobbied for their respective creative circles. Ganev perceived a conflict of interests when such people were also responsible for distributing public funding. This practice arguably ensured that certain filmmakers complete consecutive films with full government support while others spend years waiting for their debuts.<sup>357</sup> In the same year, the Bulgarian film community reacted with mass protests to the information that 300,000 leva (or approximately 150,000 euro) from the state budget had secretly been awarded to Michelle Bonev's *Goodbye Mama* even though the script was never approved by the NFC committee.<sup>358</sup> On the one hand, the protest revealed unity among the filmmakers. Preferential treatment was condemned by most of the contemporary directors and producers who, instead, displayed an affinity for fair competition. On the other hand, the issue compromised the integrity of the most important film institution, the National Film Centre.

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<sup>356</sup> Puttnam, 1997, 301.

<sup>357</sup> Vladimir Ganev. "Open Letter." *Spisanie Kino [Kino Journal]* 3-4. (2010): 3; For instance, the doyen of Bulgarian cinema, Georgi Djulgerov, completed fourteen films in the period 1990-2007 ("Georgi Djulgerov." 28 Aug. 2005. 22 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0006590/>>).

<sup>358</sup> Virtually unknown in Bulgaria, Bonev made a name for herself through her close relationships with Italian television mogul and then Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. During the 2010 Venice Film Festival she received the fabricated Action for Women Award created for her under pressure from the Italian Minister of Culture Sandro Bondi ("The Michelle Bonev Scandal: Farewell, Bulgarian Cinema." *Novinite.com - Sofia News Agency*. 1 Dec. 2010. 22 Sept. 2015. <[http://www.novinite.com/view\\_news.php?id=122762](http://www.novinite.com/view_news.php?id=122762)>).

The fairness and authority of the film funding system in Bulgaria was further undermined by another scandal in 2012. Even after the box office success of partially state-funded popular titles like *The World Is Big...*, *Mission London*, *Stapki v pyasaka [Footsteps in the Sand]* (Ivaylo Hristov, 2010), *TILT* (Viktor Chouchkov, 2011) and *Love.net*, the annual state subsidy was distributed among art-house directors Ivan Tcherkelov, Georgi Djulgerov and Svetoslav Ovtcharov, whose films regularly failed to perform well in the domestic box office. This deepened the conflict not so much between commercial and alternative film-makers but between the older and the new generations. Popular young directors and producers pointed out that Ovtcharov's last production *Zad kadar [Voice Over]* (2010) gathered just 250 viewers in its opening weekend, while Djulgerov allegedly spent 80,000 leva of the government subsidy on training a goat for his *Kozelat [The Goat]* (2009).<sup>359</sup> The NFC committee was, thus, accused of privileging their film school mentor Djulgerov and close friends Tcherkelov and Ovtcharov while disregarding popular genres and the promotion and distribution success records of other filmmakers. Thus, bureaucratic decision-making and insider lobbying seem to establish 'positive censorship' (determining which directors could be trusted as 'national authors').<sup>360</sup>

It remains profoundly difficult to determine to what extent lobbying influences the votes of NFC committees. The frequent controversies surrounding state funding signify that the system needs urgent improvement. What film-makers and critics agree on is the poor quality of the questionnaires used by the NFC committee to evaluate film projects as if they are literary works of art and the need for clearer regulations that would prevent lobbying.<sup>361</sup> With the slow but steady proliferation of public and private investment sources and the facilitation of easier co-production partnership within the European Union, a calmer and fairer filmmaking environment proves a real possibility.

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<sup>359</sup> This goat anecdote was later used in Dimitar Mitovski's highly commercial TV-series *Pod prikritie [Undercover]* as a spiteful reference to Djulgerov. In the episode in question, a gangster (played by Marian Valev) infiltrates a bank after a fake credit application to sponsor his 'new business opportunity' - supplying goats to the film industry. Djulgerov later sued Valev for defamation but lost the case. To this date, it remains unclear how much of the film's funding was employed for hiring, training, feeding and sheltering the animal.

<sup>360</sup> Dale, 1997, 122.

<sup>361</sup> Anita Dimitrova. *Za nyakolko (loshi) filma v poveche [On One Too Many (Bad) Films]* SEGA Online, 4 June 2012. 22 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.segabg.com/article.php?id=603127>>.

Film distribution and exhibition are transforming as well. Producer and critic Aleksandar Donev observes that in 2007 the Bulgarian film market was focused in Sofia with the venues in the capital city generating between 70 and 100 per cent of a film's box office income. About ten other towns proved profitable and worthy of having a picture sent there for exhibition. Multiplexes were the only moneymaking cinema halls. Hence, each year between 130 and 140 new films found release in Bulgaria with an average of 2.3-2.4 million viewers annually. Donev's analysis signifies that the total income from the Bulgarian box office in 2007 was about twelve million leva (or six million euro) with two films having attracted more than 100,000 viewers, six pictures having an audience of 50,000 to 100,000, twenty movies with 20,000 to 50,000 viewers and nineteen more with an audience of 10,000 to 20,000.<sup>362</sup> This indicated a tendency – a few big-budget titles attracted the biggest portion of the domestic audience. The idea that more multiplexes would provide bigger chances for exhibition of Bulgarian cinema was, thus, not fulfilled. In fact, the growing chain of multiplexes facilitated more copies of the American blockbusters premiering at once.<sup>363</sup> This signifies the aggressive expansion of Hollywood business in the Bulgarian distribution and exhibition sectors. By controlling the major domestic distributor (Alexandra) and, consequently, most of the exhibition outlets as well as by investing in extensive marketing campaigns the studios created a market monopoly that challenged the development of local film.

With the change in audience attitudes and industrial practices, domestic productions had to evolve as well. Donev argued that Bulgarian films in 2007 could only fight for the viewer's attention if they complied with current tendencies in commercial distribution. The only chance for the distributors of Bulgarian films to influence multiplex owners and programmers was by appropriating Hollywood production and marketing strategies. In Donev's rather aggressive rhetoric, the distributors needed to receive "weapons" from producers and directors of Bulgarian films with which to attract and impress the people who decided whether their films would reach the audience. Perspicaciously, the critic advised a careful selection of a premiere date, an attractive and engaging title and advertising and PR materials, clearly outlining the film's genre

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<sup>362</sup> Aleksandar Donev. "Da Razprostranyavash Balgarski Filmi – Misiya Nevazmozhna" ["Distributing Bulgarian Films – Mission Impossible"]. *Spisanie Kino [Kino Journal]* 6. (2007): 42–44.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid.

and providing a chance to meet its domestic stars. A film's budget and advertisement had to be based on negotiations with an actual (and not hypothetical) distributor.<sup>364</sup> The appropriation of these Hollywood strategies was a key factor that contributed to the success of the first Bulgarian blockbusters. Looking at these recommendations retrospectively, they proved crucial for renewing domestic interest in popular Bulgarian productions.

### **3.3     *The World Is Big and Salvation Lurks around the Corner* – Between the Art-House and the Popular**

*Svetat e golyam i spasenie debne otvsyakade* [*The World Is Big and Salvation Lurks around the Corner*] (Stephan Komandarev, 2008) turned out to be the bridge between 1990s Bulgarian cinema that was predominantly concerned with artistic exploration and the rise of popular filmmaking. The thematic focus of the picture was on the renegotiation of family relations during periods of historical and identity crises while the bright visual landscapes and calm soundtrack suggested a film that was life-affirming and entertaining. In a way, *The World Is Big...* utilised generic expectations of European art-house cinema, which stereotypically include the road movie, the family drama and the journey of self-exploration but for the purposes of creating general appeal.

From its development stages onwards the picture was intended to reconcile the tension between art-house and popular filmmaking in Bulgaria. “The aim was to make a film for the audiences” admitted the director Stephan Komandarev.<sup>365</sup> At the same time, the film was promoted as a literary adaptation. Komandarev chose to adapt a bestseller by the German writer of Bulgarian origin Iliya Troyanov. The novel was originally published in Germany in 1996 and subsequently translated into eleven languages. This rendered the book version a transnational cultural product. Linking the film with literature secured both artistic value and a popular appeal. The creative team emphasised that “[i]n addition to [its] unconditional success with the European reading audience, the book also won the most prestigious German literature awards – the Adelbert von Chamisso

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<sup>364</sup> Ibid.

<sup>365</sup> Yoana Pavlova. “Mezhdu Karlov Vary I Motovun – Interviyu Sas Stefan Komandarev” [“Between Karlov Vary and Motovun – An Interview with Stephan Komandarev”]. *Spisanie Kino [Kino Journal]* 4. (2008): 6–10, 7.

Prize, the Carl Bertelsmann Prize and the Marburg Literature Award".<sup>366</sup> Emphasis on the film's literary origins was used as a guarantor, indicating a 'quality film'. Its transnational scope facilitated the attraction of the widest possible range of funding bodies and audiences. As discussed in the Introduction, adapting a book with an establishing fan-base for the big screen proves another strategy for maximising commercial success and reducing financial risks.

This active campaign positioned *The World Is Big...* beyond a simple art-popular distinction at a time when Bulgarian filmmaking was still divided and in which art-circles displayed a negative attitude towards commercial practices. In a 2010 interview for the Bulgarian specialised film edition *Kino Journal*, Rositsa Valkanova (producer of *Letter to America*, among other films) argued that the attempt to attract domestic audiences through comedies and entertainment cinema was "stupid" and would, moreover, damage native originality and creativity. She doubted that popular cinema could help preserve national identity or culture.<sup>367</sup> Similarly, in 2010 director Andrey Slabakov claimed there was no such thing as "what the audience wants". Distribution and consideration for the viewers were deemed irrelevant as he admitted that his most recent film (then in post-production) had not ensured a distribution deal yet.<sup>368</sup> Another supporter of the art-house movement, the renowned director Georgi Djurgerov, holder of the Silver Bear for Best Director from the 1978 Berlinale, admitted that he loved festival audiences because they attended "different and interesting cinema" while the others had to settle for "mediocre, mainstream films".<sup>369</sup> Critic Mariana Hristova also displayed disregard for popular appeal and the importance of commercial distribution and exhibition in her review of Ivan Tcherkelov's *Obarnata elha [Christmas Tree Upside Down]* of 2006. She stated: "I am not worried that [the film] is not aimed at the wide audience. It will not be distributed in [the] 'Arena' [multiplex chain] because it is not a time-waster, a film for 'consumption'... it will find its viewers even if it is in a haystack".<sup>370</sup>

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<sup>366</sup> "The World Is Big and Salvation Lurks Around the Corner." *Official Website*. n.d. 22 Sept. 2015. <<http://theworldisbig.com/>>.

<sup>367</sup> Petya Slavova. "Volnite (ne-)voli Na Produtsenta – Interviyu S Rositsa Valkanova" ["The Gusty Woes of the Producer – An Interview with Rositsa Valkanova"]. *Spisanie Kino [Kino Journal]* 2. (2010): 14–17.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid.

<sup>369</sup> Petya Slavova. "Rezhisurata E Bolest, a Kinoto – Bolestno Sastoyanie (Razgovor S Rezhisiora Georgy Djulgerov Za Filma *Leidi Zi*)" ["Directing Is an Illness and Cinema – An Affection (An Interview with Georgy Djulgerov on *Lady Z*)"]. *Spisanie Kino [Kino Journal]* 1. (2005): 19–21.

<sup>370</sup> Mariana Hristova. "Novi Balgarski Hroniki" ["New Bulgarian Chronicles"]. *Spisanie Kino [Kino Journal]* 6. (2006): 20–22.

It was changes in national film distribution and exhibition that possibly triggered this negativity among art-circles towards commercial practices. Artistic anxieties in Eastern Europe over loss of quality of content when opening to Western markets were legitimate. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Bulgarian art-house films received as much support from the Communist regime as commercial pictures. With the fall of the regime, the two movements suddenly faced each other in their competition for funding and audiences. Critics and film-makers who began their careers before democracy seemed more inclined to display an elitist attitude towards Bulgarian film as a form of protection against the commercialising influence of open-market forces. During Communism those same people comprised the cultural elite of the nation and enjoyed special privileges. They were well-respected and influential in cultural circles.<sup>371</sup> In contrast, director Stephan Komandarev and producer Stefan Kitanov commenced their film careers in democracy. They did not mourn the loss of privileges but strove to adapt as well as possible to the new filmmaking reality.

In this stark opposition to mainstream filmmaking, Bulgaria once again illustrated the critical and artistic anxieties on the Old Continent. Jäckel notes that in France emphasis on marketability and profitability has long been disapproved by many film professionals. A fear of commercialisation foregrounded the acknowledgement that film was a product that required marketing. European art was perceived as opposed to the American model of capital and power. When the issue of ‘cultural exception’ dominated the GATT talks in 1993, Jacques Toubon, the French Minister of Culture, used the example of the 450-print release of *Jurassic Park* (Steven Spielberg, 1993) to denounce American distribution and promotion practices and criticise the role of United International Pictures in Europe.<sup>372</sup> So, refuting popular entertainment and film marketing in Bulgaria created an ideological link between the Bulgarian film intelligentsia and European political protectionism. Fears of Hollywood’s influence justified the opposition to more business-oriented film practices and disregard for commercial success was confused with an assertion of the high cultural value of film.

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<sup>371</sup> Iordanova, 2008, 12–14.

<sup>372</sup> Jäckel, 2003, 94.

In contrast, *The World Is...* explicitly appealed to popular audiences. This made it very distinct from earlier denials of the value of mainstream Bulgarian cinema. Described as a tragi-comedy of simple human questions (“Who am I? Where do my roots lie? What do I want to achieve in my life?”), *The World Is Big...* was marketed as a personal family story and an existential identity quest which was meant to communicate easily with a Bulgarian audience that had experienced a particularly challenging transition to democracy. The film’s story is simple. In the 1980s, the serene small-town childhood of Alex (Blagovest Mutafchiev/Carlo Ljubek) is clouded when the militia requires his father (Hristo Mutafchiev) to spy on his grandfather, Bai Dan (Predrag “Miki” Manojlovic), the local backgammon champion and famous anarchist. To preserve their integrity, the family decides to emigrate to the West. Twenty-five years later, Alex is in a German hospital with amnesia after a car accident in which both his parents died. The old Bai Dan leaves for Germany only to discover that Alex no longer remembers him. Bai Dan starts teaching his grandson backgammon and the ancient game brings Alex back to life. When his grandfather drags him out of the hospital and on the road, they embark on a journey to Bulgaria (on a tandem bicycle) and back to Alex’s forgotten past.<sup>373</sup> The storyline serves to conveniently make the link between Eastern and Western Europe. The characters are not only stretched between different historical decades, between past memories and the present, childhood and mature life, they also embody the cultural tensions between the East and the West. Alex is reserved, well-mannered and wealthy, but has lost his purpose in life. Bai Dan is primal but humble – a wise joker and a patient story-teller. The two characters represent the respective stereotypes on the two sides of the East-West cultural divide. The journey across Europe helps them remember what life together was like. It presents a metaphor for a possible unification of European culture and an inclusive notion of belonging.

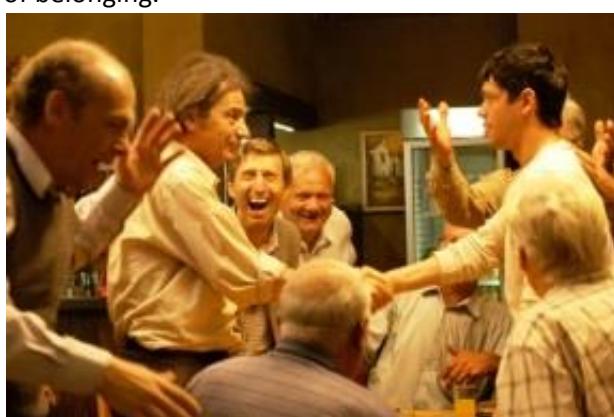


Figure 8. Miki Manoilovic and Carlo Ljubek in *Svetat e golyam i spasenie debne otvsyakade* [*The World Is Big and Salvation Lurks Around the Corner*] (Stephan Komandarev, 2008).

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<sup>373</sup> “The World Is Big and Salvation Lurks Around the Corner.” *Official Website*.

The film also echoed developments in European mainstream filmmaking in recent decades, which capitalises on cross-border business and cultural exchanges. Directors like Tom Tykwer, Luc Besson and Pedro Almodovar helped re-position the ‘arthouse’-‘mainstream’ dichotomy in Western Europe by producing new kinds of films that straddled both art and commerce and appealed to a wider audience while maintaining their cultural specificities. For instance, Besson’s *Leon: The Professional* (1994) and *Le Cinquième Élément [The Fifth Element]* (1997) proved a manifestation of European innovative arts and *cinéma du look*, negotiating art-house aesthetics with new modes of expression. Besson placed an artistic emphasis on colour, light, sound and space – elements that tend to be hidden in conventional filmmaking - thus revealing the close relationship between artistic expression and the technological apparatus that enables its production.<sup>374</sup> However, he also relied on the appeal of aestheticized violence, aggressive ‘babes’, irony and stylised fashion. A part of the cultural effects of the exchange and collaboration of ideas between America and Europe, Besson’s work proved that visual media had entered a new cosmopolitan and transnational stage, adding to the complexity of transnational film and challenging the clear-cut distinction, ‘European art-house’/‘Hollywood mainstream’.

Similarly, since the late 2000s, Bulgarian professionals put greater emphasis on market evaluation and project development. Depending on the particular resources available to them, the domestic filmmakers appropriated certain Hollywood practices in an attempt to improve the quality of their scripts. *The World Is Big...*, which took eight years in total to produce, was a common creative effort much like most American studio productions with a team of script-writers working closely together to develop the idea of the project.<sup>375</sup> Director Stephan Komandarev, novelist Iliya Troyanov, writer/director Dusan Milic and playwright Yurii Dachev produced many script-drafts with each of the versions being discussed and analysed by ‘script-doctors’ – Sabine Pochhamer (from Germany) and Isabelle Blanchard (from France). The script underwent seventeen different versions during pre-production.<sup>376</sup> The diverse backgrounds of the script-writing team ensured

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<sup>374</sup> Sue Harris. “The Cinéma Du Look.” *European Cinema*. Ed. Elizabeth Ezra. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, 219–232.

<sup>375</sup> Pavlova, 2008, 6.

<sup>376</sup> “The World Is Big and Salvation Lurks Around the Corner.” *Official Website*.

different creative perspectives were applied to the project. International collaboration guaranteed that this Bulgarian film was in tune with the latest European and global filmmaking tendencies. The attention devoted to script-development alone served to reveal the creators' commercial ambitions.

Ideas of what is involved in film development vary from one territory and producer to another. Acknowledging this fluctuation, in 1997 the European Commission placed a particular emphasis on the development of film projects as crucial to their success. Writing the screenplay, seeking partners, devising the production financing plan and planning the marketing and distribution were specified as the vital preliminary stages before production.<sup>377</sup> This signifies a recognition of the economic dimensions of European film as well as an implicit recommendation to appropriate successful Hollywood methods. An analogous shift is evident in Bulgarian filmmaking. Pre-production and development practices are gaining prominence with national institutions. The popular features discussed in this chapter were developed with support from the Bulgarian National Film Centre. In 2008 the agency distributed 148,950 leva out of its 10 million leva annual state subsidy for project and script-development. Even though the total budget in 2009 was similar in amount, 544,560 leva were spent on film development.<sup>378</sup> With institutions like the National Film Centre putting more money into development funding, a new generation of producers recognises the increasing importance of pre-production and script-development for the commercial success of a popular feature.

*The World Is Big...* tackled difficult questions about the Communist legacy and emigration. This context, however, was downplayed during the promotion in favour of a more philosophical reflection on life through the game of "luck and skill" - backgammon. It was conceived as the main subject and the engine of the action. "Popular all over the world, [the game] was elevated to a philosophy in the Balkans – it leads the characters' destinies through time and distances".<sup>379</sup> This description serves to underline the local and, at the same time, global dimensions of the story. The marketing strategy, capitalising additionally on the philosophical dimensions of the board

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<sup>377</sup> Jäckel, 2003, 29.

<sup>378</sup> "Informatsiya za darzhavnoto podpomagane na filmovi proekti po byudzheta na IA 'NFC'" ["Information on State Support for Film Projects from the Budget of Executive Agency 'National Film Centre']. *National Film Centre*. n.d. 22 Sept. 2015. <[http://www.nfc.bg/bg/finansirane/balgarski\\_filmi.html](http://www.nfc.bg/bg/finansirane/balgarski_filmi.html)>.

<sup>379</sup> "The World Is Big and Salvation Lurks Around the Corner." *Official Website*.

game, included the creation of an English-language music video, entitled “Backgammon Dice”. Written by Stefan Valdobrev (the film’s official soundtrack author) and performed by The Festival Band (part of the Sofia International Film Festival), the song features a relaxed reggae beat and served as a promotional stunt for the music buffs. The two film trailers featured the spectacular car accident (for film stunt enthusiasts), the intense meeting between Bai Dan and the amnesia-ridden Alex (for drama-lovers), a love scene (for romantics), a game of backgammon (for risk-takers) and the journey on the tandem bicycle (for adventurers). The promotional campaign appealed to a variety of audiences, culturally and geographically. This was the result of the co-produced nature of *The World Is Big...* and pan-European funding.

Co-production enhanced the financial scope of the picture and guaranteed access to foreign locations during shooting. *The World Is Big...* was shot on four different locations with technical and creative teams from Bulgaria, Germany, Slovenia, Hungary and Italy. Even if the production budget of 2 million euro (three quarters from which came from abroad) might not have been comparable to that of a Hollywood or a Western European film made at the time, by Bulgarian filmmaking standards, it was impressive.<sup>380</sup>

Both *The World Is Big...* and *Mission London* benefited from the support of Eurimages and MEDIA. Pan-European funding formed an essential characteristic of domestic popular features. Bulgaria joined Eurimages in 1993 and MEDIA in 2002. The former fund is part of the Council of Europe and supports films made by three or more member states. The latter programme stimulates filmmaking through loans and subsidies for script-writing, production, distribution and promotion.<sup>381</sup> The programmes have provided vital support to Bulgarian production in the environment of limited national financing and a transition to an open market economy.

Changes in financing have influenced the aesthetic and narrative development of Bulgarian cinema. One of the requirements for a film to receive pan-European funding includes a narrative

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<sup>380</sup> “The World Is Big and the Salvation of Bulgarian Cinema Might Lurk Around the Corner.” *The Sofia Echo*. 2 Apr. 2010. 22 Sept. 2015. <[http://sofiaecho.com/2010/02/04/852873\\_the-world-is-big-and-the-salvation-of-bulgarian-cinema-might-lurk-around-the-corner](http://sofiaecho.com/2010/02/04/852873_the-world-is-big-and-the-salvation-of-bulgarian-cinema-might-lurk-around-the-corner)>.

<sup>381</sup> Galt, 2006, 102–103.

focus on pan-European interaction and integration. Earlier pictures with clearly local motivations (like *The Black Swallow* which tells the story of a young gypsy girl) struggled to satisfy the standards, eventually incorporating curious subplots that seemed irrelevant to the main storyline.<sup>382</sup> The desire to represent ‘European-ness’ on screen, promoted by pan-European funding bodies, has been criticised by scholars as contributing to a false cinematic identity, coined in an attempt for differentiation from Hollywood. The Euro-pudding, already discussed in the Introduction, is the trivial product of European coproduction efforts.<sup>383</sup> However, pictures like *The World Is Big...*, *Mission London* and *Love.net* boasted a focus on transnational culture from their very inception as a strategy to attract state support, European funding and a variety of viewers. Instead of attempting to portray Bulgarian identity as fixed and stable, the above-mentioned films capitalise on the fluidity and complexity of transnational subjects. Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden notice that what marks transnational cinema is the deconstruction and reconstruction of identities “along the lines of a powering dynamic based on mobility”.<sup>384</sup> *The World Is Big...* re-negotiates Bulgarian and European identity through the family drama of Alex and Bay Dan, reconnecting in their journey home. The film, thus, benefits not only financially from mixing local and global sensitivities, it also enhances cultural representations onscreen and challenges marketing categorisations.

As Ramon Lobato argues, the distributive context of a picture proves a key variable elevating “some cinematic encounters (opening nights, festival screenings) to the status of cultural events and relegate[ing] others (two-for-one weekly rentals, late-night movies) to the bottom of the value chain”.<sup>385</sup> With this idea in mind, *The World Is Big...* benefited from two premieres and dual distribution. This fact situated the film both within the art-house and the mainstream viewing contexts and allowed it to multiply its value through the different exhibition strategies. The first screening was part of the Sofia International Film Festival Bulgarian Programme Gala and took place on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2008 in the biggest hall of the National Palace of Culture in Sofia. The place of exhibition attached cultural prestige to the production. National media reported that more than three thousand viewers applauded the film and its creators for half an hour after the end credits.

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<sup>382</sup> Iordanova, 1998, 259.

<sup>383</sup> Galt, 2006, 103–104.

<sup>384</sup> Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden, eds. *Transnational Cinema, The Film Reader (In Focus: Routledge Film Readers)*. 1st ed. LONDON: Taylor & Francis, 13 Jan. 2006, 7–8.

<sup>385</sup> Ramon Lobato. *Shadow Economies of Cinema: Mapping Informal Film Distribution*. United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, 18.

The film's popularity set a precedent in contemporary Bulgarian cinema.<sup>386</sup> *The World Is Big...* boasted a festival life of over four years, winning awards from international festivals in Zurich, Warsaw, Bergen, Tallinn and many others. It was further shortlisted in the nine titles selected for the 2010 Best Foreign Language Film Oscar-nominations.<sup>387</sup> The film's festival success was cleverly incorporated into its mainstream marketing strategy. *The World Is Big...* was referred to as "the most distributed and awarded [Bulgarian] film", "the first Bulgarian film to reach one of the last stages of nominations at the Oscars" and "one of the most successful contemporary Bulgarian films that participated in almost one hundred film festivals around the world and received over thirty international festival awards".<sup>388</sup> The statements brought artistic merit but the festival distribution of the production was also an essential commercial tool for entering foreign markets.

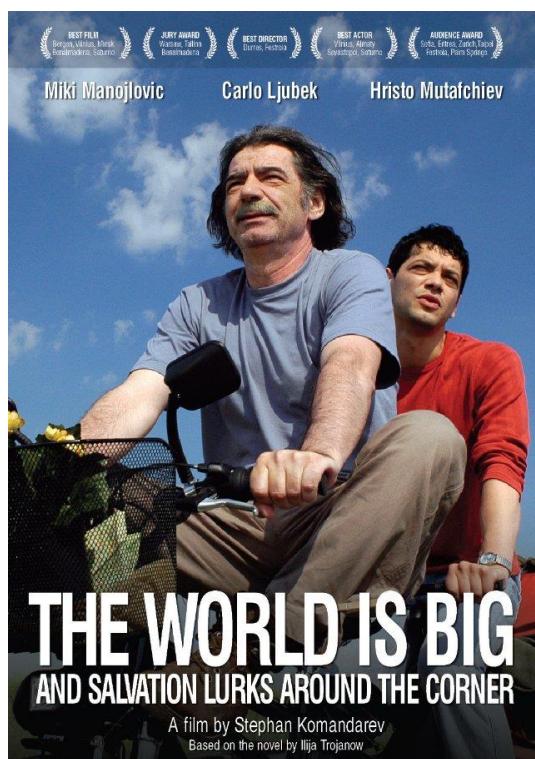


Figure 9. Promotional poster for *Svetat e golyam i spasenie debne otvsyakade* [*The World Is Big and Salvation Lurks Around the Corner*] (Stephan Komandarev, 2008).

<sup>386</sup> "Triumfalna premiera na *Svetat e golyam i spasenie debne otvsyakade*" ["A Triumphant Premiere of *The World Is Big and Salvation Lurks Around the Corner*"] Vesti.bg, 15 Mar. 2008. 22 Sept. 2015.

<<http://www.vesti.bg/index.phtml?tid=40&oid=1174072>>.

<sup>387</sup> The film also won awards from events held in Lithuania, Taiwan, Ukraine, Albania, Portugal, Spain, Belarus, Italy, Russia, Eritrea, the USA, Iran and France ("Desetiletie na balgarskoto kino" ["Bulgarian Film Decade"]) Dom na kinoto. n.d. 22 Sept. 2015.

<<http://www.domnakinoto.com/desetiletie/index.php?page=movies&id=322>>.).

<sup>388</sup> Dyakova, 2010, 15.

Stringer notes that festivals provide a platform for foreign big-budget films to ‘breakthrough’ internationally.<sup>389</sup> Foreign popular features carry a ‘cultural discount’ in the sense that for non-domestic audiences they prove difficult to identify with in terms of lifestyle, geography and cultural values depicted. However, when a mainstream production is repackaged as art-house, it finds potential alternative distribution and audiences abroad. As already discussed in the Introduction, this cultural transposition characterises much of non-English language cinema. As a result of it, *The World Is Big...* was purchased for cinematic, video and television distribution by twenty-three countries on four continents.<sup>390</sup> Featuring elements that would communicate as simply as possible with a wide range of audiences, *The World Is Big...* echoed Hollywood blockbuster international appeal.<sup>391</sup> The film attempted to reconcile the domestic tensions between art-house and popular but also utilised its links with both mainstream and festival cinema in order to maximise its distribution. The mainstream distribution of *The World Is Big...* span over one hundred weeks.<sup>392</sup> After its short initial run with the mainstream distributor Alexandra, the film benefited from self-distribution. A renter of the independent House of Cinema, producer Stefan Kitanov had a screen for the film available which guaranteed a long life for the production, allowing for extra promotion and the organising of related special events. The extended and successful theatrical run of *The World Is Big...* served to show that a title’s viewing potential was often bigger than what official distributors expected and achieved.<sup>393</sup> It illustrates the potential of contemporary Bulgarian cinema to transcend polar divides and strict definition.

The funding conflicts in Bulgarian cinema reveal not only artistic prejudice over respect for popular filmmaking practices but also lack of constructive dialogue between the separate film cliques. It appears that different filmmaking generations in Bulgaria have differing ideas about what constitutes ‘good cinema’. Younger authors recognise the importance of genre, marketing and distribution while the older generation, brought up under the protection of the Communist

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<sup>389</sup> Stringer, 2003, 205.

<sup>390</sup> The film was, reportedly, distributed in cinemas in Germany, Slovenia, Hungary, Serbia, Poland, Austria, Switzerland, Romania, Macedonia, Kosovo, Lithuania, France, Spain, Portugal, Israel, Taiwan, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay and Bolivia and on television and video in Australia and South Korea (“Desetiletie na balgarskoto kino” [“Bulgarian Film Decade”]).

<sup>391</sup> Maxwell et al., 2005, 268–269.

<sup>392</sup> “Svetat e golyam i spasenie debne otvsyakade/The World Is Big and Salvation Lurks around the Corner.” cinefish.bg, n.d. 24 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.cinefish.bg/Svetat-e-golyam-i-spasenie-debne-otvsyakade-The-World-is-Big-and-Salvation-Lurks-around-the-Corner-id11033.html>>.

<sup>393</sup> Julia Knight and Peter Thomas. *Reaching Audiences Distribution and Promotion of Alternative Moving Image*. United Kingdom: University of Chicago Press, 2011, 21.

vertically integrated system, remains suspicious of open-market competition and box-office success. A promising enterprise in reconciling the differences between the art and the popular movements is the association ‘New Bulgarian Cinema in 21<sup>st</sup> Century’. It includes young professionals from both mainstream and the art-house circles such as Dimitar Mitovski, Kamen Kalev, the Chouchkov Brothers, Konstantin Bojanov, Dragomir Sholev and Andrey Paounov, whose proclaimed aim is to preserve the revival of Bulgarian film and ensure its sustainable development by conquering thousands of domestic viewers as well as the international festival arena.<sup>394</sup> Such initiatives shape what is perceived as contemporary Bulgarian cinema, especially when they produce marketable and watchable pictures.

### **3.4 The Setting New Standards in Production, Distribution and Box Office Success with *Mission London***

Dimitar Mitovski’s *Misiya London* [*Mission London*] permanently altered domestic expectations for commercial success. Mitovski’s experience across audiovisual forms and commercial orientation signified his lack of prejudice towards mainstream genres which, in turn, secured aggressive marketing and the box office success of the production. The film benefited from diversified funding, saturation marketing and large-scale distribution in competition with Hollywood blockbusters. Its successful adaptation to the Bulgarian distribution and exhibition market was due to the combination of a local topic with transnational industrial practices.

Defined by the media as “an eccentric comedy”, the movie tells the story of the authoritarian wife of the Bulgarian president – Devorina Selyanska (Ernestina Shinova) who decides to host an important reception in London.<sup>395</sup> The protagonist’s name is a pun including the Bulgarian words for ‘yard’ and ‘village’ and once again evokes the idea of Bay Ganyo, himself a character of provincial background, with no morals but great ambitions. The action revolves around the

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<sup>394</sup> “Obrashtenie na sdruzenie ‘Novo balgarsko kino 21-vi vek’” [“An Address by the Association ‘New Bulgarian Cinema 21<sup>st</sup> Century’”]. frognews.bg, 1 June 2012. 22 Sept. 2015.

<[http://frognews.bg/news\\_45387/Obrashtenie\\_ot\\_sdrujenie\\_Novo\\_balgarsko\\_kino\\_21-vi\\_vek/](http://frognews.bg/news_45387/Obrashtenie_ot_sdrujenie_Novo_balgarsko_kino_21-vi_vek/)>.

<sup>395</sup> Preslava Preslavova. *Misiya London finishira uspeshno v Sofia* [*Mission London with a Successful Finish in Sofia*]. frognews.bg, 4 Sept. 2009. 22 Sept. 2015.

<[http://frognews.bg/news\\_14956/Misiia\\_London\\_finishira\\_uspeshno\\_v\\_Sofiia/](http://frognews.bg/news_14956/Misiia_London_finishira_uspeshno_v_Sofiia/)>.

mission of the newly appointed Bulgarian ambassador, Varadin Dimitrov (Julian Vergov), to arrange the presence of Her Majesty Elizabeth II at the Bulgarian reception. In London Varadin is surrounded by quite a few colourful characters, using the embassy for their own private benefits. While trying to restore order, he falls in love with the beautiful student/stripper/cleaner Katya (Ana Papadopulu) and encounters a PR agency with supposed contacts in elite social circles, which turns out to provide impersonators of famous people. Realising his mistake too late, Varadin is forced to go along with the fake reception and watch helplessly as the absurdities of Bulgarian immigrant life and British social attitudes envelop him. As already mentioned, the film's narrative displays links with *Love Actually*, which features a love story between the British Prime Minister (Hugh Grant) and the new junior member of the household staff at 10 Downing Street (Martine McCutcheon). *Love Actually* was well-known in Bulgaria at the time, having garnering \$79,658 in the 2004 domestic box office.<sup>396</sup> While it was never credited by Mitovski as an inspiration for *Mission London*, the British-American picture likely influenced standards for marketing and distribution of European cinema in Bulgaria. Importantly, *Mission London* offered a text which, while impacted by foreign entertainment, catered to specifically local audiences and served different purposes.



Figure 10. Promotional poster for *Misiya London* [*Mission London*] (Dimitar Mitovski, 2010).

<sup>396</sup> "Love Actually (2003) - International Box Office Results." n.d. 22 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=intl&country=BG&id=loveactually.htm>>.

*Mission London* contributes to a tradition of constant renegotiation of Bulgaria's place in Europe. On the one hand, the film comments on national anxieties about appearing culturally inadequate when abroad. On the other, it mocks universal human faults like pettiness, naivety, greed and individualism. One of the film's subplots portrays the chef at the Bulgarian embassy (Lyubomir Neykov) scheming with his friend (Georgi Staykov) to steal and sell the ducks from Richmond Park to a restaurateur, later murdered by the Russian mafia. Once they realise the birds have been marked with tracking devices and the police is about to arrest them, the two friends feed the trackers to some swans. This leads British media to come up with a sensationalist title: 'Cannibal swans in Richmond Park!', while the Bulgarian chef and his friend fight over the profit from their crime. As they comically wrestle, both take turns to proclaim their hatred for Bulgarians. This masochist attitude reflects the domestic inferiority complex and shame at one's own cultural heritage. At the same time, the film plays on national stereotypes, depicting the British as naïve, the Bulgarians as brutish and the Russians as mafiosos. By exposing the 'faults' of each nation, *Mission London* counters any feelings of guilt over national belonging. If everyone is flawed, then Bulgaria can easily become part of the dysfunctional European family.

The dialogue in English and Bulgarian proves another symbolic device for overcoming cultural differences across Europe. It mimics Hollywood in an attempt to create an environment of cosmopolitanism. A voice-over in English, a typical Hollywood convention, links the different parts of *Mission London*'s plot. The ambassador Varadin negotiates with the impersonator agency and watches a self-help DVD about tranquillity and mental peace in English. He, however, courts Katya and carries out his professional duties in the embassy in Bulgarian. Similar to Hollywood blockbusters, *Mission London* capitalised on a mixture of popular genres with this hybridity ensuring "the permutations of emotional, visceral or intellectual impact for any individual viewer".<sup>397</sup> The film displayed elements of political satire, parody, slap-stick, romance and crime. These thematic and generic complexities maximised audience appeal and served to further guarantee the domestic blockbuster status of the picture. The film features a mixture of Bulgarian and English as if to justify its place between Hollywood and the Balkans.

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<sup>397</sup> Nigel Morris. *The Cinema of Steven Spielberg: Empire of Light (Directors' Cuts)*. New York: Wallflower Press, 1 Sept. 2006, 57.

Laëtitia Kulyk wonders whether the use of English in non-Anglophone European productions contributes to greater diversity or uniformity. There has been a clear increase in the use of English language in post-2003 films, due to its status as *lingua franca*, usefulness in co-productions and comparative advantage when seeking market penetration abroad.<sup>398</sup> It is also implicitly linked to the blockbuster category, making an emphasis on high production values and international orientation.<sup>399</sup> Kulyk observes that small nations struggle to find the balance between conforming to legal definitions of national cinema and the homogenisation of European film through the use of English and mainstream models.<sup>400</sup> Nevertheless, *Mission London* overcomes this problem by using foreign culture and language not only as an exotic attraction but to reflect on Bulgarian identity and belonging. The appropriation of Hollywood entertainment in Bulgaria has been productive on many levels.

The change towards a business-based approach in Bulgarian filmmaking began with re-defining the production process and the roles of the creative personnel across national and international contexts. As Jäckel observes, before the fall of the Berlin Wall, film units in Central and Eastern Europe were semi-autonomous basic film production entities headed by renowned national directors. The state determined the budgets, cast and crews and provided stable salaries leaving producers with very little responsibility. After the privatisation of the film industries in the former Eastern bloc, the competitive funding environment created a great demand for producers with extensive business skills and knowledge.<sup>401</sup> Since lack of a professional licencing practice in Bulgaria allowed anyone with no previous qualifications to apply for government funding as a producer, poor quality productions characterised the 1990s and early 2000s. According to data from the National Film Centre there are more than four hundred registered producers. Although this number seems unreasonably high, the actual professionals with productive careers remain a few dozen while the ones with experience in foreign co-productions by 2009 were about ten.<sup>402</sup>

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<sup>398</sup> Laëtitia Kulyk. "The Use of English in European Feature Films: Unity in Diversity?" *Cultural Borrowings: Appropriation, Reworking, Transformation*. N.p.: Scope: An Online Journal of Film and Television Studies, 2009. 173–181.

<sup>399</sup> Id., 179.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid.

<sup>401</sup> Jäckel, 2003, 36.

<sup>402</sup> Lyubomir Halachev. "Balgarskiya Produtsent – Ot Frenskiya Model Do Balgarskata Realnost" ["The Bulgarian Producer – from the French Model to the Bulgarian Reality"]. *Spisanie Kino [Kino Journal]* 1. (2009): 17–19.

Lack of experienced producers and appropriate legislation was, therefore, what delayed the revival of the Bulgarian film industry post-communism.

Inadequate institutional practices led to Bulgarian producers struggling to maintain their authority in many instances. An idea left over from Communism had previously conflated 'producer' with 'director of production'. Formerly, there had been relatively little freedom for hired producers external to BNT. The channel was inclined to commission a production with an independent producer but preserving full control over the content. Editorial intervention often stripped the producer of their freedom to choose the technical team and equipment for the production (in an effort to keep funding within the institution) while keeping them responsible for the quality.<sup>403</sup> This practice was detrimental to Bulgarian filmmaking. It slowed the professional development of producers, compromised the integrity of the national television channel and made it difficult to determine who was accountable for the poor performance of domestic features.

In contrast, the production of successful popular cinema necessitated stricter creative control and supervision. As Hollywood producer and former studio head Robert Evans argued, a producer's vision presents a valuable corrective for any director, determining the realistic boundaries of the project and asserting artistic and business control when needed.<sup>404</sup> Similarly, even though the roles and strategies adopted by Western European producers vary greatly depending on the project, production company and national context, they work with the director closely, making creative and production decisions and facilitating the link with the distributor.<sup>405</sup> Hence, gaining creative independence was a crucial step for the maturing not only of Bulgarian professionals but of the whole film industry. It made them part of global filmmaking practices. With the adoption of the Film Industry Act and under the influence of Western professionals, Bulgarian producers received formal recognition as the driving engines behind a production.

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<sup>403</sup> Mihail Metev. "Evropeiskoto I Balgarskoto Kino – Modeli I Formuli" ["European and Bulgarian Cinema – Models and Formulas"]. *Spisanie Kino [Kino Journal]* 6. (2007): 39–41.

<sup>404</sup> Dale, 1997, 40.

<sup>405</sup> Jäckel, 2003, 35.

Director/producer of *Mission London* Dimitar Mitovski, a graduate of Animation at the National Academy of Theatre and Film Arts, had a taste of the festival circuit (having co-authored shorts screened during The International Critics' Week at Cannes).<sup>406</sup> His experience of international festivals contributed to forming partnerships with foreign professionals. For his debut feature, *Mission London*, Mitovski managed to attract co-producers from the UK, Hungary, Macedonia and Sweden.<sup>407</sup> Foreign involvement in the project helped secure a budget of 1.4 million euro, evaluated by a critic as "decent" and appearing bigger on screen.<sup>408</sup> Co-production enhanced the financial scope of the picture and guaranteed access to foreign locations during shooting.

International partnerships were vital for the development of a Bulgarian big-budget event film. Limited state financing in the immediate post-communist years established co-production as the only viable alternative for maintaining artistic output in Bulgaria. For instance, in 2003 Bulgaria's payment to Eurimages was 137,000 euro but the membership secured co-funding amounting to four times the national contribution. When in 2004 Bulgaria ratified the Treaty of the European Convention on Cinematographic Co-production, easier access to funds from countries with different legislation was also ensured.<sup>409</sup> Bulgaria's accession to the European Union in 2007 facilitated further seamless economic and artistic exchange with the European community. Bulgarian filmmakers could benefit from access to foreign government's incentives, subsidies and markets, shoot in desired foreign locations and learn from partner practices.<sup>410</sup> As a result, by 2011 three of the top seven most successful Bulgarian pictures were co-productions with European partners.<sup>411</sup>

Business acumen and experience across the competitive audio-visual industry further characterised the successful new producers. Mitovski was a co-founder of SIA Advertising (in 1993) and Camera, specialising in the production of feature films, documentaries, television

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<sup>406</sup> Genoveva Dimitrova. "Balgarskoto Igralno Kino: Kapsulirane-Otvaryane-Zapushvane I Dve Strategii Za Gledaemost" ["Bulgarian Feature Films: Encapsulation-Opening Up-Obstruction and Two Strategies for Viewing"]. *Spisanie Kino [Kino Journal]* 5-6. (2010): 17–18.

<sup>407</sup> "Sedmitsa na balgarskoto kino v Moskva: *Misiya London*" ["A Week of Bulgarian Cinema in Moscow: *Mission London*"]. 2012. 22 Sept. 2015. <<http://bci-moscow.ru/bg/events/2012/11/20/685.html>>.

<sup>408</sup> Dimitrova, 2010, 18.

<sup>409</sup> Gergana Dakovska. "Eurimages: Nie Sme Tarseni Partniori" ["Eurimages: We Are Sought After Partners"]. *Spisanie Kino [Kino Journal]* 5. (2005): 13–15.

<sup>410</sup> Jäckel, 2003, 60.

<sup>411</sup> Yanakiev, 2011, 52–3.

programmes, commercials and music videos. SIA's portfolio includes over two thousand television advertisements and the Bulgarian versions of highly popular international reality formats.<sup>412</sup> Mitovski benefited from experience in managing advertising agencies and working in television, knew what would sell and where to find the resources, professionals and equipment to complete his projects. *Mission London* attracted as official partners Zagorka JSC (a famous beer producer), bTV, national air travel company Bulgaria Air, the American fast-food chain KFC as well as a number of national radio stations and lifestyle magazines.<sup>413</sup> This unashamed linking of the film form with a producer of alcoholic beverages (as well as a fast food international conglomerate) was another step not only towards securing funding but also towards positioning Bulgarian pictures within the international rhetoric of entertainment and consumption.

Involving private businesses with the Bulgarian popular pictures proves the first step towards diversification of financing. It also ensures extensive media coverage during the marketing stage and provides extra visibility for the films. Hollywood has perfected product placement by employing placement specialists to ensure that all logos, background advertisements and products on screen are a negotiated deal.<sup>414</sup> By maximizing the 'points of contact with a film', the link to famous businesses creates extra layers of meaning and appeals to a wider public.<sup>415</sup> Bulgarian producers are trying to replicate this strategy to ensure bigger financial scope and additional media exposure for their projects. Because of the emphasis that Mitovski put on creating a 'glossy' and attractive look for *Mission London*, watching new Bulgarian films quickly became popular again, especially among Hollywood-friendly teenagers.<sup>416</sup> Hence, the development of a new form of domestic popular film redefined the relationship with local viewers.

The new exhibition context and market saturation with Hollywood products inevitably shaped the young domestic audience. Attending screenings at the multiplexes turned into a demonstration of

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<sup>412</sup> Vladimir Ignatovski. "Pari Za Kino Ima" ["There Is Money for Cinema"]. *Spisanie Kino [Kino Journal]* 4. (2003): 50–52.

<sup>413</sup> "Sedmitsa na balgarskoto kino v Moskva: *Misiya London*", 2012.

<sup>414</sup> Maxwell et al., 2005, 273.

<sup>415</sup> Id., 264.

<sup>416</sup> Irina Ivanova. "Za Novoto Balgarsko Kino I Novite Virusi" ["About New Bulgarian Cinema and the New Viruses"] *Spisanie Kino* 5-6. (2012): 8–10.

social and economic status. As already discussed, spectators between the age of twenty-five and thirty were fond of American culture and entertainment.<sup>417</sup> The proliferation of shopping malls was, thus, perceived as providing a direct link with Western culture. Young people embraced the materialistic attitude often associated with excessive shopping in an attempt to imitate the American lifestyle and famous stars.<sup>418</sup> The multiplex catered to this consumerist mentality by establishing ‘economies of scale’ in the management of cinema. As part of the shopping mall, it offered free parking facilities, large screens, Dolby sound, comfortable seating, air conditioning, security, advance booking facilities, spacious foyers, sales of related products and catering infrastructures.<sup>419</sup> The cinema experience in Bulgaria was increasingly associated with comfort and luxury. Consequently, *Mission London* had to replicate that in its distribution and exhibition strategies in order to obtain maximum audience exposure.

Control over a country’s film distribution secures control over finance and film diversity. As Maxwell et al. observe, Hollywood builds its successful audio-visual trade not on cheap reproduction, but through its vast infrastructure of global distribution.<sup>420</sup> With most films generally losing money during their theatrical run, successful distributors are studio conglomerates with a sufficiently broad spread of films to ensure that profits from a handful of pictures will outweigh any losses incurred by other films. The proliferation of American product on Bulgarian screens has, therefore, put extra pressure on local films to compete for the attention of the viewers. Recent distribution of contemporary Bulgarian popular titles revealed a coming to terms with and an adaptation to this new environment. The success of Bulgarian mainstream cinema depended on a carefully scheduled release date, ensuring a large number of prints open in cinemas simultaneously and securing the involvement of national film distributors and television broadcasters.

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<sup>417</sup> Donev, 2007, 42–43

<sup>418</sup> “Among the most visible American brands in Bulgaria are: KFC, Dunkin Donuts, Subway, Domino’s Pizza, Berlitz, ERA, Century 21, Remax, GNC, and Wilson Learning. The recent entry of Curves, Subway, Domino’s Pizza and Starbucks, demonstrate that the American franchise concept is becoming popular as the local market matures.” (“Doing Business in Bulgaria – 2011 Country Commercial Guide for US Companies.” 2011. 22 Sept. 2015. <[http://export.gov/bulgaria/static/2011-ccg-bulgaria-1\\_latest\\_eg\\_bg\\_038450.pdf](http://export.gov/bulgaria/static/2011-ccg-bulgaria-1_latest_eg_bg_038450.pdf)>).

<sup>419</sup> Jäckel, 2003, 118–9.

<sup>420</sup> Maxwell et al., 2005, 294–7.

The choice of release date for the Bulgarian features had little to do with actual audience dynamics and more with avoiding Hollywood competitors. Studio distributors usually release expected hits on holiday weekends even though there is no definitive evidence that higher demand is seasonal.<sup>421</sup> The simultaneous global releases with little or no delays between the different countries and the growing influence of Hollywood studios on domestic programming saw American blockbusters premiering in Bulgaria according to US holidays. Although there have been notable exceptions, most Hollywood mega-productions dominated the box office around Christmas, Valentine's Day and the early summer period. To avoid direct competition, recent Bulgarian big-budget event films chose to debut in early spring or autumn. For instance, the festival premiere of *The World Is Big...* was part of the Sofia International Film Festival Bulgarian Programme Gala and took place on 15<sup>th</sup> March while its mainstream premiere was a red carpet occasion on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2008.<sup>422</sup> Similarly, *Mission London* premiered on 13<sup>th</sup> April 2010 and *Love.net* opened officially on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2011. This tendency reveals a sober business approach to distribution and the successful adjustment to the exhibition reality. Although there is little evidence to confirm or refute this idea, releasing big-budget domestic productions in spring or autumn could potentially benefit from Bulgarian audiences seeking leisure activities around Liberation Day, (Orthodox) Easter, St George's Day, Unification Day and Independence Day.<sup>423</sup> Importantly, by avoiding programming clashes with Hollywood hits, domestic pictures ensure that popular American productions would not distract attention from the dissemination of their trailers, posters and television and print advertisements. This guarantees procurement of event status in the short period that they saturate the Bulgarian public domain.

*Mission London* achieved an immediate and uncompromising success. Distributed in Bulgarian theatres by A Plus Films (an alleged subsidiary of Alexandra Group), from its very first weekend on eighteen screens in cinemas, *Mission London* topped the box office, breaking almost all previous attendance records. Between 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> April 2010, the title attracted 46,291, grossing the astonishing 355,120 leva (or 181,578 euro).<sup>424</sup> Thus, *Mission London* performed better than its

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<sup>421</sup> Id., 279.

<sup>422</sup> "Triumfalna premiera na Svetat e golyam i spasenie debne otvsyakade" ["A Triumphant Premiere of *The World Is Big and Salvation Lurks Around the Corner*"].

<sup>423</sup> Liberation Day is an official national holiday celebrated on 3<sup>rd</sup> March, the dates for the Orthodox Easter change every year, ranging from late March to early May, St George's Day is on 6<sup>th</sup> May, Unification Day is marked on 6<sup>th</sup> September and Independence Day is on 22<sup>nd</sup> September.

<sup>424</sup> "Mission London | Notes." Facebook, n.d. 22 Sept. 2015.  
<<https://www.facebook.com/MissionLondon/notes>>.

direct Hollywood competitors *Clash of the Titans* (Louis Leterrier, 2010), *How to Train Your Dragon* (Dean DeBlois, 2010) and the 3D *Alice in Wonderland* (Tim Burton, 2010).<sup>425</sup> The picture also outperformed the previous rulers of the Bulgarian box office – *Troy* (Wolfgang Petersen, 2004) and *300* (Zack Snyder, 2006) with just 1,700 viewers less than *Avatar* (James Cameron, 2009) which had premiered on four more screens.<sup>426</sup> Moreover, *Mission London* remained at the top of the box office until 9<sup>th</sup> May 2010 becoming the most successful contemporary domestic production to date and destroying the twenty-year-old myths that the contemporary viewer was not interested in Bulgarian films, that there were not enough cinema halls and that the major distributors purposefully limited the exhibition of Bulgarian movies".<sup>427</sup> Thus, *Mission London* highlighted the existence of a profitable market niche for popular domestic movies.



Figure 11. Ana Papadopulu and Julian Vergov in *Misiya London* [*Mission London*] (Dimitar Mitovski, 2010).

The fact that the picture premiered in ‘Arena Mladost’ signified that it readily exploited the developed multiplex environment in Bulgaria. Mitovski took advantage of the saturation booking and simultaneous national release which could easily be obtained through partnership with a multiscreen cinema chain. Multiple bookings across the country ensured easier access and strengthened revenue prospects. As Maxwell et al. argue, the number of prints distributed acts as the final promotional effort during exhibition. Although a costly investment, 35mm copies are

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<sup>425</sup> “Kino Box Office Archive.” n.d. 22 Sept. 2015. <<http://kino.dir.bg/boxoff.php?startdate=2010-04-09&enddate=2010-04-15>>.

<sup>426</sup> “Mission London | Notes”.

<sup>427</sup> “Bulgarskite filmi prez 2011 – rekorden broi” [“A Record Number of Bulgarian Films Made in 2011”]. Vesti.bg, 23 Dec. 2011. 22 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.vesti.bg/index.phtml?tid=40&oid=4416011>>.

justified by providing more opportunities for poster displays and marquee space, much like a billboard announcing a new product.<sup>428</sup> Theatrical distribution is still a viable business option for Bulgarian cinema.

For the first time since 1989, commercial success was an unambiguous marker for audience appreciation in Bulgaria. By the end of its theatrical distribution, the film had attracted 376,843 viewers and garnered more than 1.3 million euro in the Bulgarian box office, setting new standards for contemporary Bulgarian cinema.<sup>429</sup> The film retrieved its initial investments from its theatrical run which ensured that television and DVD distribution provided pure profit and justified state support.

Moreover, the success of *Mission London* attracted the attention of domestic television channels. TV partnership secured exposure to a large proportion of the domestic audience and advertising revenue. The film was broadcast on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2011, a year and a half after its first release, on its media partner – bTV.<sup>430</sup> Mitovski carefully guarded the film against copyright infringement and piratical distribution. Thus, its television premiere was an event for everyone who could not afford to watch it in the cinema. Thanks to *Mission London*, the channel attracted one million viewers, reaching a rating of 13.2 per cent and a share of thirty-nine, becoming an absolute leader in television prime time. Between eight and nine o'clock in the evening bTV drew an audience of 600,000 more viewers than its direct competitor Nova Television, which portrayed film co-productions as vital for the development of the Bulgarian television market as well.<sup>431</sup> As a result, the associate partner, bTV officially declared its support for new Bulgarian television series and feature film projects.<sup>432</sup> After its first co-production with SIA, the national media expressed its

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<sup>428</sup> Maxwell et al., 2005, 305; There is no information on whether *Mission London* benefited from digital distribution as well.

<sup>429</sup> Yanakiev, 2011, 52.

<sup>430</sup> "Mission London." bTV, 9 Sept. 2011. 22 Sept. 2015. <[http://www.btv.bg/movies/movie/321788088-Misiya\\_London.html](http://www.btv.bg/movies/movie/321788088-Misiya_London.html)>.

<sup>431</sup> "*Misiya London* povtori uspeha si v kinata s televizionnata si premiera po bTV snoshti" [“*Mission London* Repeated Its Success in Cinemas with Its Television Premiere on bTV Last Night”]. cinefish.bg, 12 Sept. 2011. 22 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.cinefish.bg/Misiya-London-povtori-uspeha-si-v-kinata-s-televizionnata-si-premiera-po-bTV-snoshti-news7101.html>>.

<sup>432</sup> "*Misiya London* ekskluzivno po bTV v nedelya, 11 septemvri, ot 20:00 chasa" [“*Mission London* Exclusively on bTV on Sunday, 11<sup>th</sup> September, at 20:00”]. cinefish.bg, 9 Sept. 2011. 22 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.cinefish.bg/Misiya-London-%96-ekskluzivno-po-bTV-v-nedelya-11-septemvri-ot-2000-chasa-news7083.html>>.

intention to strategically develop within the sphere of modern cinema, extending its reach towards the big screen.<sup>433</sup> Similarly, *Love.net* was utilised in the television ratings competition. Its premiere during the Liberation Day weekend as part of a contemporary Bulgarian film programme, also featuring *Footsteps in the Sand*, aimed to facilitate Nova Television reaching more viewers than bTV.<sup>434</sup> Hence, attracting the attention and support of television companies with national scope proved beneficial to the development of domestic cinema, viewers and television channels alike. Television broadcasters have become active in forging links across audio-visual forms. Along with film financing, the channels have taken a great interest in theatrical distribution and marketing. Thanks to the excellent box office performance of recent popular features, partnerships between film and television in Bulgaria are predicted to expand.

### **3.5    *Love.net*: Affirming the Value of Saturation Marketing, Stars and Online Promotion**

With Iliyan Djevelekov's *Love.net* (2011) the tendency for production of big-budget event films in Bulgaria was reaffirmed. This influenced the way national cinema is perceived by domestic audiences, raising expectations about the way a film should look and communicate with its viewers. The high production values, contemporary appeal, international cast, innovative marketing and transnational awareness of *Love.net* turned it into one of the most popular contemporary Bulgarian productions. The chosen topic and clever marketing predetermined the film's tight connections with modern technologies. This shifted the sense of cultural belonging from the realm of the national to the space of the virtual.

The official synopsis gives away little: the film “[f]ollows the parallel stories of a number of characters who are trying to change their lives via the Internet or are simply having fun online”.<sup>435</sup> The tagline: “On April Fool comes a film about real love” was similarly ambiguous, even if it

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<sup>433</sup> In 2011 bTV Studios was set up as a branch of MediaPro Entertainment, responsible for the production of new Bulgarian television projects and commercials and distributing Hollywood pictures (“TV Series.” n.d. 22 Sept. 2015. <<http://mpe.bg/en/series/>>).

<sup>434</sup> “Predstoi balgarski uikend v efira na Nova TV” [“A Bulgarian Weekend on Nova TV to Come”] cinefish.bg, 27 Feb. 2012. 22 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.cinefish.bg/Predstoi-balgarski-uikend-v-efira-na-Nova-TV-news8321.html>>.

<sup>435</sup> *Love.net*. 1 Apr. 2011. 22 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1705120/>>.

provided significant details as to the release date and the film's general subject.<sup>436</sup> This served to: avoid boring the viewers with lengthy descriptions, raise curiosity and attract attention to follow-up marketing initiatives.



Figure 12. Promotional poster for *Love.net* (Ilian Djevelekov, 2011).

The film's envisioned genre – a romantic drama/comedy with a focus on contemporary technologies – was evident from the title of the production. The combination of the words 'love' and 'net' exemplified the picture's fixation on the most discussed, valued and sought after human emotion and its transformations in a world of modern communications. The title and story

<sup>436</sup> "Vsichko za premierata *Love.net*" ["Everything about the *Love.net* Premiere"] cinefish.bg, 28 Mar. 2011. 22 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.cinefish.bg/Vsichko-za-premierata-Lovenet-news6041.html>>.

borrowed heavily from *Love Actually* without formally giving it any credit. Like *Love Actually*, *Love.net* featured a narrative of intertwined stories about complicated family and romantic relationships that, nonetheless, receive their happy ending. Unlike *Mission London*, which presented a loose remake, refracted through the prism of issues surrounding national belonging, *Love.net* built on the idea of *Love Actually* through the transnational process of innovation through imitation. Joye argues for incorporating the social, cultural, ideological and economic forces that shape the process of cultural imitation. Creative reworking of an already existing and, in most cases, previously successful media product, depends on a careful balance between familiarity and innovation.<sup>437</sup> *Love.net*, thus, presents the realities of making a romantic comedy in the Bulgarian film industry. Informal remakes allow to outweigh financial risks and attract investors in this context.

*Love.net* aimed to capitalise on a popular topic with an already established transnational appeal. The six degrees of separation theory, which states that everyone is six or less steps away by introduction to anyone else in the world, gained prominence in popular culture through the film *Six Degrees of Separation* (Fred Schepisi, 1993), the Kevin Bacon parlour game, pop songs, TV shows and the rise of social media.<sup>438</sup> *Love.net* aims to re-define the notion of Bulgarianness in an interconnected world, thus, once again making a claim on European cultural belonging. *Love Actually* was marketed with an exclusive emphasis on its Britishness, peddling international stereotypes and negotiating a new national sensibility of exclusivity and self-satisfaction.<sup>439</sup> *Love.net* similarly focused on presenting a certain type of upper-middle class Bulgarians, leading an exciting and liberated life in the capital city of Sofia. The universal appeal of such stereotypical characters allowed for possible export abroad. The narrative link with the UK provides a point of contrast in terms of location and language but also confirms the universality of human emotions and, as a result, cultural similarities. While *Love.net* aspired to represent a Bulgarian reality of interconnectedness with Europe (collectively exemplified, in this instance, by the UK), its marketing was focused on new technologies, providing inclusivity and personalised viewer engagement.

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<sup>437</sup> Joye, 2009, 56–57.

<sup>438</sup> David Smith. “Proof! Just Six Degrees of Separation between Us.” *The Guardian* The Guardian, 2 Aug. 2008 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2008/aug/03/internet.email>>.

<sup>439</sup> Steven Blandford. *Film, Drama And The Break Up Of Britain*. 1st ed. Bristol, UK: Intellect Books, 15 Apr. 2007, 24.

The plot focuses on the endeavours of a journalist, Andrey Bogatev (Zahari Baharov) (whose last name alludes to the adjective ‘rich’ in Bulgarian) to research romance on the web for an article in a men’s magazine. Through a dating website he encounters the sexually liberated businesswoman Emilia (Koyna Ruseva) and then falls in love with an elite prostitute, Niki (Dilyana Popova), while his brother, a surgeon, Filip (Hristo Shopov), is caught cheating by his wife, the banker, Mila (Lilia Maraviglia). As a result, she attempts to infuse new life into their relationship through anonymous internet communication. Filip and Mila’s son Toni (Teodor Avramov) is best friends with Emilia’s daughter Devora (Lora Cheshmedjieva), a teenager looking for the wrong kind of attention online. At the same time, Mila’s friend Joana (Diana Dobreva), who is a theatre director, meets an older English musician (John Lawton) while looking for a song on YouTube. In addition to placing the emphasis on modern communications, the picture portrays a lifestyle standard. Like in *Love Actually*, the characters in *Love.net* are not marginal but successful urban types seeking physical and emotional fulfilment without any financial preoccupations. This creates an attractive illusion of material prosperity which does not necessarily reflect the social and economic situation in the respective country.

While *Love.net* portrayed onscreen affluence and European belonging, its marketing campaign relied on messages of local inclusivity. Before commencing work on the script in 2007, Djervelekov contacted the owners of the biggest Bulgarian dating website and negotiated the terms of their co-operation during all stages of the creation and promotion of the film. Shortly after, the website’s administrator announced to its users the beginning of a preparation of a feature film, entitled *Love.net*. The main message was: “Let’s make this film together”.<sup>440</sup> It encouraged contribution by inviting feedback and interaction. For two months every member of the website had the chance to send a short description of their most interesting love story that had happened through the Internet. 7,346 submissions and more than 50,000 registered visits put the film’s profile on top of the site’s popularity rankings. The stories received were, reportedly, not used by the team but confirmed that the envisioned script was as close to reality as possible.<sup>441</sup> They also served as preliminary market research on general interest in the topic of the movie. The effort put

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<sup>440</sup> “Vsichko za premierata *Love.net*” [“Everything about the *Love.net* Premiere”].

<sup>441</sup> Ibid.

into constructing *Love.net*'s script exposed regard for popular appeal and viewers' preferences. It also signified a prevalent concern with early marketing and audience engagement.

The sense of 'belonging' that virtual participation in the script-development created among users was the first unofficial marketing strategy for *Love.net*. The development of the film evoked similarities with participatory culture where consumers are active contributors to the arts and media with equal access to opportunities, experiences, skills and knowledge.<sup>442</sup> Similarly, the casting for minor characters started on the Internet, a tactic used to fortify the idea of communal filmmaking and further blur the boundaries between 'celebrity' and 'user', cinematic and virtual.<sup>443</sup> Hence, the contribution and involvement of online communities was central for the development of the picture. It transcended national allegiance, building instead a virtual society of shared experiences and interests.

This serves to show that with the rise of the Internet, there is an increased pool of creativity and easier access to feedback from audiences. As Jeff Ulin argues, development is no longer confined to one company or territory. The artist can network, relate with their audience and absorb trends online, responding to users' comments and criticism.<sup>444</sup> The potential for interactivity is what shapes contemporary audiences as much more than passive consumers of cultural products. Their active influence on film production is welcome by the industry as a means of market research and a guarantee for financial success. Hence, the web provides an instant feedback loop, which, in turn, enables increased risk-taking and higher production values. Direct access to audiences helps survey attitudes and preferences, influencing creative and economic strategies. The Internet fills in a void in the process of national filmmaking and proves useful in ensuring popularity with local audiences.

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<sup>442</sup> Henry Jenkins et al. *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century*. n.d. 22 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.newmedialiteracies.org/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/NMLWhitePaper.pdf>>.

<sup>443</sup> "Vsichko za premierata *Love.net*" ["Everything about the *Love.net* Premiere"].

<sup>444</sup> Jeff Ulin. *The Business of Media Distribution: Monetizing Film, TV and Video Content in an Online World*. Oxford: Focal Press, 2009, 73.

Aggressive marketing characterises most US studio productions. In an attempt to avoid financial risks related to big-budget event films and predict a picture's box office performance in the 1970s Hollywood pioneered market research and various promotional strategies.<sup>445</sup> As Maxwell et al. observe, film marketing was based on the idea that it guides customers in committing to purchasing a ticket "under circumstances that force them to do something very irrational – namely, to buy a product sight unseen".<sup>446</sup> So, good promotional strategies are described as not only informative but also persuasive. Traditional film marketing and promotional techniques include posters, press, television and advertising, theatrical trailers, screenings/previews, publicising box-office performance or festival and other awards won, star and director appearances and virtually everything that provides a film with extra media exposure and influences the potential spectators.<sup>447</sup> Obtaining maximum visibility remains a key aspect of successful marketing.

Marketing is a competitive field, especially in the context of business consolidation and globalisation. To outdo rivals and suppress new competitors, the studios collectively develop and maintain a 'product differentiation barrier to entry' via accumulation over time of consumer preferences. 'Accumulative preference' is constructed through advertising clichés such as 'from the producers of *Avatar*'. This provides a 'quality certificate' for 'good entertainment' and gives the majors a hypothetical monopoly of filmgoers'.<sup>448</sup> To break through this differentiation barrier, popular Bulgarian titles had to reinvent themselves as similar to Hollywood in entertainment values but different in identity. Appropriating marketing strategies that appealed specifically to and actively engaged with the Bulgarian audience proved essential in challenging the box office domination of American films.

A guarantee for the quality of *Love.net* proved to be the fact that its production company Miramar already had in its portfolio a successful picture, *Zift*. Like *The World Is Big...*, the Communist neo-noir *Zift* mixed art-house with genre cinema, winning awards at festivals in Moscow, Wiesbaden and Sofia, becoming the sixth most successful contemporary Bulgarian

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<sup>445</sup> Maxwell et al., 2005, 260.

<sup>446</sup> Id., 268.

<sup>447</sup> Jäckel, 2003, 94.

<sup>448</sup> Maxwell et al., 2005, 260.

feature by 2011 and securing broadcasting on HBO.<sup>449</sup> Miramar exploited the same continuity that allowed Hollywood studios to obtain exclusive stature with cinema-goers.

To underscore *Love.net*'s appeal, its creators also highlighted the enjoyable qualities of the story.

Media coverage described the picture as:

... a positive and serene film with no blood, violence, mafiosos, drug-dealers, patriarchal idyll or a return to the socialist past. It is a film about love that happens thanks to and in spite of the Internet. With its choice of a universal contemporary topic and the modern approach to [it], this film almost isn't Bulgarian and, yet, it is the most Bulgarian film of the year! Because it happens here and now, it tells of people who love, cheat, forgive and punish precisely here... The Bulgarian audience got used to watching films on the Internet. But this film tells of the Internet and the producers hope that the viewers will see it in cinemas.<sup>450</sup>

*Love.net*'s refusal to examine past traumas or social injustice shifted the focus away from national preoccupations with history and towards the contemporaneity of universal private emotions. This strategy served to attract a younger audience, most of whom had no recollection or experience of Communism. The general appeal of the picture stemmed from the paradoxical way of defining of its national belonging, at the same time challenging past developments and epitomising the future direction of Bulgarian film. The message conveyed: *Love.net* communicates at a local level but displays world-class quality and vision. The promotion of the film clearly utilised a transnational framework to shift notions of what constitutes contemporary Bulgarian cinema.

The business-oriented new generation of Bulgarian producers and directors were convinced that a good marketing campaign pre-determined the successful distribution of a picture. Especially following the box office success of *Mission London*, aggressive advertising was justified as the most secure strategy to bring audiences into cinemas during the first two weeks of the film's release. In the early years of democracy, promotion had been the most underestimated part of Bulgarian productions. It relied on a mere ten per cent of the promotional budget of a European picture and one per cent of that of a Hollywood project. The escalation of marketing costs and the proliferation of expensive marketing campaigns determined Hollywood as the dominant force on the global film distribution market and held back the performance of Bulgarian pictures. Most domestic titles were doomed even before reaching the big screens. That is why, Matei

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<sup>449</sup> "Zift." n.d. 22 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.ziftthemovie.com/>>.

<sup>450</sup> "Vsichko za premierata *Love.net*" ["Everything about the *Love.net* Premiere"].

Konstantinov, co-producer and script-writer of *Love.net*, argued that saturation marketing was not a desperate attempt to sell a weak product but an indivisible part of the film's quality. Otherwise its excellent footage, expensive technology and professionals would most often pass unnoticed.<sup>451</sup> Flooding the public space with details about new domestic productions provided an adequate response to foreign cinematic domination, turning local pictures into big cultural and social events.

*Love.net* benefited from co-production arrangements with Nova Television and partnerships with the most popular Bulgarian email host, the biggest domestic video sharing website, an established information portal, four prominent radio stations, two film-related websites, a lifestyle magazine, a satellite television channel, internet and telephone service providers, a television entertainment channel and a Bulgarian record label.<sup>452</sup> *Love.net*'s campaign was, thus, ambitious, attempting to cover the widest possible range of communication channels. Saturation marketing raised awareness about the film, triggered curiosity and created a cinematic event out of its premiere. The teaser trailer for the picture started playing in cinemas a year before the movie's release while the official trailer premiered before Christmas 2010. In addition, multiplexes were branded with advertising materials from 14<sup>th</sup> February (strategically drawing links with Valentine's Day). On 21<sup>st</sup> March 2011 the outdoor campaign, featuring billboards, city lights and advertisements in the newly built Sofia metro stations commenced. Giant laptops were positioned within cinemas and underground exits in Sofia.<sup>453</sup> In addition, to the traditional television and radio spots, *Love.net* also depended on a large-scale Internet campaign.

Although new media platforms allow for cost-effective promotion which, in turn, helps establish an online presence and identity quite easily, for a webpage to appear high in the general search and to provoke audience interest, additional efforts must be made. A priority for *Love.net*'s innovative campaign was the "online word of mouth – or viral marketing".<sup>454</sup> Attracting attention through banners, trailers and wallpapers on related websites as well as through the official webpage ([www.themovie love.net](http://www.themovie love.net)) and the Facebook profile proved essential. Photos of the film's

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<sup>451</sup> Vera Chalakova. *Kak da si kupim lyubov ot prav virtualen pogled* [How to Buy Love at First Virtual Sight]. trud.bg, 3 Feb. 2011. 22 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.trud.bg/Article.asp?ArticleId=765775>>.

<sup>452</sup> "Love.net." n.d. 22 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.themovie love.net/partners.html>>.

<sup>453</sup> "Vsichko za premierata Love.net" ["Everything about the *Love.net* Premiere"].

<sup>454</sup> Knight and Thomas, 2011, 268–270.

production, a jam session with the British rock band Uriah Heep, information on the soundtrack, teasers and press reviews were made available through the social network platform. The Facebook page also provided interactive tests (“Which *Love.net* Character Are You?”), information on the screenings across the country, festival participation and collected awards and a survey related to the most preferred distribution method. The filmmakers announced an online contest for a photo or a video entitled ‘Me and My Computer’ with the best submission winning a 3D digital camera from one of the film’s sponsors. Related promotional activities continued after the film’s release. Nova Television’s morning talk show ‘Na Kafe’ [‘Over Coffee’] hosted a competition for the most romantic love story that had started online and BG Radio invited submissions for lyrics to D2’s song “Cherry Tree”, included in the film’s soundtrack.<sup>455</sup> *Love.net*’s interactive approach was utilised to engage Internet users and create a sense of belonging. It rendered entertainment accessible and coined a sense of a transnational community.

*Love.net* further capitalises on the fascination of the Bulgarian audience with stars, a category largely constructed by Hollywood and appropriated at local level in successful marketing strategies. Stardom as an aspect of the film industry emerged at the beginning of the 20th century from the growing fascination with the screen image, both a part of the fantasy world on film and representing the performance of real human beings.<sup>456</sup> An important aspect of the star image as a byword of desire comes with the possible ideological interpretations within a vibrant sociocultural environment. Stars signify a particular interplay between representation and identification.<sup>457</sup> Actors with onscreen charisma and convincing performance are significant factors for the success of any production. Established stars are known to provoke the public imagination and trigger viewers’ fantasies. The most popular actors also guarantee a loyal following, helping a film throughout promotion and exhibition. Often ‘brand names’, actors in Hollywood are the main selling tools, ensuring high level of media exposure and advertising.<sup>458</sup> In contrast, most European actors fail to achieve global fame, boasting instead what Alexandra Schneider and Vinzenz Hediger define as ‘vernacular stardom’ – “a regionally specific form of drawing power [from] film actors dependent upon a variety of factors such as language, genre, role, and [the] interaction

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<sup>455</sup> Vsichko za premierata *Love.net*” [“Everything about the *Love.net* Premiere”]; “Love.net.” n.d. 22 Sept. 2015. <<https://www.facebook.com/Love.NET>>.

<sup>456</sup> John A. Ellis. *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Books, 1982, 91.

<sup>457</sup> Barry King. “Articulating Stardom.” *Stardom: Industry of Desire*. Ed. Christine Gledhill. New York: Routledge, 22 Aug. 1991. 167–182.

<sup>458</sup> Dale, 1997, 42.

and coordination of cinema with other mass media".<sup>459</sup> European stars are dependent on the local context of their production and consumption, and seldom travel beyond them. As Olof Hedling explains, due to their 'cultural discount', most of these vernacular stars lack pan-European or global appeal. Hedling attributes this to European film's reliance on protectionist measures and state subsidy which promote national instead of transnational stars.<sup>460</sup> Similarly, famous Bulgarian actors rarely achieve global recognition. However, in an attempt to expand its appeal and emphasise its links with Western Europe and Hollywood, *Love.net* marketed its cast as transnational.

The presence of local and foreign celebrities, which were particularly well-known to the Bulgarian audience, in *Mission London* and *Love.net* answered to sociocultural transformations in Bulgaria and formed the basis of successful promotional strategies. In this way the pictures appealed to larger audiences and served as a self-proclaimed bridge between Bulgarian film culture and domestic perceptions of what constitutes Hollywood show business. *Love.net* exploited post-communist domestic fascination with Western European culture through its cast. Musicians John Lawton and Mick Box from the English rock band Uriah Heep were invited to participate after frequent guest performances at the Kavarna Rock Festival. Although losing international popularity in the 1980s, the band had remained the epitome of free spirit and democracy for countries of the Eastern bloc. An advantageous political situation contributed to their great popularity in post-communist countries. In 1987 Uriah Heep was among the first Western bands approved to tour the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Up until this point, the USSR had been strictly out of bounds for heavy rock bands, though Uriah Heep's song 'July Morning' had somehow managed to establish their name over there in the late 1970s.<sup>461</sup> Bulgarian audiences identified Uriah Heep with the transition to democracy and freedom of speech. Thus, even though the band's international popularity was in decline, for the Bulgarian domestic viewers Lawton embodied the much admired Western European culture.

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<sup>459</sup> Alexandra Schneider and Vinzenz Hediger. "Functionaries with Hearts of Gold: TV Comedians as Vernacular Movie Stars in Switzerland." *Stellar encounters: stardom in popular European cinema*. Ed. Tytti Stoila. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 30 Dec. 2007. 65–72.

<sup>460</sup> Olof Hedling. "The Trouble with Stars: Vernacular versus Global Stardom in Two Forms of European Popular Culture." *The Europeanness of European Cinema: Identity, Meaning, Globalization*. Ed. Mary Harrod, Mariana Liz, and Alissa Timoshkina. United Kingdom: I.B.Tauris, 18 Dec. 2014. 117–129.

<sup>461</sup> "Uriah Heep." n.d. 22 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.uriah-heep.com/newa/heepstory14.php>>.

Foreign stars necessitated and at the same time justified the extensive use of the English language throughout the film. This catered to the Anglophone Bulgarian youth culture, while also opening up the picture for prospective foreign distribution. *Love.net* appropriated an American model of influencing local audiences, buying up international talent and content in order to help success in foreign markets. Gerard Depardieu appeared in *102 Dalmatians* (Kevin Dima, 2000), Michelle Yeoh in *Tomorrow Never Dies* (Roger Spottiswoode, 1997) and Tchéky Karyo in *The Patriot* (Roland Emmerich, 2000) to boost the films' appeal outside the US.<sup>462</sup> By employing foreign actors *Love.net* was regaining a home audience already conditioned by Hollywood to seek cosmopolitan entertainment.

The idea of Hollywood stardom is revealed as contributing to representational complexities in *Love.net*. Actress Koyna Ruseva, established in theatre and television, was cast as one of the leading characters. Famously described by the producers as “the Bulgarian Marlene Dietrich”, Ruseva is, thus, positioned within a multitude of national contexts.<sup>463</sup> She is compared to German-born American actress Dietrich with the implication that both possess talent and exotic looks that could conquer Hollywood. However, she is the “*Bulgarian Dietrich*” and this appropriated version of the successful émigré actress is deemed essential for establishing a specifically national viewing context for the film. Likewise, Hristo Shopov (with experience in theatre and film) is portrayed as making the link between Bulgarian and Hollywood filmmaking. Shopov had risen to stardom with the cult *Yesterday*, a picture, which embodied youth culture and free spirit post-communism. However, during the last twenty years, the actor participated mainly in foreign productions with stars such as Rutger Hauer and Val Kilmer. Among his most prestigious was the part of Pontius Pilate in Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ* (2004).<sup>464</sup> Therefore, Shopov’s experience in both Hollywood productions and Bulgarian features rendered him a unique ambassador of transnationalism for *Love.net*.

These examples reveal the dual affiliation with national culture and international Hollywood business strategies that Bulgarian big-budget productions capitalise on. References to domestic celebrities and culture embedded in large-scale promotional campaigns contribute to a post-

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<sup>462</sup> Maxwell et al., 2005, 269.

<sup>463</sup> Vsichko za premierata *Love.net*” [“Everything about the *Love.net* Premiere”].

<sup>464</sup> Ibid.

modern fusion of local culture and global commerce. Through its mixed cast, *Love.net* is positioned simultaneously within traditions of Hollywood and European stardom, with particular emphasis placed on local talent. This presents an attempt to revive national filmmaking traditions by employing and, at the same time, challenging a Hollywood framework of reference.

*Love.net* exploited another established Hollywood strategy for attracting media attention – the lavish film premiere. The film opened officially on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2011 in ‘Arena Mladost’ cinema with a red carpet and an extravagant reception. The media were eager to report: “The official premiere of *Love.net* would match any glamorous Hollywood event”.<sup>465</sup> Once again, the picture was compared to a Hollywood blockbuster – an assurance of the film’s glitzy style, entertainment value and attraction. The whole Bulgarian government was present, led by the then-Prime Minister, Boyko Borisov, who, allegedly, strongly advised them to attend the film during a work meeting.<sup>466</sup> Known for his populist statements, Borisov likely utilised the premiere to gain extra media exposure. However, it was also a move certifying official government support for popular entertainment in Bulgaria.



Figure 13. The cast of *Love.net* (Ilian Djevelevkov, 2011) at the film’s premiere.

<sup>465</sup> “Love.net s Holivudska premiera na cherveniya kilim” [“Love.net with a Hollywood Premiere on the Red Carpet”]. *Dnes+*. 29 Mar. 2011. 22 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.dnesplus.bg/News.aspx?n=525617>>.

<sup>466</sup> Yuliana Oncheva. “Dokato snimahme Love.net, se rodi bebe” [“While Shooting *Love.net* a Baby Was Born”]. *Standart News*. 2 Apr. 2011. 22 Sept. 2015. <<http://paper.standartnews.com/bg/article.php?d=2011-04-02&article=362919>>.

*Love.net* illustrated the significant role of state financing in securing additional private business support. Close to 60 per cent of the film's budget were attained through a government subsidy. This reduced the financial risk for private companies. As a result, *Love.net* set a precedent for Bulgarian theatrical film circulation. The biggest domestic distribution company Alexandra Films became involved with the production even before it was completed.<sup>467</sup> This signified a conviction that *Love.net* would prove a successful business venture. At the same time, affiliation with such a powerful distributor allowed the film to maximise its market reach.

The shift towards bigger promotional campaigns in Bulgaria is, in fact, part of broader tendencies in European film. As Jäckel explains, European marketing budgets have soared. In France investment in film advertising grew by 50 per cent between 1995 and 1999 because a successful cinema run guarantees the distributors higher revenues from ancillary rights (which include everything from television to other non-theatrical outlets). The shrinking theatrical windows thanks to the advance of digital technology and alternative distribution also put a stress on advertising. A picture is expected to make a profit in cinemas in a much shorter time. Competition is intense and the large European players are now investing in huge publicity campaigns (with matching budgets) to build up audience anticipation.<sup>468</sup> The recognition of the power of marketing in Bulgaria should, therefore, be attributed not only to the insight of commercially-savvy producers but also to changes in the general European audio-visual distribution and exhibition climate.

*Love.net*, thus, illustrated the evolution of Bulgarian popular cinema since the early 2000s. Governed by a mostly beneficial legislation that regulates access to funding and interactions with distributors, domestic film benefits from young and enthusiastic artists with enviable business experience. The constant efforts put into raising budgets, the focus on universal contemporary topics and employment of innovative marketing paid off with increased audience interest. Domestic popular features, the product of transnational collaboration and local developments, have grown into prestigious carriers of cosmopolitan values.

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<sup>467</sup> Vsichko za premierata *Love.net*” [“Everything about the *Love.net* Premiere”].

<sup>468</sup> Jäckel, 2003, 99–100.

### 3.6 Conclusion

The recent revival in Bulgarian cinema was based precisely on attracting viewers back to domestic productions. Innovative marketing and genre conventions improved the ‘visibility’ of local productions, raising attendance figures and revenue. This, in turn, revealed the economic potential of Bulgarian films and justified public and private investments. The importance of domestic audience appreciation is also highlighted by Angelov, who points out that no awards or critical reviews can outweigh the significance of a viewer’s opinion.<sup>469</sup> Defenders of Bulgarian popular film highlight the realisation that the economic endurance of European cinema is contingent on the ability to cross boundaries, transcending the art/popular distinction.<sup>470</sup> I have explored the construction of popular film in contemporary Bulgaria and argued that, for better or for worse, Hollywood had an enormous impact on its development. As Bergfelder observes, the cross-cultural aspects of and global influences on European film have often been neglected or described in apocalyptic terms as challenges to indigenous identities.<sup>471</sup> Thus, what I hope to have achieved in this chapter is a more balanced and inclusive description of the development of contemporary Bulgarian popular productions.

In addition to revealing the commercial potential of popular domestic titles, *The World Is Big...*, *Mission London* and *Love.net* exposed palpable drawbacks in the contemporary Bulgarian exhibition network. Despite the commercial orientation of domestic popular cinema, large distributors often underestimate it. The short multiplex circulation for *The World Is Big...* did not account for the fact that European films rely on word of mouth and time to build an audience, sometimes taking longer than American movies to reach their full potential.<sup>472</sup> It further revealed lack of appropriate engagement on the distributor’s part and an inability to apply diversified exhibition strategies. Disbelief in the commercial potential of the Bulgarian popular feature left Mitovski frustrated that the distribution and exhibition companies did not secure an extra screen

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<sup>469</sup> Vladimir Angelov. “Sladki, Solenki i Gorchivki” [“Sweets, Salty Snacks and Bitters”]. *Spisanie Kino [Kino Journal]* 1. (2008): 28–29.

<sup>470</sup> Dimitris Eleftheriotis. *Popular Cinemas of Europe: Studies of Texts, Contexts and Frameworks*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2001, 77.

<sup>471</sup> Bergfelder, 2000, 139.

<sup>472</sup> Jäckel, 2003, 136-7.

for *Mission London*.<sup>473</sup> Faced with the real possibility of matching *Avatar*'s domestic record and outperforming it, *Mission London* could have defeated Hollywood at its own game. Decisions over the number of screens booked undermines the fairness of box office competition in Bulgaria.

The relatively small number of multiplexes and functioning cinemas across the country present another challenge. The reported interest in *Love.net* was so overwhelming that organised fan clubs from Gabrovo, Sevlievo and Tryavna booked special coaches to go to Veliko Tarnovo – the only town in the region with a functioning cinema.<sup>474</sup> To accommodate the film's enormous popularity and secure more screens, screenings of other films were purportedly cancelled. Venues even sold tickets for viewers willing to stand during the screenings. Due to serious pressure from the citizens of Burgas, Alexandra Films and the local 'Trakiya' cinema reached a compromise for cooperation in order to allow the exhibition of *Love.net*.<sup>475</sup> All of this serves to disclose that the number of cinemas in Bulgaria is insufficient which often limits access of the general public to cultural products. The state has proven reluctant to devote finances to the development of an alternative exhibition network across smaller towns and villages with the justification that such a long-term investment would only benefit a small proportion of the population.<sup>476</sup> Hence, the monopoly of the multiplex chains is sustained with only audiences in big cities enjoying new domestic productions. Faced with such a complex issue, filmmakers and viewers alike have turned to the festival circuit and new technologies in attempts to secure formal and informal alternative distribution.

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<sup>473</sup> Elena Peneva. *Dimitar Mitovski: Misiya London pobedi Avatar* [*Dimitar Mitovski: Mission London Beat Avatar*]. cinefish.bg, 23 Apr. 2010. 22 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.cinefish.bg/Dimitar-Mitovski-Misiya-London-pobedi-Avatar-news3801.html>>.

<sup>474</sup> "Love.net - nomer edno v kinata" ["Love.net – Number One in Cinemas"]. Manager.bg. n.d. 22 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.manager.bg/news/lovenet--nomer-edno-v-kinata>>.

<sup>475</sup> "Love.net donese na sazdateelite si polovin milion leva za 10 dni" ["Love.net Brought to Its Creators Half a Million Leva in 10 Days"] Investor.bg, 11 Apr. 2011. 22 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.investor.bg/novini/346/a/lovenet-donese-na-syzdateelite-si-polovin-milion-leva-za-10-dni-115250/>>.

<sup>476</sup> Diana Andreeva. *Optimist sam, che ako nie sme po-kreativni, ako saumeem da napishem realni neshta, strategiyata shte bade normalen i rabotesht document* [I'm an Optimist that If We Are More Creative, If We Manage to Write Realistically, the Strategy Will Be a Normal, Working Document' – An Interview with Mitko Todorov, Deputy Minister of Culture]. Literaturen Vestnik, 8 Feb. 2012. 22 Sept. 2015. <<http://litvestnik.wordpress.com/>>.



## **Chapter 4: A Transnational Future Imagined**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In the previous two chapters I discussed the importance of historical context when evaluating the connections between the contemporary Bulgarian film industry and global business and artistic trends. I emphasised the role that domestic popular features played in adapting to the competitive contemporary environment of funding, development, distribution and marketing. In line with Imre's argument, I attempt to portray Bulgarian cinema as an organic part of "an increasingly integrating transnational entertainment industry in which media forms, platforms and technologies are intertwined".<sup>477</sup> In this chapter I examine alternative opportunities for expansion of the local industry, provided by the rising importance of the film festival platform and the Internet.

The Sofia International Film Festival (SIFF) is an event fostering film production and co-operation in the region. It illustrates Marijke de Valck's claim that "[a]t the festivals the issues of nationality or political relations are negotiated, economic sustainability or profitability is realised, and new practices of cinephilia are initiated".<sup>478</sup> SIFF is not only a site for film exhibition and increased cine-literacy for local audiences. It provides international exposure and distribution opportunities to young filmmakers the world over as well as to local professionals. Hence, the growing cultural and business value of SIFF is a likely factor that will contribute to shaping future ideas about what constitutes the transnational Bulgarian film industry.

New technologies present an alternative both to finding audiences for festival cinema and to mainstream distribution practices. I examine netcinema.bg – a Bulgarian video-on-demand (VoD) website – which participated in Streams, the Online European Film Festival in 2013 in light of de Valck's exploration of the effects of convergence and digitisation on the festival network and

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<sup>477</sup> Imre, 2012, 2.

<sup>478</sup> Marijke de Valck. *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007, 15.

Iordanova and Cunningham's idea of digital disruption.<sup>479</sup> The Internet could provide an alternative distribution model for Bulgarian cinema but there is still a practical problem of reaching the right audience and achieving financial sustainability.

Last but not least, my case-study of *Love.net* (Ilian Djevelekov, 2011) shows that while the picture exploited the attraction of new technologies in its plot, innovative marketing and legal online circulation, its producers' firm stance against film piracy exemplified a polar relationship with the global network. The controversy over this Bulgarian film is part of broader anxieties surrounding the influence of the web on the international entertainment industry. The deregulation of access and information flow which characterises the Internet is often revealed as, at once, facilitating and threatening the creative process. It presents an opportunity for distribution without intermediaries but it also poses a danger to control and monetisation. Reconciling these tensions is a necessary step for the Bulgarian film industry before it exploits future opportunities for digital expansion.

## 4.2 Profiling the Sofia International Film Festival

I situate the Sofia International Film Festival as part of arguments on the sustainability and cultural impact of film festivals. Influenced by Jeffrey Ruoff, I view festivals as living organisms which comprise communal affairs and transnational business opportunities. On the margins of the commercial industry, festivals nourish art-house, independent, activist, subject- and region-specific cinema.<sup>480</sup> As such, they necessitate a special kind of management which takes into consideration their open system, cyclical nature and participation-driven transformation. As Alex Fischer observes, operational continuity is more important than the number of premieres or special guests.<sup>481</sup> Building alliances with other events and people, getting the timing and location right, conveying an identifiable function, securing legitimising affiliations, providing incentives for participants and controlling resources ensure the successful run of a film festival.<sup>482</sup> This is the

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<sup>479</sup> De Valck, 2008, 15–23; Iordanova and Cunningham, 2012.

<sup>480</sup> Jeffrey Ruoff, ed. "Introduction." *Coming soon to a festival near you. Programming film festivals*. United Kingdom: St Andrews Film Studies, 30 May 2012. 1–24, 17–18.

<sup>481</sup> Alex Fischer. *Sustainable Projections: Concepts in Film Festival Management*. United Kingdom: St Andrews Film Studies, 21 Dec. 2012, 42.

<sup>482</sup> Id., 43–50, 54, 58, 70–80.

framework against which I measure the performance of SIFF. My analysis is necessarily situated within de Valck's work on film programming and the politics of participation. Festivals not only screen films, they provide a meeting place for professionals, academics, cinephiles and political activists.<sup>483</sup> This is precisely what embodies the cultural and economic value of SIFF as well. Iordanova remains skeptical of the possibility that international festivals may form an alternative distribution network, pointing to problems in economic viability and the lack of dialogue between separate events.<sup>484</sup> Nonetheless, my case-study suggests that partnership with European and Balkan festivals and the increased networking efforts of director Stefan Kitanov are integral to the functioning of the Sofia International Film Festival and, by extension, alternative distribution and exhibition in Bulgaria.

Started in 1997 as a thematic music film festival, since 2003 SIFF has featured an international competition for first and second films alongside networking opportunities and workshops for both professionals and cinephiles. Its proclaimed mission – “bringing the current world cinema trends to domestic viewers in Bulgaria and the latest in Bulgarian cinema to the rest of the world” – reveals a transnational scope and ambitions for cultural impact. SIFF is organised by the film production company Art Fest (headed by Stefan Kitanov) with the help of the Sofia Municipality, in partnership with the Ministry of Culture, the National Film Centre and the National Palace of Culture. It is also supported by the MEDIA and MEDIA Mundus programmes of the European Commission, national and international cultural institutions and private sponsors.<sup>485</sup> Thus, in terms of its funding, the event proves a transnational venture, a fact which further validates the observation that the Bulgarian film industry transcends the limitations of the national.

The involvement of national and international funding bodies secures a diversification of resources and ensures film festival sustainability. Fischer notes that the stability and strength of

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<sup>483</sup> Marijke de Valck. “Finding Audiences for Films: Festival Programming in Historical Perspective.” *Coming soon to a festival near you. Programming film festivals*. Ed. Jeffrey Ruoff. United Kingdom: St Andrews Film Studies, 30 May 2012. 25–40, 29.

<sup>484</sup> Dina Iordanova. “The Film Festival Circuit.” *Film Festival Yearbook: Volume 1: The Festival Circuit*. Ed. Dina Iordanova and Ragan Rhyne. United Kingdom: St. Andrews Film Studies, 30 May 2009. 23–39.

<sup>485</sup> “Sofia International Film Festival.” FilmFestivalLife, n.d. 23 Sept. 2015.

<<http://www.filmfestivallife.com/Sofia-International-Film-Festival>>; “About us.” *Sofia International Film Festival*. n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://siff.bg/archive/2012/index.php?page=page&id=2&lang=en>>; “18th Sofia International Film Festival.” n.d. 23 Sept. 2015.

<<http://siff.bg/archive/2013/index.php?page=news&id=661&lang=en>>.

individual festivals are rooted in their ability to maintain their functions despite the withdrawn support of certain contributors.<sup>486</sup> SIFF overcame such financing shortfall in 2009 when, due to the economic crisis, corporate funding shrunk. As Will Tizard observed,

since the Iron Curtain fell, most film fests in the region have had to be savvy self-promoters, mixing limited money from culture ministries with that of film funds, regional funds and businesses.

In Sofia's case, Kitanov says, the state has carried even less of its share than is common in the region – roughly [fifteen percent] of the fest's budget – which was fortunately bolstered by the EU's MEDIA program[me], upping the total to [forty percent].<sup>487</sup>

Importantly, SIFF utilised its rising reputation to attract investment from sponsors, foundations and foreign cultural institutes, thus, ensuring that the decreased budget had no visible impact on the event. Jameson Irish Whiskey represents one of the consistent backers, claiming that their affiliation with SIFF has improved sales significantly.<sup>488</sup> This serves to show that the festival functions in mutual symbiosis with institutions and businesses not only within Bulgaria, but also in the European Union. SIFF implicitly renegotiates the economic and cultural place of Bulgarian cinema within European festival traditions. Indeed, the economic interconnectedness between the Bulgarian festival and European bodies signifies not only business but creative collaboration as well.

It is in this context that commercial imperatives exhibit their impact on cultural agendas. This is best illustrated when examining the managerial style of SIFF's director Stefan Kitanov. A graduate in Finances and Crediting, Film Studies (at the Bulgarian National Academy of Theatre and Film Art) and Arts Management (at De Montfort University, Leicester), Kitanov acts as an active film producer and distributor. He worked in co-production with Karl Baumgartner and Thanassis Karathanos on *The World Is Big...*<sup>489</sup> Kitanov was also an associate producer for director Tony Palmer for *England, My England* (1995) and *The Strange Case of Delphina Potocka or The Mystery of Chopin* (1999), and acts as an official distributor in Bulgaria for Wim Wenders, François Ozon, Fatih Akin, Aki Kaurismäki, Lars von Trier, Rangel Valchanov, the Dardenne Brothers, Susanne Bier, Kornél Mundruczó, Radivoje Andric and Dusan Milic.<sup>490</sup> With further experience as a programmer

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<sup>486</sup> Fischer, 2013, 30–31.

<sup>487</sup> Will Tizard. *Funding shortfall can't stop Sofia fest*. Variety, 25 Feb. 2009. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://variety.com/2009/film/news/funding-shortfall-can-t-stop-sofia-fest-1118000535/>>.

<sup>488</sup> Ibid.

<sup>489</sup> Pavlova, 2008, 9–10.

<sup>490</sup> "The World Is Big and Salvation Lurks Around the Corner." *Official Website*.

of the independent House of Cinema, a member of the European Film Academy and jury of various European festivals, Kitanov undoubtedly holds an appreciation of film both as art and as a cultural commodity. He admitted that vision comes before profitability and so financing often followed the format of SIFF instead of the other way round.<sup>491</sup> Despite this idealistic mind set, a conflict of interests arguably arose when in 2008 *The World Is Big...* entered four different festival programmes upon its premiere at SIFF, eventually winning the Kodak Award for Best Bulgarian Film as well as the Audience Award. Bratoeva-Darakchieva argued that the distribution of awards had turned into a promotional campaign for the film. Hence, this undermined the artistic status of both the picture and the festival.<sup>492</sup> However, Kitanov's significant professional influence on and contribution to Bulgarian film production, distribution and exhibition presupposes the possibility of such conflicts. SIFF has, undoubtedly, benefitted from his business contacts and access to relevant film production and vice versa. Kitanov's overlapping professional loyalties do not compromise the artistic integrity of the festival, on the contrary, they allow for the event's economic sustainability.



Figure 14. Stefan Kitanov, director of the Sofia International Film Festival.

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<sup>491</sup> "Stefan Kitanov: Zhiveya za dnes i mislya za utre" ["Stefan Kitanov: I Live for Today and I Think of Tomorrow"]. *Karieri.bg*. 15 June 2015. 23 Sept. 2015. <[http://www.karieri.bg/karieren\\_klub/blog/2553308\\_stefan\\_kitanov\\_jiveia\\_dnes\\_i\\_mislia\\_za\\_utre/](http://www.karieri.bg/karieren_klub/blog/2553308_stefan_kitanov_jiveia_dnes_i_mislia_za_utre/)>.

<sup>492</sup> Ingeborg Bratoeva-Darakchieva. "Na Krastopat" ["At a Crossroad"]. *Spisanie Kino [Kino Journal]* 2. (2008): 19–21.

State and pan-European financial support marks SIFF as a valuable platform for showcasing national cinema and bringing international films to domestic audiences. Rivi notes that “[t]he MEDIA programme [in particular] aims to support innovative audiovisual festivals... which promote and screen [a] significant proportion of European works to European audiovisual professionals and to the general public and which work in partnership with other European audiovisual festivals”.<sup>493</sup> In line with these requirements, SIFF contributes an air of international recognition and co-operation to contemporary Bulgarian film culture.

The international competition section of the 2012 edition, for instance, included pictures from Bulgaria, Canada, Cyprus, Germany, Romania, the UK and the USA, as well as co-productions by Brazil-Argentina-France, Germany-Poland-Finland, Turkey-France-Germany and Russia-USA.<sup>494</sup> In other words, SIFF provides a platform for national, European and world productions. By the same year, the festival had screened over 1,600 feature films and documentaries. It had featured more than 1,000 professional guests, among whom were filmmakers Lech Kowalski, Emir Kusturica, Nikita Mikhalkov, Alan Parker and Wim Wenders, producer Karl Baumgartner and actors Claudia Cardinale, Kornel Mundruczo and Michael Palin. Over 70,000 spectators, reportedly, attend the festival every year.<sup>495</sup> Fischer maintains that the emphasis on international participation and audience attendance figures in marketing a festival stem out of the pressure to “present proof of ... social relevance”.<sup>496</sup> To accentuate its event status and unique appeal, SIFF caters to European audiovisual industry standards and cultural interests by offering a large repertoire of pictures and stars to its audience while also remaining a platform for networking and establishing business connections. Further, the initiative Sofia Film Fest on the Road (discussed later in this chapter) works in partnership with festivals in Istanbul, Transylvania and Sarajevo in order to bring festival cinema to smaller towns of the region.<sup>497</sup> It reveals an inclusive attitude, an ambition for audience development and co-operation with similar audiovisual events.

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<sup>493</sup> Rivi, 2007, 59.

<sup>494</sup> “Sofia International Film Festival - Movies.” n.d. 23 Sept. 2015.

<[http://siff.bg/archive/2012/index.php?page=movie\\_categories&id=&lang=en](http://siff.bg/archive/2012/index.php?page=movie_categories&id=&lang=en)>.

<sup>495</sup> “About us.” *Sofia International Film Festival*.

<sup>496</sup> Fischer, 2013, 36.

<sup>497</sup> “Operation Kino.” *Sarajevo Film Festival*. n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.sff.ba/en/page/operation-kino>>.

SIFF is neither the only nor the longest functioning festival in Bulgaria. It contributes to a broader film festival culture, together with a mixture of competitive and non-competitive, regional, national and international events such as the Golden Rose Festival of Bulgarian Feature Films, the Golden Rhyton Bulgarian Documentary and Animation Film Festival, the International Film Festival Love is Folly, In the Palace International Short Film Festival, Filmini International Short Film Festival and the Cinemania World Film Panorama.<sup>498</sup> Unlike the rest in the list though, SIFF is accredited by pan-European organisations like la Fédération Internationale de la Presse Cinématographique/the International Federation of Film Critics (FIPRESCI) and the International Federation of Film Producers Associations (FIAPF).<sup>499</sup> The former association unites film critics and journalists with the aim to defend their professional interests and promote film culture, while the latter is a producer organisation with influence on media policies, intellectual property regulation and film festival management. The festival gained its accreditations as a mark of its ten year anniversary in 2010 and, potentially, as a result of Stefan Kitanov's networking and co-production efforts. SIFF is also featured in *Variety*'s "50 Unmissable Film Festivals" of 2007 – a trade magazine guide for events with "industry impact", "vision, originality, striking setting, audience zest and/or... [an] ability to mine a unique niche".<sup>500</sup> According to Fischer, such legitimizing affiliations and professional recognition give festivals a level of credibility. Membership in what are perceived to be 'sanctioning organisations' such as FIPRESCI and FIAPF distinguish a festival as a preferred site of exhibition, securing prestige, partnership and the potential to share resources with other members. This, in turn, positions SIFF as an important site of cross-border collaboration and transnational distribution.

By conforming to their accrediting organisations' codes of practice, festivals uphold a previously agreed upon standard of quality and reliability. For instance, membership in FIPRESCI secures the presence of an international jury member who awards a prize in the name of the organisation,

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<sup>498</sup> The Festival of European Co-productions was also part of this list until 2010 when it was discontinued ("National Festivals." *National Film Centre*. n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.nfc.bg/en/festivali.html>>).

<sup>499</sup> "Festival Reports." *FIPRESCI*. n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.fipresci.org/festival-reports/2015>>; "Competitive Specialised Feature Film Festivals." *International Federation of Film Producers Associations*. n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <[http://www.fiapf.org/intfilmfestivals\\_2014\\_sites02.asp](http://www.fiapf.org/intfilmfestivals_2014_sites02.asp)>.

<sup>500</sup> Variety Staff. *50 unmissable film festivals*. *Variety*, 8 Sept. 2007. 23 Sept. 2015.

<<http://variety.com/2007/film/markets-festivals/50-unmissable-film-festivals-1117971644/>>.

providing an additional incentive for participation.<sup>501</sup> In 2013 the FIPRESCI award at SIFF was delivered by representatives from Austria, France and Bulgaria, contributing an air of transnational cooperation and cosmopolitanism.<sup>502</sup> This serves to show that through its international affiliations, SIFF validates its function as part of an established transnational network of film events. The festival has been recognised by the international film community for its business and cultural potential. To illustrate this, in the next section I focus on the growing role that SIFF plays in the funding and distribution not only of Bulgarian but of Balkan and European cinema more generally.

#### **4.3 The Business and Cultural Potential of the Sofia International Film Festival**

One of SIFF's main aims is to establish opportunities for professional and business cooperation across borders. Sofia Meetings is one such initiative, forming an integral part of the festival's structure. It is a co-production market, including project presentations of upcoming directors' first, second or third pictures in front of film professionals from Europe and the region as well as representatives of film funds and other film markets. Sofia Meetings also features a section, entitled Balkan Screenings. It presents selected works in progress from the region to programmers of international film festivals, sales companies, distributors, TV buyers and journalists.<sup>503</sup> In other words, Sofia Meetings creates a forum for local and international filmmakers, affording access to alternative funding and distribution.

*Iztochni piesi [Eastern Plays]* (Kamen Kalev, 2009), a Bulgarian-Swedish independent co-production, started as a project precisely at Sofia Meetings 2008. The film follows the journey of two estranged brothers, Georgi (Ovanes Torosian) and Christo/Itso (Christo Christov) who must face both each other and their own personal tribulations when they take opposite sides in a racist beating at the centre of the Bulgarian capital Sofia. Georgi is a teenager searching for an

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<sup>501</sup> Fischer, 2013, 58, 80.

<sup>502</sup> "Awards." *Sofia International Film Festival*. n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://siff.bg/archive/2013/index.php?page=prizes&id=&lang=en>>.

<sup>503</sup> "Sofia Meetings." *Sofia International Film Festival*. n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://siff.bg/sofiameetings/index.php?page=news&id=156>>.

alternative identity when he joins a neo-nazi group. Itso is a struggling artist, undergoing therapy for drug addiction, who rescues the Turkish family his brother's gang is brutalising. Faced with his guilty conscience, Georgi reconsiders participating in larger skin-head initiatives. In the meantime, Itso is tempted to explore the connection he felt with the beautiful Turkish girl that he saved. In an ultimately escapist/romantic move, he leaves the depressing Sofia for the colourful Istanbul to look for her. This short description illustrates that the narrative of *Eastern Plays* is markedly different from previous films, negotiating national inferiority complexes and colonial traumas. In its focus on the personal drama of the individual in the big city, *Eastern Plays* rejected narrow interpretations of Bulgarianness, promoting instead a universal moral outlook. This is what helped the film secure funding and travel.



Figure 15. Ovanes Torosian and Christo Christov in *Iztochni piesi [Eastern Plays]* (Kamen Kalev, 2009).

Following its participation in Sofia Meetings, *Eastern Plays* attracted the funding needed for its completion. The final picture was a co-production between Kalev's own Waterfront Films, the Swedish companies Film i Väst (production) and Chimney Pot (post-production).<sup>504</sup> While the Bulgarian National Film Centre did not directly support the film's creation, the institution contributed 40,000 leva to its distribution and exhibition, also investing in SIFF's stand at the Cannes International Film Festival that year.<sup>505</sup> It was there that *Eastern Plays* made its debut in

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<sup>504</sup> *Eastern Plays* (2009), n.d. 23 Sept. 2015.

<[http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1426361/companycredits?ref\\_=tt\\_dt\\_co](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1426361/companycredits?ref_=tt_dt_co)>.

<sup>505</sup> “Informatsiya za darzhavnoto podpomagane na filmovi proekti po byudzheta na IA ‘NFC’” [“Information on State Support for Film Projects from the Budget of Executive Agency ‘National Film Centre’ for 2009”].

the Directors' Fortnight section. Following that, the film was featured at numerous international festivals, including Melbourne, Thessaloniki and Chicago, winning awards in Warsaw, Bratislava, Tokyo and Sofia. *Eastern Plays* was also among the three finalists for the European Parliament Lux Cinema Prize – a recognition of the picture's social relevance and contribution to debates surrounding European culture.<sup>506</sup> After the end of its festival life, the film received distribution in the territory of Belgium, Bulgaria, France, the Netherlands, Sweden and Turkey.<sup>507</sup> Even though *Eastern Plays* did not attract as many domestic viewers as popular features *Mission London* and *Love.net*, thanks to its festival participation and story with a transnational appeal it secured access to foreign markets and received increased international press coverage. This reinforces de Valck's claim that the international film festival circuit can be perceived as a chain of temporary exhibition venues which allow films to accumulate value that might support theatrical release or television broadcasts.<sup>508</sup> Festival distribution enhances the transnational character of Bulgarian filmmaking, allowing domestic productions to transcend the limitations of the local market for art-house pictures.

The case of *Eastern Plays* illustrates Cindy Wong's observations on the benefits of film festival markets. Wong maintains that

[u]nlike... contemporary Hollywood, which can demand large sums of capital in the boardroom, money for independent cinema must be assembled from multiple sources. Festival producers have know-how and connections to other producers and sources of money, be they government funds, or equipment investments/donations from studios/labs or manufacturers, or distributors. Many companies are small and can only contribute a fraction of the total budget for a film... [T]hese markets, as well as film festivals in general, are excellent places for networking with people who can tell you who is interested in what project.<sup>509</sup>

In a similar manner, Sofia Meetings helps young directors overcome the limitations of non-mainstream film production in the context of contemporary European filmmaking. It presents an alternative to the limited and, sometimes, irregular state funding procedures Workshops such as 'Breaking into the US Market through the Sale of Remake Rights in Films and Format Rights in Television' and 'Exploring Non-Traditional Models for Distributing Independent Films', led by US lawyer Patricia Mayer during the 2013 edition of Sofia Meetings, directly address possibilities for

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<sup>506</sup> Michela Greco. *Eastern Plays*. Cineuropa - the best of european cinema, 10 Sept. 2009. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.cineuropa.org/ff.aspx?t=ffocusarticle&l=en&tid=2015&did=112483>>.

<sup>507</sup> "Eastern Plays." LUMIERE. n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <[http://lumiere.obs.coe.int/web/film\\_info/?id=33847](http://lumiere.obs.coe.int/web/film_info/?id=33847)>.

<sup>508</sup> De Valck, 2007, 39.

<sup>509</sup> Cindy Hing-Yuk H. Wong. *Film Festivals: Culture, People, and Power on the Global Screen*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 15 Sept. 2011, 141.

enhancing local filmmakers' skillsets, business expansion in foreign markets and cross-border co-operation.<sup>510</sup> The Robert Bosch Stiftung Project Market of 2013 likewise aimed at giving young filmmakers from the Caucasian and Black Sea regions an insight into international co-productions. A prize, worth up to 70,000 euros was awarded to selected projects, pitched at German producers.<sup>511</sup> Through such initiatives, Sofia Meetings provides training and support for local film professionals, potentially shaping the cinematic future of the region. Learning to utilise foreign and pan-European sources of funding proves essential for the professionalisation of young local talent. It also impacts the types of film stories that national cinema starts to tell. The increased internationalisation and universal appeal of Bulgarian film narratives could prove the decisive element in reaffirming the country's European cultural belonging. As a result, it is likely that SIFF will play a role in future discussions of what constitutes Bulgarian identity and film.

As the name itself suggests, the Sofia International Film Festival is an internationally-oriented venture. Accordingly, Sofia Meetings exists in partnership with the European Audiovisual Entrepreneurs development and networking producer organisation, Cannes Producers Network, the Europa Distribution network of independent film distributors, Thessaloniki International Film Festival's co-production forum Crossroads, the Mediterranean Co-production Forum, the Mediterranean Film Institute and the business platform of the Moscow International Film Festival – Moscow Business Square.<sup>512</sup> Building such market alliances allows Sofia Meetings to share resources with similar organisations and enhance opportunities for cross-border co-operation.<sup>513</sup> However, the title of the event also features a geographic location – the Bulgarian capital city – implying an emphasis on local filmmaking and seeking to achieve a balance between national interests and international business ambitions.

By providing market opportunities for regional filmmaking, the festival also illuminates developments in pan-Balkan themes and collaborations.<sup>514</sup> In 2007 Andrew James Horton

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<sup>510</sup> "Patricia Mayer at the 10th Sofia Meetings." *Sofia International Film Festival*. n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://siff.bg/sofianneetings/index.php?page=news&id=136>>.

<sup>511</sup> "Project Market Sofia of the Film Prize of the Robert Bosch Stiftung." *Sofia International Film Festival*. n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://siff.bg/archive/2013/index.php?page=news&id=560&lang=en>>.

<sup>512</sup> "Sofia Meetings." *Sofia International Film Festival*.

<sup>513</sup> Fischer, 2013, 43–44.

<sup>514</sup> Dina Iordanova. "Introduction." *The cinema of the Balkans (24 frames)*. Ed. Dina Iordanova. London: Wallflower Press, 8 Aug. 2006. 1–12, 10–11.

observed that despite the critical recognition obtained by filmmakers Emir Kusturica, Theo Angelopoulos and Danis Tanovic, Balkan cinema was still under-represented at major festivals. Such films received exposure at international festivals with expressed focus on works from the region but rarely achieved theatrical or DVD distribution beyond those circuits.<sup>515</sup> Co-productions proved one way to overcome distribution limitations. While in the 1990s Western partners were preferred, Horton suggested that by 2007 pan-Balkan co-operation increasingly helped finance and distribute films – “typically an international partner will inject cash at an early stage of production or to pay for postproduction and in return be granted favourable distribution and television rights for their national, or even the regional, market”.<sup>516</sup> Regional co-operation was also evident in common promotional activities where Balkan countries shared pavilions (and, thus, expenses) at the 2006 International Village of the Cannes film market.<sup>517</sup> Such initiatives correspond with the idea of transnational business and artistic exchanges, governing the Bulgarian film industry, and supplement the small national film market.

Confirming Horton’s argument, SIFF has hosted special events facilitating Balkan meetings and screenings since at least 2002.<sup>518</sup> Pictures, featured in the Balkan Competition of the 2011 festival illustrated a distinct preference for cross-border collaboration. Eight out of the twelve presented films were co-productions with preference given to Western European countries as partners.<sup>519</sup> Despite the strained diplomatic relations between Bulgaria and Macedonia, the competition also featured the Macedonia-France-Bulgaria co-production *Majki [Mothers]* (Milcho Manchevski, 2010).<sup>520</sup> The production was made possible thanks to the transnational background of director Milcho Manchevski, potentially influenced by his education and settlement in the US.<sup>521</sup> A likely result of his cosmopolitan lifestyle, he developed the ability to navigate political and diplomatic

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<sup>515</sup> Andrew James Horton. “High Profile Yet Invisible: Balkan Cinema on the Festival Circuit.” *Cineaste* 32.3 (2007): 47–50.

<sup>516</sup> Id., 49.

<sup>517</sup> Id., 50.

<sup>518</sup> “6. Mezhdunaroden Sofia Film Fest” [“6. International Sofia Film Fest”] n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.cinema.bg/sff/2002/bg/>>.

<sup>519</sup> “Sofia International Film Festival - Movies”.

<sup>520</sup> “Mothers/Majki.” *Sofia International Film Festival*. n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://siff.bg/archive/2011/index.php?page=movies&id=336>>; Georgi Gotev. *Bulgaria vetoes Macedonia's EU accession talks*. EurActiv | EU News & policy debates, across languages, 2 Nov. 2012. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.euractiv.com/enlargement/bulgaria-vetoes-macedonia-eu-acc-news-515809>>.

<sup>521</sup> “Izvestniyat makedonski rezhisior Milcho Manchevski predstavi noviya si film u nas” [“The Famous Macedonian Director Milcho Manchevski Presents His New Film Here”]. n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <[http://www.btv.bg/article/1795201407-Izvestniyat\\_makedonski\\_rejisyor\\_Milcho\\_Manchevski\\_predstavi\\_noviya\\_si\\_film\\_u\\_nas.html](http://www.btv.bg/article/1795201407-Izvestniyat_makedonski_rejisyor_Milcho_Manchevski_predstavi_noviya_si_film_u_nas.html)>.

relations for the benefits of film production. At the same time, SIFF regularly facilitated cross-border collaboration, regardless of clashing political ideologies. This serves to show the prevalence of artistic co-operation over political differences. Pan-Balkan collaboration might not have been as prominent in the 2011 edition of SIFF as Horton had hoped. However, the festival still ensured that regional works receive enough exposure. As Dimitris Kerkinos argues when discussing the festival in Thessaloniki,

[a]ttending Balkan festivals is very important, as it offers the opportunity not only to see the latest local films but also to make useful contacts with producers and directors, to find out about the films that are about to emerge, and to obtain screeners. Exchanging information and opinions with other festival programmers or film journalists is also essential, as it is impossible to visit all the festivals.<sup>522</sup>

Through its market-oriented initiatives and partnerships, SIFF forms an integral part of the Balkan festival network, allowing international exposure to regional productions. This move echoes Iordanova's recommendation for pan-Balkan alliance in claiming back and re-shaping the international image of the region.<sup>523</sup>

Does the business collaboration occurring at the Sofia International Film Festival contribute to creating an adequate representation of Bulgarian film? Wong proposes that the mixture of funding provided at film markets accompanying such events possesses the potential to erode the idea of national cinema.<sup>524</sup> By promoting pictures that cater to international festival audiences, film markets pay less attention to local sensitivities and national mentalities. Halle warns of the threat of distorted or simplified on-screen representation of non-Western culture as the result of co-production funding, catering to and perpetuating easily exported stereotypes.<sup>525</sup> As my thesis so far implies, though, the idea of what comprises Bulgarian cinema has changed and transformed as a result of local and international political shifts, business enterprises and artistic influences, often transcending the category of the national. The development of diversity in Bulgarian cinema is not in spite but because of international influences. There is no single definition of what 'authentic' Bulgarian film should be. There is no pure categorisation. National cinema is necessarily 'contaminated' by the impact of international funding, distribution and audiences. Diversification of film financing in Bulgaria, for instance, reflects a general environment of

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<sup>522</sup> Kerkinos 2009, 173.

<sup>523</sup> Iordanova, 2008, 95–97.

<sup>524</sup> Wong, 2011, 153.

<sup>525</sup> Randall Halle. "Offering Tales They Want to Hear: Transnational European Film Funding as Neo-Orientalism." *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories*. Ed. Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover. New York: Oxford University Press, Dec. 2010. 303–319.

international business co-operation and globalisation. It is only natural that ‘national’ narratives would change as the local and global are increasingly intertwined. I adopt an inclusive approach to professional activities at SIFF in light of their integral role in the way the Bulgarian film industry functions and could develop in the future. As Stringer suggests, individual festivals should be examined as “a socially produced space... that acts as a contact zone for working through unevenly differentiated power relations – not so much a parliament of national film industries as a series of diverse, sometimes competing, sometimes cooperating public spheres”.<sup>526</sup> The question is not whether co-productions stemming from Sofia Meetings stand for a whole national film tradition but what they contribute to the development of the regional and European film industries.

Sofia Meetings provides diverse film output, thus, ensuring that national film culture gains exposure to new ideas and facilitating broader pan-European co-operation. The event proves beneficial for the proliferation of a number of film genres and formats, thus, enhancing local film culture and promoting cross-border collaborations. A picture that owes its existence to Sofia Meetings (among other co-production markets) is *Et si on vivait tous ensemble? [And If We All Lived Together/All Together]* (Stéphane Robelin, 2011). A French-German comedy-drama, the film follows the stories of five friends, different in character and background, but all struggling with impending old age. They decide to move in together as an alternative to a retirement home and they hire a young student to help them. Despite its mainstream orientation and small distribution deal in the US, the film had a modest box office performance, perhaps due to the notion of ‘cultural discount’, already discussed in the previous chapters.<sup>527</sup> Importantly, *And If We All Lived Together* reveals that Sofia Meetings is accommodating for pan-European popular co-productions with no guaranteed revenue. Featured in SIFF’s 2012 programme, the film elicited a positive response from local audiences, thus, contributing to local cinephile experience.<sup>528</sup>

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<sup>526</sup> Julian Stringer. “Global Cities and International Film Festival Economy.” *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context*. Ed. Mark Shiel, Tony Fitzmaurice, and Mark Sheil. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, Oct. 2001. 134–144.

<sup>527</sup> *Et Si on Vivait Tous Ensemble? (2011) - Box Office / Business*. n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <[http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1674057/business?ref\\_=tt\\_dt\\_bus](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1674057/business?ref_=tt_dt_bus)>.

<sup>528</sup> “And If We All Lived Together?/Es si on vivait tous ensemble?” *Sofia International Film Festival*. n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://siff.bg/index.php?page=movies&id=468&lang=en>>.

On the other end of the spectrum is Jan Cvitković surrealist *Archeo* (2011), an experimental film which portrays the abstract relationships between a man, a woman, a boy and nature. The description on the official website defines it as “a prayer, a study – depending on the viewer’s state of mind and view”. The film was distributed in its country of origin – Slovenia, winning awards at home and in Austria.<sup>529</sup> This production also benefitted from the support of Sofia Meetings, illustrating that the event bears no prejudice towards the avant-garde and niche films.

Last but not least, Sofia Meetings has contributed to the enrichment of national filmmaking. The event provided exposure to financing opportunities for the road-movie *Avé* (Konstantin Bojanov, 2011). With nineteen awards from prestigious international festivals, it proved the most successful Bulgarian festival film for 2011, gaining distribution in France, Switzerland and Poland.<sup>530</sup> Sofia Meetings similarly benefitted *The World Is Big...* and *Eastern Plays*. While placing an emphasis on business collaboration, the event proves that there is room for pan-European collaborations, non-mainstream productions and in-between pictures. It provides an alternative to dominant forms of financing and distribution which emphasise commercial success.

The effects of co-production funding on representation are not the topic of my exploration. However, the Sofia International Film Festival carries both business and cultural value. The involvement of the Bulgarian government in the SIFF co-production film market could serve as an institutional stamp of approval for its contribution to local culture and economy. Estimations based on published annual reports signify that between 2007 and 2011 the Bulgarian National Film Centre contributed over 250,000 leva to the development of Sofia Meetings.<sup>531</sup> This fact reaffirms Wong’s idea that festivals are inextricably engaged with the national film industry.<sup>532</sup> More than twenty Bulgarian directors participated in Sofia Meetings or had their debut picture featured at the Sofia International Film Festival. Among them were Zornitsa Sophia with her low-budget indie *Mila ot Mars* [*Mila from Mars*] (2004), Javor Gardev with his award-winning neo-noir

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<sup>529</sup> “Archeo wins Innsbruck.” n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.archeomovie.com/en/synopsis>>.

<sup>530</sup> “Avé na rezhisiora Konstantin Bojanov – nai-nagrazhdavaniyat balgarski film za 2011” [“Konstantin Bojanov’s *Avé* – the Most Awarded Bulgarian Film for 2011”]. frognews.bg, 17 Sept. 2012. 23 Sept. 2015. <[http://frognews.bg/news\\_47524/Ave-na-rejisjora-Konstantin-Bojanov-%E2%80%93-nai-nagrajdavaniyat-balgarski-film-za-2011/](http://frognews.bg/news_47524/Ave-na-rejisjora-Konstantin-Bojanov-%E2%80%93-nai-nagrajdavaniyat-balgarski-film-za-2011/)>.

<sup>531</sup> “Informatsiya za darzhavnoto podpomagane na filmovi proekti po byudzheta na IA ‘NFC’” [“Information on State Support for Film Projects from the Budget of Executive Agency ‘National Film Centre’”].

<sup>532</sup> Wong, 2011, 132.

*Zift*, Dimitar Mitovski with his blockbuster-aspiring *Mission London*, Viktor Chouchkov Jr. and the big-budget co-production with Germany *TILT*, Konstantin Bojanov's road-movie *Avé* as well as Dimitar Kotzev-Shosho and his digitally shot adventure-comedy-mystery *Lora ot sutrin do vecher* [*Lora from Morning till Evening*] (2011).<sup>533</sup> The variety of filmmaking styles and genres presented at SIFF testifies to the creation of a productive and stimulating environment. If consistent, state funding for the festival's market and training initiatives could contribute to further opportunities for professionalisation and networking. This, in turn, would result in more diversified film financing and a progressively viable Bulgarian film industry.

Festival markets like Sofia Meetings 'add value' to the events they are attached to, allowing them a more active role in film production, distribution and exhibition.<sup>534</sup> Festivals, thus, form a mutually beneficial relationship with the film industry. Projects that find sponsorship at a particular festival are likely to later be exhibited by them and others in their network which ensures programming flow for the events; vice versa, products of such markets rely on festivals for exhibition beyond their own sites.<sup>535</sup> Once a professional enters the system of the film festival through project pitching or seeking co-production partners, it is likely that their finished product will form part of the festival network.

*Eastern Plays* proves an example of a picture whose production, circulation and marketing relied on its festival affiliations. An official Bulgarian submission for the Foreign Language category at the 2011 Oscars, the movie featured a poster, highlighting its participation at Palm Springs International Film Festival and Cannes Directors Fortnight as well as its awards from Tokyo, Gran Canaria and Angers.<sup>536</sup> An award or even just an acceptance to be screened at an economically and culturally influential festival present opportunities for branding for marketing purposes.<sup>537</sup> As de Valck explains, exposure on the festival circuit allows a film to accumulate value via the

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<sup>533</sup> "20 Selected Bulgarian Directors." *Sofia International Film Festival*. n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <[http://siff.bg/archive/2013/index.php?page=kita20&news\\_id=545&lang=en](http://siff.bg/archive/2013/index.php?page=kita20&news_id=545&lang=en)>.

<sup>534</sup> Wong, 2011, 141.

<sup>535</sup> Id., 153.

<sup>536</sup> Vladan Petkovic. *Bosnia selects Cirkus Columbia; Bulgaria submits Eastern Plays for Oscars*. 22 Sept. 2010. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.screendaily.com/bosnia-selects-cirkus-columbia-bulgaria-submits-eastern-plays-for-oscars/5018574.article>>; "Eastern Plays." *EU Film Days 2011*. n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <[http://www.eufilmdays.jp/archives/2011/sites/default/files/film/posters/15\\_easternplays.jpg.png](http://www.eufilmdays.jp/archives/2011/sites/default/files/film/posters/15_easternplays.jpg.png)>.

<sup>537</sup> De Valck, 2007, 112.

snowball effect – “[t]he more praise, prizes and buzz a film attracts, the more attention it is likely to receive at other festivals”.<sup>538</sup> Festivals, thus, afforded a seal of cultural value and prestige to *Eastern Plays* by featuring it. In turn, providing training and co-production guidance to young filmmakers ensures that the festival remains affiliated with them if they gain recognition and prominence.<sup>539</sup> After his debut at Cannes, Kamen Kalev has frequently been referenced by SIFF as a ‘graduate’ of the festival. Furthermore, the festival claims to have ‘discovered’ more than sixty contemporary international directors who, at some point, participated in the International Competition for First and Second Feature Film.<sup>540</sup> This successful talent-scouting marks SIFF as a desirable platform for new directors and provides a reputation-based incentive for future participants.

Practically speaking, it is common for films to be selected by programmers or sales agents after having been screened at another film festival. This kind of publicity and distribution opportunity can be crucial, especially for younger directors.<sup>541</sup> SIFF provides such exposure on a regular basis. In 2013 two further Bulgarian projects presented at Sofia Meetings were taken on by the Warsaw Film Festival for development and screening.<sup>542</sup> This fact demonstrates the interconnectedness between SIFF and other film events throughout the year. Representatives of the Bulgarian festival regularly attend international festivals across the globe.<sup>543</sup> SIFF both exports and imports film projects and completed pictures, in partnership with festivals from most of Europe. This signifies cooperation and inter-dependence across the festival network. Does it guarantee self-sustainability though?

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<sup>538</sup> Id., 35.

<sup>539</sup> Wong, 2011, 146.

<sup>540</sup> “20 + 20 + 20 world cinema discoveries.” *Sofia International Film Festival*. n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <[http://siff.bg/archive/2013/index.php?page=kita20&news\\_id=541&lang=en](http://siff.bg/archive/2013/index.php?page=kita20&news_id=541&lang=en)>.

<sup>541</sup> Fischer, 2013, 13, 70–71.

<sup>542</sup> “Two Bulgarian Projects from Sofia Meetings Were Selected in CentEast Market and Warsaw Film Festival’s Programmes.” *Sofia International Film Festival*. n.d. 23 Sept. 2015.

<<http://siff.bg/archive/2013/index.php?page=news&id=641&lang=en>>.

<sup>543</sup> Some of the events include Berlin, Cannes, Cluj, Cottbus, Ghent, Istanbul, Jerusalem, Karlovy Vary, Locarno, London, Moscow, San Sebastian, Sarajevo, Tallinn, Thessaloniki, Rotterdam, Venice, Warsaw, Wiesbaden and Yerevan. Festival director Stefan Kitanov and deputy director Mira Staleva sometimes also visit Bari International Film Festival, the European Film Festival in Lecce, Finále Pilsen, Gijón International Film Festival, the International Adana Golden Boll Film Festival, Mar del Plata International Film Festival, Odessa International Film Festival, Saint Petersburg International Film Festival, Torino Film Festival, Trieste Film Festival, Vilnius International Film Festival and Voices Festival in Vologda (“20 Selected International Festivals.” *Sofia International Film Festival*. n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <[http://siff.bg/archive/2013/index.php?page=kita20&news\\_id=551&lang=en](http://siff.bg/archive/2013/index.php?page=kita20&news_id=551&lang=en)>).

There has been skepticism towards the economic viability of the international festival circuit. In 2009 independent distributor Henry Rosenthal objected that festivals provide little more than a screening venue.<sup>544</sup> Iordanova, in turn, describes festivals as “the parallel workings of numerous circuits that function comparably and yet without much dialogue”.<sup>545</sup> She perceives festivals as reactionary discreet phenomena, bound by the necessity to share resources, but ultimately failing to pose a real challenge to the Hollywood system of distribution due to their temporary functions and economic frailty.<sup>546</sup> Iordanova admits that “it comes down to the way the festival sees its mission and defines its identity”.<sup>547</sup> She believes that with the proliferation of niche content and the rise of new technologies, festivals could “be reinvented in some new viable alternative forms”.<sup>548</sup> While Iordanova raises valid concerns about Hollywood’s dominance over world film distribution, her reasoning is ultimately based on the assumption of the primacy of national cinema. The focus on film festivals as self-contained units leaves little room for the idea of the global flow of economic and artistic resources. Indeed, in such a scenario festival self-sustainability becomes an unlikely outcome.

On the opposite side of the argument is de Valck, who points out that examining festivals as networks justifies the shift towards perceiving cinema as a transnational entity. It necessitates a move away from geopolitics and ‘the national’ towards a more inclusive account of global economy and individual locales. Examining film festivals as part of a network results in “an ideological shift away from agendas that dichotomise artistic categorisations – subjecting them to hierarchical value judgements – and toward concerns about the interconnections between the multiplicity of technologies, institutions and markets in the contemporary global media culture (while paying attention to difference and practices of translation)”.<sup>549</sup> This interpretation ensures that an appropriate emphasis is placed on local practices as well as on cross-border initiatives. As Wong notes “[t]he birth of film festivals was national in nature” but the international scope and participation called to the front issues surrounding global interactions and power.<sup>550</sup> De Valck

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<sup>544</sup> Cited in Fischer, 2013, 25–26.

<sup>545</sup> Iordanova, 2009, 24.

<sup>546</sup> Id., 25–26, 31, 35.

<sup>547</sup> Id., 28.

<sup>548</sup> Id., 36.

<sup>549</sup> De Valck, 2007, 30.

<sup>550</sup> Wong, 2011, 159.

maintains that film festivals should not be perceived as unified, closed phenomena. On the contrary, she sees them as constituted in relation to continuous presences such as Hollywood, national film strategies, and local policies.<sup>551</sup> Due to their dependency on their environment, Fischer describes festivals as ‘open systems’, relying on the participation of different stakeholders in order to operate.<sup>552</sup> While a festival cannot produce (all of) its own films, technology, sponsors or audiences, this does not imply that it is an unstable organisation. If operated under successful management, film festivals can provide alternative exhibition venues for cinema.

There is no universal description that can be applied to film festivals. Events like SIFF – inextricably linked to Stefan Kitanov’s Art Fest/RFF International and, thus, actively engaged in film production, distribution and exhibition – prove the possibility for sustainability of the format. By December 2012 Kitanov had been involved in the production of eleven pictures in addition to *The World Is Big and Salvation Lurks around the Corner*.<sup>553</sup> Involvement in film production ensured that Kitanov and SIFF obtained privileged access to programming film premieres and screening new titles as part of the annual festival. This, to an extent, neutralised the constant competition with other events for films.<sup>554</sup> Kitanov’s company Art Fest further turned to distribution in 2003 and in the following nine years presented at the Sofia International Film Festival and distributed in Bulgaria over forty features made by European and international directors, including *Young Adam* (David Mackenzie, 2003), *Crossing the Bridge: The Sound of Istanbul* (Fatih Akin, 2005), *3* (Tom Tykwer, 2010) and *Pina* (Wim Wenders, 2011).<sup>555</sup> The association between SIFF and general film distribution allows an extension of activities beyond the operational period of the festival. This, in turn, secures diversified sources of income, strengthening the economic basis for SIFF and expanding its sustainability options.

In addition to distribution, the Sofia International Film Festival is also involved in exhibition. Kitanov’s film career began when in 1992 he was appointed director of Dom na kinoto (the Cinema House) in Sofia – a cinema centre for the Union of Bulgarian Filmmakers and local

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<sup>551</sup> De Valck, 2007, 33–34.

<sup>552</sup> Fischer, 2013, 14.

<sup>553</sup> “20 Produced Movies.” *Sofia International Film Festival*. n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <[http://siff.bg/archive/2013/index.php?page=kita20&news\\_id=543&lang=en](http://siff.bg/archive/2013/index.php?page=kita20&news_id=543&lang=en)>.

<sup>554</sup> Ruoff, 2012, 2–3.

<sup>555</sup> “20 Distributed Films.” *Sofia International Film Festival*. n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <[http://siff.bg/archive/2013/index.php?page=kita20&news\\_id=544&lang=en](http://siff.bg/archive/2013/index.php?page=kita20&news_id=544&lang=en)>.

cinephiles.<sup>556</sup> Since 2003, the Cinema House has been managed by Art Fest (joined by Camera in 2008). It is part of the Europa Cinemas network (funded by MEDIA and focusing on screening European co-productions) and one of the key cinema theatres in which SIFF, Cinemania and the Festival of European Co-productions take place.<sup>557</sup> Access to an exhibition venue such as the Cinema House was crucial in allowing *The World Is Big...* a longer theatrical run and enough opportunities to attract wider audiences. Co-operation between SIFF and the Cinema House proves mutually beneficial. Fischer observes that the availability of venues is a constant problem for festival-organisers because “hiring a venue that is well-suited to both the needs of the audience and the technical aspects of projection can be extremely expensive”.<sup>558</sup> In addition, securing an exhibition space does not guarantee return on investment. Money spent on venue hire might not be recovered in the box office income.<sup>559</sup> Hence, the importance of working in co-operation with a cinema theatre which focuses on the accumulation of not only economic but cultural value. The professed mission of the Cinema House is “to support and enrich... urban culture and life in Sofia as well as endorse projects which support the best European practices and policies, encourage communication between cultures and ease the transition to ... European and global values”.<sup>560</sup> In this way the theatre provides an alternative to the mainstream exhibition network and much needed space for festival cinema. On the other hand, SIFF offers publicity and exposure for the Cinema House by featuring it in its media releases and on the official festival website.

SIFF On the Road is a combined distribution and exhibition initiative developed by the festival, similarly, with cultural ambitions. It aims to bring selected pictures to towns across Bulgaria. As discussed in Chapter Three, the exhibition network in the country is currently confined to multiplex chains which have spread to a limited number of locations. This ultimately restricts audience access to new films, as was the case with the distribution of *Love.net*. SIFF On the Road works in co-operation with local municipalities and community centres in finding spaces for screening its alternative programmes. Since 2003 SIFF has slowly been expanding its cinema tour to include towns in the eastern region (Burgas, Chernomorets, Dobrich, Lozenets, Malko Tarnovo,

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<sup>556</sup> Ibid.

<sup>557</sup> “About us.” *Cinema House*. n.d. 23 Sept. 2015.

<[http://domnakinoto.com/index.php?page=page&id=2&city\\_id=30](http://domnakinoto.com/index.php?page=page&id=2&city_id=30)>.

<sup>558</sup> Fischer, 2013, 34.

<sup>559</sup> Ibid.

<sup>560</sup> “About us.” *Cinema House*.

Pomorie, Sozopol and Varna), in central Bulgaria (Kazanlak, Plovdiv, Sliven and Stara Zagora), to the north (Gabrovo, Kozlodui, Ruse, Targovishte and Veliko Tarnovo) as well as to the west (Blagoevgrad, Tran and Godech).<sup>561</sup> SIFF can be perceived as a democratising influence on the contemporary Bulgarian distribution and exhibition environment, reaching out to audiences in the country-side who are often neglected. As already indicated by Donev, by 2007 the Bulgarian film market was focused in Sofia.<sup>562</sup> Sending a film outside of the capital was not economically profitable but SIFF emphasised the cultural value of such initiatives.

Events like SIFF On the Road are beneficial for local spectators. They facilitate a sense of belonging to “the local and wider imagined global community of cinephilia”.<sup>563</sup> In 2013 SIFF On the Road presented between five and twenty-five different pictures in each town visited. Among them were examples of recent Bulgarian, European and world cinema as well as a selection of shorts.<sup>564</sup> The variety of films on offer contrasted with the usual availability of mainstream American productions. That is why Wong suggests that film festivals constitute social spheres which provide an alternative discourse and vision to Hollywood and other mainstream cinemas.<sup>565</sup> The festival can be an open forum for discussions of national identity and international relations, “political, social and cultural ideas... as well as... the nature of the medium itself”.<sup>566</sup> Film programming and official guests determine to a large extent the ideological emphasis of the event and draw audience participation.

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<sup>561</sup> “20 Bulgarian Towns Where SIFF Has Regional Editions.” *Sofia International Film Festival*. n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <[http://siff.bg/archive/2013/index.php?page=kita20&news\\_id=552&lang=en](http://siff.bg/archive/2013/index.php?page=kita20&news_id=552&lang=en)>.

<sup>562</sup> Donev, 2007, 42–44.

<sup>563</sup> Wong, 2011, 159.

<sup>564</sup> Vladi Vladimirov. ‘Sofia Film Fest na pat’ spira v Kyustendil [Sofia Film Fest On the Road Stops in Kyustendil] DarikNews.bg, n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <[http://dariknews.bg/view\\_article.php?article\\_id=1116782](http://dariknews.bg/view_article.php?article_id=1116782)>.

<sup>565</sup> Wong, 2011, 160.

<sup>566</sup> Id., 161, 163.



Figure 16. SIFF On the Road 2013 in Kazanlak.

SIFF On the Road 2013 in Kazanlak focused on Bulgarian cinema, local history and European filmmakers. The opening night featured a discussion with director Georgi Kostov after the screening of his debut picture *Pistol, Briefcase and Three Stinking Barrels*. A few days later, actress Irena Miliankova answered audience questions following *Cvetat na hameleona [The Color of the Chameleon]* (Emil Hristow, 2012) in which she participated. Director Kiril Stankov and actresses Kasiel Noah Asher and Paraskeva Djukelova attended the event to present their feature *July [Krapetz]* (2012). The local edition of SIFF On the Road also featured a special screening of the documentary *Sevt Bezsmurtniyat: Tainite na edin Trakiiski tsar [Seuthes/Sevt The Immortal: Secrets of a Thracian King/Ruler]*<sup>567</sup> (Zlatina Russeva, 2009) – a co-production between France, Belgium and Bulgaria, relating to the historical heritage of the Kazanlak region. Through the Q&A sessions with Bulgarian film professionals SIFF On the Road sought to raise publicity and create a

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<sup>567</sup> The film is not part of the IMDb catalogue or the Lumiere database and I have encountered variations in translation across online articles.

local spectacle. As de Valck notes, in recent years “[f]ilm festivals [have shaken] off their dusty image of elitist events for cinephiles who gather in small and smoky theatres to obsess over somewhat unworldly issues. The ‘new’ festivals were more inviting to the general public. Their programming became broader and the ‘dressing’ sexier.”<sup>568</sup> Similarly, SIFF On the Road attracted audiences with local topics of general interest and star presence. Partnership with MEDIA Mundus and other Balkan film festivals allowed the SIFF tour to focus less on profitability and more on cultural value. With adult tickets costing two leva (one euro) and concession entry priced at one lev (fifty euro cents), the organisers sought to democratise access and maximise the cultural experience of the local community.

As an audience-development initiative, SIFF On the Road provides exposure to a variety of European productions. In addition to domestic films, the 2013 event in Kazanlak presented recent international festival victors such as *The Angels' Share* (Ken Loach, 2012) – a laureate from the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) Awards, the European Film Awards, the César Awards, Cannes and San Sebastián, *Blancanieves [Snow White]* (Pablo Berger, 2012) – prize-winner at the Goya Awards and San Sebastián, *Smrt coveka na Balkanu [Death of a Man in the Balkans]* (Miroslav Momcilovic, 2012) – with an award from Karlovy Vary as well as Oscars, Golden Globe, Cannes, BAFTA and European Film Awards winner *Amour* (Michael Haneke, 2012).<sup>569</sup> The programme also featured genre and stylistic diversity. It included the romantic comedy *Den skaldede frisør [Love Is All You Need]* (Susanne Bier, 2012), the dance documentary *Pina* (Wim Wenders, 2011), adventure drama *On the Road* (Walter Salles, 2012), the semi-documentary *Epizoda u životu beraca zeljeza [An Episode in the Life of an Iron Picker]* (Danis Tanovic, 2013) and selected shorts. Thus, SIFF On the Road presented a dense cultural programme for a town of 46,000 people with no regularly functioning cinema.<sup>570</sup> Attendance numbers admittedly varied, according to the time of the day and type of picture screened. However, the audience appeared predominantly young and enthusiastic.

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<sup>568</sup> De Valck, 2007, 212.

<sup>569</sup> *The Angels' Share*. n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1924394/awards>>; *Blancanieves*. n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1854513/awards>>; *Smrt Coveka Na Balkanu*. n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2113768/awards>>; *Amour*. 16 Nov. 2012. 23 Sept. 2015. <[http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1602620/?ref\\_=nm\\_flmg\\_dr\\_2](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1602620/?ref_=nm_flmg_dr_2)>.

<sup>570</sup> “Population by towns and sex.” n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.nsi.bg/en/content/6710/population-towns-and-sex>>.

Indeed, the Sofia International Film Festival pays special attention to cine-literacy programs for students. SIFF for Students, housed at the Cinema House in Sofia, started in the autumn of 2009. It aims to “provide students and teenagers with unlimited access to the most successful and significant films in domestic and European cinema... [and] to ‘get [them] in touch’ with the stars of the world stage, whilst enriching and shaping their tastes for quality cinema”.<sup>571</sup> It is an audience-development programme with a focus on the future of cinema distribution and exhibition in Bulgaria by attempting to influence the taste of the new domestic spectators. By offering free entry to all screenings, the organisers of the festival emphasise the value of attracting young people to their initiative. Thus, SIFF contributes to the development of a global cinephile culture in Bulgaria. In 2010 SIFF also developed a nine-month weekly programme with thirty-four Bulgarian feature films made in the period between 2000 and 2009 in order to celebrate ‘A Decade of Bulgarian Cinema’.<sup>572</sup> Supported by the National Film Centre, Bulgarian National Television and ‘Culture’ programme of the Sofia Municipality, the project targeted the general audience but also students, specifically on certain days of the week. Each screening was followed by a discussion with the film’s creators and at the end of the year spectators were allowed to vote for their favourite film of the decade.<sup>573</sup> This interactive approach recognized the significance of audience preferences and attempted to build a bridge between viewers and filmmakers.

SIFF and the Cinema House further believe that cinema can be an educational tool.<sup>574</sup> Such institutions function under the motto that, celebrating diverse cultural products and viewpoints, festival films broaden the cinematic experience and ideological horizon of their spectators. Wong explains that, even though

festivals cannot create a single global public sphere, a monolithic world civil society... they embody a generalised mandate to be an open forum for all kinds of cinematic exchanges that might stimulate debate. On the other hand, they also represent their respective governments, industries, and communities. Still, just as elites use festivals to make their statements, individuals also use festivals to present their points of view. These individuals, because of the global aspects of film festivals, come from all over the world, and diversify the points of view by their works, while evoking multiple interpretations from varied audiences.<sup>575</sup>

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<sup>571</sup> “About us.” *Cinema House*.

<sup>572</sup> Ibid.

<sup>573</sup> “Decade of the Bulgarian Cinema 2000-2009.” *Cinema House*. n.d. 23 Sept. 2015.

<[http://www.domnakinoto.com/desetiletie/index.php?page=news&city\\_id=28&id=144](http://www.domnakinoto.com/desetiletie/index.php?page=news&city_id=28&id=144)>.

<sup>574</sup> “About us.” *Cinema House*.

<sup>575</sup> Wong, 2011, 168.

Providing forum for discussions and meetings with film professionals, programmes like SIFF for Students and ‘A Decade of Bulgarian Cinema’ prove a democratising force. By problematising notions of cultural identity and belonging, by making Bulgarian and European film accessible and interactive, and by promoting an environment of inclusivity such events carry great communal value.

SIFF’s focus on reaching wider audiences illustrates de Valck’s point that with the professionalisation of festivals as cultural organisations, greater emphasis is placed on re-styling and improved logistics. In order to attract not only traditional cinephiles but also urban professionals, students and leisure-seekers, SIFF compiled broader screening programmes and expanded its network, making the event more accessible. The festival appealed to less cine-literate audiences, with the hope of providing film education and a sustainable platform for film distribution and exhibition.<sup>576</sup> Ezra and Rowden observe that the proliferation of such film festivals creates new referential frameworks for understanding films. These frameworks transcend ethnic, national or identitarian communities and, instead, serve as alternative means for representing transnational film culture.<sup>577</sup> In a similar manner, SIFF rises above national borders and individual traditions in an attempt to create an inclusive space for film distribution and consumption.

The Sofia International Film Festival partakes in the global and local forces shaping Bulgarian film culture. In practice, the event secures exposure of audiences to European film and world cinema. SIFF introduces spectators to different national and international film traditions, facilitating appreciation for cinematic history and foreign cultures. Together with its partner institutions, it serves to establish an alternative distribution network in the Balkans. In spirit, SIFF democratises access to culture by featuring both popular and niche productions. It further contributes to enhanced business co-operation and professionalisation of local talent. SIFF participates in the re-negotiation of Bulgarian identity by acknowledging the value of local cinema and promoting its development on a par with European practices. The festival is characterised by a cosmopolitan openness to transnational material, thus, contributing to the formation of cultural awareness that is not simply shaped by Hollywood productions.

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<sup>576</sup> De Valck, 2012, 33.

<sup>577</sup> Ezra and Rowden, 2006, 3–4.

## 4.4 Festivals Gone Digital

The development of online distribution channels created new platforms for festival cinema – even easier to access and more transnational in scope than the Sofia International Film Festival. In 2013 the Bulgarian video-on-demand website netcinema.bg participated in the second edition of Streams: The European Online Film Festival. It was presented through the EuroVoD platform, a collaborative European VoD network, specialising in European art-house films and independent cinema.<sup>578</sup> In this second edition Streams included films from Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Iceland, Ireland, Spain, Switzerland and the UK, featuring a variety of genres and topics. From mid-November to mid-December, the films were available across all participating platforms. A jury, comprised of film critics and bloggers, representative of each of the contributing countries, awarded prizes for the best entries.<sup>579</sup> Thus, Streams portrays a collaborative effort between European countries, aiming to uncover new opportunities for disseminating their festival pictures through digital distribution. The participation of netcinema.bg further reaffirms the transnational character of film festival distribution and exhibition in Bulgaria. Could VoD platforms overcome cultural differences and facilitate the creation of a unified European market? A balanced evaluation of Bulgaria's participation in Streams suggests that online festivals hold the potential to change the way the film industry functions but only when part of a larger network and under the right management.

Digital distribution of festival cinema has a number of benefits. De Valck argues that digitization provides new channels for distribution and exhibition of niche content.<sup>580</sup> This idea was first articulated by Chris Anderson who, in 2006, introduced the theory of the Long Tail. Anderson maintains that business and culture have re-evaluated their focus on a relatively small number of mainstream products and markets which stand at the head of the demand curve. With the rise of online retailers and the fall of production costs, lack of shelf space no longer determines which cultural products are deemed financially viable. Anderson claims that consumer interest is shifting

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<sup>578</sup> "The European VoD Network." n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.eurovod.org/>>.

<sup>579</sup> "Uchastvame v onlain festival na evropeiskoto kino" ["We Are Participating in an Online Festival of European Cinema"]. TechNews.bg, 17 Nov. 2013. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://technews.bg/article-63786.html#.VT7Q0pOD8zw>>.

<sup>580</sup> De Valck, 2012, 37.

towards the diversity of niche products in the tail of the demand curve instead.<sup>581</sup> This proves beneficial for the proliferation of events like the European Online Film Festival. With no expenses for hosting an event, Streams easily overcomes the limitations of physical space. Because the online festival is not confined to a particular geographical location, it is also not limited to niche local audiences. Streams holds the potential to attract larger numbers of European film buffs across the participating territories instead. So, in theory, online distribution and exhibition can extend the scope and reach of a festival.

This alters the place of the film festival within the industry as well as the way in which it is organised and operated. Iordanova perceives new technologies as disruptive to the traditional system of film circulation, featuring distinct windows of exhibition and viewing formats. The proliferation of online distribution platforms presents opportunities for “transborder flows of niche and peripheral content”.<sup>582</sup> The Internet invites direct interaction and removes the need for intermediaries, thus, cutting costs.<sup>583</sup> Iordanova observes that this proves particularly useful to independent, documentary, foreign and art-house films since the move towards digital distribution makes them less dependent on institutional support or big distributor companies.<sup>584</sup> This fundamentally changes the role of the festival circuit. Iordanova notes,

[i]n the traditional distributor-dominated set-up, the film festival was outside the distribution chain and seen as pre-cursor to distribution itself: a film would screen at festivals in the hope of striking deals that would get it through to distribution. In the new disintermediated set-up, however, the film festival becomes a key element of the film’s circulation. Once it has become a site for direct exhibition of cinema, a festival also receives the chance to network closer with other festivals, a development that is greatly facilitated and enhanced by the appearance of technological means that enable coordinated streaming of the same content to multiple festivals.<sup>585</sup>

Online film festivals such as Streams possess the potential to disrupt the traditional model of film distribution in Bulgaria where companies like Alexandra hold the monopoly over theatrical circulation and exhibition. However, a number of them are still in the development stages and fail to pose a real threat to traditional exhibitors. If successful, the European Online Film Festival could inspire future online pan-European initiatives.

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<sup>581</sup> Chris Anderson. *The Long Tail, In a Nutshell*. n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.longtail.com/about.html>>.

<sup>582</sup> Iordanova, 2012, 1.

<sup>583</sup> Id., 4.

<sup>584</sup> Id., 5.

<sup>585</sup> Id., 17.

Cross-border online co-operation also makes the film festival circuit more sustainable. Expanding across online platforms could help festivals maintain their functions throughout the year and create collaborative schemes with other events.<sup>586</sup> After the end of Streams 2013, small budget European festival films such as *Entre les bras* (Paul Lacoste, 2011), *Chercher le garçon* (Dorothée Sebbagh, 2012), *Nice Guy* (Pascal Bergamin, 2012), *Mary & Johnny* (Samuel Schwarz and Julian Grünthal, 2011), *Mama Illegal* (Ed Moschitz, 2011), *De leur vivant* (Géraldine Doignon, 2011), *Leg ihn um* (Jan Georg Schütte, 2012), *Kleine Verbrechen [Small Crime]* (Christos Georgiou, 2008), *Silence* (Pat Collins, 2012) and *Tim Robinson: Connemara* (Pat Collins, 2012) remained a constant part of the catalogue of netcinema.bg.<sup>587</sup> The convergence between festival cinema and online distribution was beneficial both for films exhibited and for the development of the Bulgarian VoD platform itself. Indeed, the films in the 2013 repertoire exhibited an interesting mixture of small to modest budget festival films. The Bulgarian VoD website is yet to secure distribution deals with popular European pictures.

In its essence, Streams perfectly illustrates possible future developments for the festival circuit and online distribution. It is a pan-European initiative that avoids the pressures of competition with traditional festivals by moving into the digital realm and utilising the appeal of niche content and new technologies to attract viewers. Nonetheless, de Valck wonders whether a certain level of rebranding is necessary to attract the increasingly technologically-savvy audiences. She predicts that by inviting more spectator feedback and participation, festivals will necessarily move away from the tastes of individual programmers and towards a bigger selection of film choices. This, in turn, should contribute to a more democratic and transparent festival circuit.<sup>588</sup> De Valck's observation holds true of the Bulgarian online festival. Streams requires better promotion and more audience engagement strategies to establish itself in the Bulgarian market-place. The current emphasis on featuring a jury of film critics, instead, signifies that the European Online Film Festival values professional opinion over audience choice. Streams also faced the barriers of traditional distribution. The lack of support from a big distributor, at least on the territory of Bulgaria, likely resulted in limited publicity for the event. The multitude of online articles dedicated to the commencement of the digital festival was not followed through with further

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<sup>586</sup> De Valck, 2012, 37–38.

<sup>587</sup> *Netcinema.bg*. n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://netcinema.bg/>>.

<sup>588</sup> De Valck, 2012, 37–38.

analysis of its development. The lack of publicised statistics on the number of views accumulated in Bulgaria invites pessimistic assumptions about the success of Streams on netcinema.bg.

I speculate that the limited visibility and attraction of the European Online Film Festival in Bulgaria stem from a disturbed notion of community, a lack of continuity between the different editions and a need for standardisation across different platforms. These issues do not undermine the festival's potential to influence the future development of the transnational Bulgarian film industry. They simply point towards areas in need of improvement.

Janet Harbord suggests that by moving online, festivals lose a part of their appeal, which constitutes the notion of a shared event and communal experience.<sup>589</sup> A unique characteristic of festivals is their participatory nature. Space, time and geographical limitations create an exclusive event out of a traditional festival. They create a sense of community among the professionals and audiences in attendance. When this idea is undermined, due to the inclusive and democratizing influence of new technologies, a festival loses part of its charm. The intimate community that participation in an exclusive event creates is compromised. Online festivals need to adopt explicit strategies for audience interaction and to create continuity between separate editions in order to regain their ability to forge personal links with and among their participants.

In its 2013 publicity for Streams, netcinema.bg focused on the participation of Bulgarian titles – *Love.net* and *Podslon [Shelter]* (Dragomir Sholev, 2010) – across the other European VoD platforms.<sup>590</sup> The rhetoric of the promotional article served to report the event as a reason for national pride but did not invite active involvement or the sense of a European community. Coupled with the lack of face-to-face interaction, an official award ceremony or celebrity presence, the online festival failed to entice the curiosity of domestic audiences.<sup>591</sup> The only interactive marketing strategy, related to Streams 2013 in Bulgaria, was the contest to win free

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<sup>589</sup> Janet Harbord. "Film Festivals-Time-Event." *Film Festival Yearbook: Volume 1: The Festival Circuit (St. Andrews Film Studies)*. Ed. Dina Iordanova and Ragan Rhyne. United Kingdom: St. Andrews Film Studies, 30 May 2009, 40–48.

<sup>590</sup> "Uchastvame v onlain festival na evropeiskoto kino" ["We Are Participating in an Online Festival of European Cinema"].

<sup>591</sup> De Valck, 2008, 21.

online tickets for the event by answering a trivia question about the latest European Film Academy Awards.<sup>592</sup> This underlines the need for more active promotion, engagement and curation during the online film festival. As de Valck observes,

[i]n the contemporary aggressive environment, where commercial producers and programmers turn to strategies of affective branding, spectacular aesthetics and populist content, it is... not enough to make festival films available online. Festivals need to draw attention to the alternative titles and provide sociocultural environment where viewers are stimulated to watch and contemplate these films.<sup>593</sup>

In light of de Valck's argument, Streams has so far failed to create a special environment for the circulation and consumption of its content. It lacks "an 'expert' frame that can function as both portal and guide to the films on offer".<sup>594</sup> For instance, there is no special section dedicated to previous, current or future editions of the event on the netcinema.bg website. No information is given regarding the distributed awards or the titles that have proven most popular with online audiences. There is no special publicity, in the form of interviews with directors and stars or published film reviews. There is not even a forum for users to discuss the films that they have seen. Thus, the European Online Film Festival does little to create a festive atmosphere and invite active participation.

Another factor that prevents Streams from gaining influence as part of the transnational European film industry is the lack of standardisation. The structure and development of the VoD platforms involved signifies the need for a co-ordinated vision and a shared future mission. The official website – [www.streamsfilmfestival.com](http://www.streamsfilmfestival.com) – lists the contributing VoD platforms but provides no history of their collaboration or additional information on individual events. While the general Streams website at least maps out its affiliations, the Bulgarian netcinema.bg features no links to the rest of the VoD platforms or hints at the general initiative. This undermines the formation of a sustainable online festival network. The European Online Film Festival misses out on accumulating prestige by referring to previous editions and creating a sense of continuity.

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<sup>592</sup> "Specheli sas 'Streams' – onlain festival na evropeiskoto kino (koi specheli)" ["Win with Streams: The European Online Film Festival (Who Won)]. *Operation Kino*. 11 Dec. 2013. 23 Sept. 2015.

<<http://operationkino.net/>>.

<sup>593</sup> De Valck, 2008, 20.

<sup>594</sup> Ibid.

A possible role-model for Streams could prove to be myFrenchFilmFestival which was founded in 2011 and continues to provide up-to-date information on French and world cinema, in addition to its annual online competition. It is an initiative of Unifrance, an organisation of several hundred film professionals, promoting French films around the world and managed by Le Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée (the National Centre for Cinema and the Moving Image) at the French Ministry of Culture.<sup>595</sup> The fact that the online festival exhibits strong institutional links guarantees sustainability and continuity. Sponsored by French multinational car manufacturer Renault, Swiss-based luxury watch, jewellery and accessories company Chopard, French/Swiss clothing company Lacoste and Apple's online media broadcaster iTunes, myFrenchFilmFestival secures both regular financing for its awards and media exposure by association with famous transnational brands. It is also supported by a variety of media across different countries, including Telefilm Canada, TV5 Monde, Eurochannel, *Le Monde*, *So Film* and *Variety*. This ensures the adequate promotion of the online event. The website is accessible in eleven different languages, including English, Chinese and Arabic, in an attempt to maximise its potential audience and convey an environment of inclusiveness and cosmopolitanism. The aim of the online event is to increase exposure for emerging directors and showcase the diversity of French production from a young generation. Web audiences around the world vote for a selection of ten short films and ten features by first- or second-time directors which have already been released in French theaters but have not gained distribution abroad. This initiative provides emerging directors with global visibility. The fifth edition of the online French film festival took place from 16<sup>th</sup> January to 16<sup>th</sup> February 2015 and recorded 560,000 screenings from 207 territories via myfrenchfilmfestival.com and twenty-six partner platforms. The numbers were up from 380,000 in 2014.<sup>596</sup> While the online festival appears to be among the most successful in its field, future developments in technology and technophile audiences will show whether it manages to gain a more substantial share of the global film market.

Video-on-demand distribution faces challenges not only in the context of festival cinema but on a more general level. In 2014 a report on the fragmented European VoD market was carried out for the European Commission by the Belgium digital research centre iMinds. It studied the possibility of the creation of a digital single market in Europe, investigating the origins of the companies,

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<sup>595</sup> "About us." *uniFrance Films*. n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://en.unifrance.org/corporate>>.

<sup>596</sup> "Successful edition of the 5th MyFrenchFilmFestival.com." My French Film Festival, n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.myfrenchfilmfestival.com/en/newsitem?newsitem=13484>>.

participating in digital distribution, their willingness to go beyond the traditional territorial and language borders, the diversity of the content on offer and current consumption patterns.<sup>597</sup> The research established that across the European countries there were a number of businesses involved in VoD, including television channels (TF1, BBC), content producers/film distributors (Universciné), telecom operators (Telefonica), targeted content aggregators (Netflix), video sharing websites (Dailymotion), audiovisual archives and public support funds (DFI's involvement in Filmstriben). Just like netcinema.bg, these services were reluctant to share exact statistics regarding their online audience reach.<sup>598</sup> While spending on audiovisual content through online platforms and services rose to 1.2 billion euro in 2011, the selected interviewed parties admitted that they struggled to establish the right revenue model and settle controversies over changes in release windows.<sup>599</sup> Not all European countries benefited from cross-border initiatives. Language differences and geo-location further fragmented the market. There was a lack of legislative harmonisation across the EU (in particular, discrepancies related to varying age ratings or differing tax systems) and an increasing worry that large players that are linked to US companies (like Google, Apple and Netflix) are potential competitors and even game changers. Piracy was often cited as a persistent challenge. Users accessing content online were not necessarily willing or used to paying (an issue that I discuss in more detail in the next section).<sup>600</sup> So, despite indications that the market for VoD services in Europe was expanding, its shape and size remained unclear.<sup>601</sup> This could serve to illustrate why the Streams festival did not obtain visibility or a substantial audience following in Bulgaria.

Online film distribution initiatives like netcinema.bg are faced with a number of legislative, industrial and practical problems, part of the larger audiovisual environment. What becomes clear is the need for operational flexibility, heightened audience awareness and innovative marketing. Similarly to academics like Iordanova and de Valck, current VoD companies emphasised the importance of localised marketing strategies and tailoring of the offer towards specific countries. Marketing was considered an important cost element by interviewees of the iMinds report.

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<sup>597</sup> Sophie de Vinck, Heritiana Ranaivoson, and Ben van Rompu. *Fragmentation of the Single Market for On-Line Video-on-Demand Services: Point of View of Content Providers*. N.p.: European Commission, 2014. 23 Sept. 2015. <ec.europa.eu/newsroom/dae/document.cfm?doc\_id=6355>.

<sup>598</sup> Id., 2, 13.

<sup>599</sup> Id., 3, 14, 16.

<sup>600</sup> Id., 3, 17.

<sup>601</sup> Id., 1.

Pricing strategies were described as influenced by the business relationships struck by the VoD offers. The importance of branding for the take-off of the VoD service was highlighted during the conducted interviews.<sup>602</sup> The report infers that,

[s]imply putting content out there is not enough to translate this to an increased diversity of consumption... In a world of infinite choice, guiding signs become increasingly important. Social media, personalised recommendation and search technologies in this sense have a crucial impact on the discovery and selection of audiovisual works by the audience. For European content, the key question is whether this potentially better fit between content supply and audience preferences will result in the increased circulation and consumption of non-national European audiovisual works.<sup>603</sup>

Questions of diversity and accessibility remain prominent as VoD businesses in Europe develop and grow. The report investigates making the shift towards collaborative projects and distribution of transnational media products, initiatives at the heart of the Streams festival as well. From what has been discussed so far, digital distribution emerges as a factor likely to shape the future of the transnational film industry in Bulgaria.

Despite its poor management and the underdeveloped state of the European VoD market, I believe Streams holds the potential to revolutionise the way festival cinema is distributed in Bulgaria. Iordanova notes that new technologies and improved logistics help festivals operate in a more or less coordinated manner, gaining power and visibility through becoming direct and instantaneous access points for new content. Online co-operation limits real-life competition; practitioners no longer need to invest in travelling from one exclusive festival event to another.<sup>604</sup> To achieve greater recognition, Streams needs to maximize its points of contact with audiences and film professionals. Perhaps future collaboration with the Sofia International Film Festival would validate its local ambitions. What remains clear is that VoD websites like netcinema.bg need more interactive initiatives and better marketing.

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<sup>602</sup> Id., 4.

<sup>603</sup> Id., 18–19.

<sup>604</sup> Iordanova, 2012, 19.

## 4.5 *Love.net*: The Influence of New Technologies on Distribution and Audiences

A big-budget event film with high production values, contemporary appeal and an international cast, as discussed in the previous chapter, *Love.net* is the second most successful contemporary Bulgarian production to date. The film's pioneering online distribution in Bulgaria raised questions about the value and price of cultural goods, increasingly undermined by informal networks of sharing. In this section I discuss a hypothesis that a considerable segment of contemporary audiences feel entitled to watch anything, anywhere, on any device and, preferably, for free. I do not claim that this mentality is shared by every spectator and, similarly, I pass no judgment from a moral standpoint. Instead, I observe that trends in informal distribution are prominent enough, especially in Bulgaria, to subvert dominant practices and lead to alterations in the film distribution environment altogether. Thus, by examining selected aspects of the circulation of *Love.net* and comparing them to trends in world cinema, I expose industrial as much as social and cultural tendencies. I maintain that unresolved tensions essentially leave modern technology as a questionable factor in the future development not just of the Bulgarian but also of the international film industry.

It is an understatement to claim that the Internet has revolutionised communication and entertainment. In 2012, less than two decades since the 'dot-com' boom, there were about 2.5 billion users online.<sup>605</sup> They were free to search for information, send or read electronic messages, get news, buy products, watch videos, share their art, socialise and look for work, accommodation or love online.<sup>606</sup> Every user is able to contribute to the digital pool of knowledge and resources through tools such as networking and file-sharing. Bulgaria is part of changes in the digital environment. In the early 2000s the country experienced an unprecedented interest in the Information Technology market with international companies like SAP, Apple and Hewlett Packard outsourcing their services there.<sup>607</sup> By 2005 Bulgaria ranked eighth in the world in terms

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<sup>605</sup> "World Internet Users Statistics and 2015 World Population Stats." n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.internetworkstats.com/stats.htm>>.

<sup>606</sup> "Three Technology Revolutions." Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech, 10 Feb. 2014. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://pewinternet.org/Trend-Data-%28Adults%29/Online-Activites-Total.aspx>>.

<sup>607</sup> "Hewlett Packard Opens Global Support Center in Sofia - Novinite.com - Sofia News Agency." 6 June 2006. 23 Sept. 2015. <[http://www.novinite.com/view\\_news.php?id=64578](http://www.novinite.com/view_news.php?id=64578)>.

of the number of certified IT professionals per capita.<sup>608</sup> With the increased development of technophile culture in Bulgaria, notions about intellectual property also changed.

Films like *Love.net* depend on online communities for their production and success. Through the process of disintermediation, the film's producers claimed control over the distribution of their creation. However, danger to traditional film distribution comes as much from Internet technology's potential to override the traditional industry hierarchy as from users themselves. Values of choice and unrestricted access drive not only pirate networks but most of the web itself. The decentralisation of resources renders peer-to-peer sharing invulnerable and difficult to manage while anti-authoritarian ideology attracts a substantial following.<sup>609</sup> The Bulgarian audiovisual environment demonstrates a competition between dominant and subversive models of online distribution.

The experiment in legal digital dissemination revealed a controversial aspect of the relationship between *Love.net* and new technology. While the producers of the picture were eager to explore alternative means of online distribution, they feared the Internet with its informal networks of sharing. Audience participation was welcome during development and marketing but an anathema for distribution. The decentralised and deregulated nature of the Internet presented an advantage in reaching viewers and, at the same time, a challenge to film profits. As Peter Decherney suggests, media copyright in the digital age has been characterised by both a fear of and faith in technology. Hollywood studios and national industries have confronted informal digital distribution as threatening to top-down control over cultural products while seeking ways to monetise online video.<sup>610</sup> However, even marketing and distribution units within the same company have disagreed over how damaging informal distribution really is.<sup>611</sup> Whether or not it can be contained is an entirely different matter. *Love.net* elucidates these tensions in the context

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<sup>608</sup> Bill Robinson. *Bulgaria- Eastern Europe's Newest Hot Spot | Offshoring Business Intelligence & Tools | EU Out-Sourcing Specialists Platform | German Market-Entry offshoring Vendor Services*. Aug. 2005. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.outsourcingmonitor.eu/articles/outsourcing-to-bulgaria.html>>.

<sup>609</sup> Siva Vaidhyanathan. *The Anarchist in the Library: How the Clash between Freedom and Control Is Hacking the Real World and Crashing the System*. New York: Basic Books, 4 May 2004, 17.

<sup>610</sup> Peter Decherney. *Hollywood's Copyright Wars: From Edison to the Internet*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012, 235.

<sup>611</sup> Ulin, 2010, 322.

of a small national film industry, raising issues over changing social habits of film consumption and possibly pointing towards the need for a more flexible copyright system in the future.

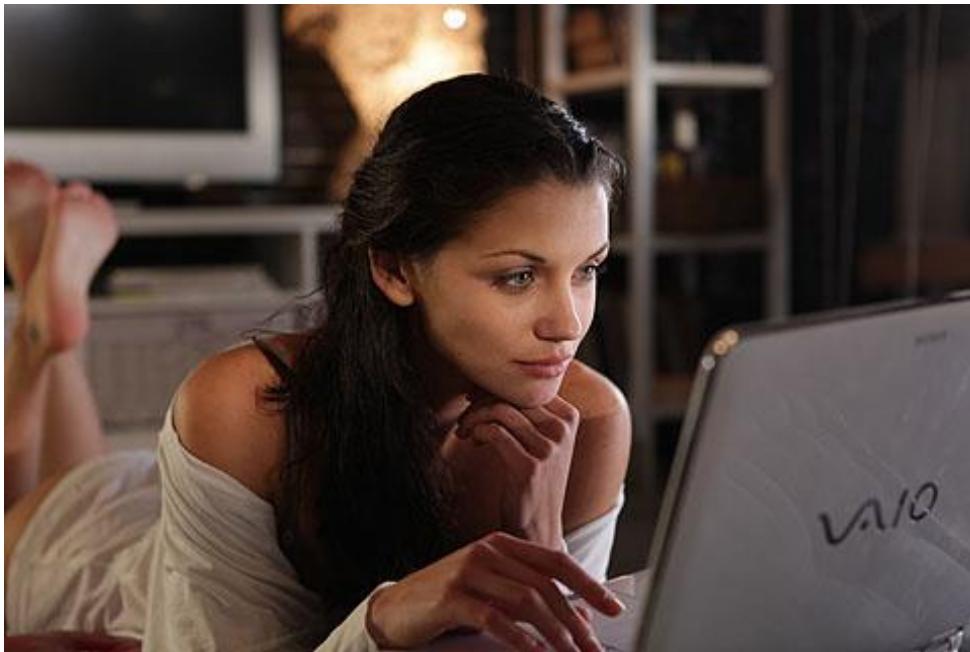


Figure 17. Dilyana Popova in *Love.net* (Ilian Djevelevkov, 2011).

Recognising the increased importance of Internet film circulation, Djevelevkov and his partners ventured into a new type of film distribution, characterised by more authorial control through disintermediation. After their experience of “conventional” theatrical and DVD circulation with *Zift*, Miramar recognised the restrictions of traditional distribution. The limitations of the domestic film market and the lack of international exposure prompted the producers of *Love.net* to pioneer online distribution in Bulgaria in an attempt to reach a wider audience.<sup>612</sup> Iordanova explains the process as a recent tendency to undermine the role of traditional distributors in favour of independent online distribution by the filmmakers. The content owner and exhibitor interact directly without intermediaries in an attempt to maximise profit and reinstate alternative exhibition channels. It is a move, necessitated not only by the gradual narrowing of clearly distinguishable consecutive exhibition windows and aimed at “counteract[ing] the speed at which pirated material can now travel over the Internet” but also by the idea of democratised film

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<sup>612</sup> “2 leva, za Love, v neta” [“2 Leva, for Love, on the Internet”]. *Webcafe*. 17 Nov. 2011. 23 Sept. 2015. <[http://www.webcafe.bg/id\\_313478973](http://www.webcafe.bg/id_313478973)>.

circulation.<sup>613</sup> Direct online distribution is perceived as a way for small and independent producers to gain exposure. It also allows access to previously distant audiences that provide extra revenue.<sup>614</sup> Iordanova's idea of 'democratising' access to content should be understood in the context of producer control and regulation. Disintermediation is liberating because, by removing the need for formal distribution deals, it leaves filmmakers with easier access to online exhibition routes and control over profits. This potentially positions independent and low-budget producers on an equal basis with their Hollywood studio counterparts.

Just six months after its theatrical and three months before its television premiere *Love.net* was made available on the video-on-demand platform netcinema.bg, itself managed by the film's producers. The viewing code that allowed access to the picture for twelve hours cost one euro.<sup>615</sup> It was an opportunity to regain control over the film's distribution after its multiplex release and continue to make a profit. The decision was justified as aiming to bring the film to the citizens of small towns and villages with no cinemas as well as to Bulgarian diasporas abroad.<sup>616</sup> Hence, the Internet provided an opportunity for cross-border distribution and access to niche content (like contemporary Bulgarian cinema).<sup>617</sup> The deregulated nature of the medium allowed for the emergence of new video-on-demand business models and additional revenue.

Nonetheless, the Internet and its users were also perceived as posing a potential threat for online content. In an official open letter on their Facebook page, the film's creators took a firm stance against illegal movie dissemination. They claimed to have contacted the biggest domestic torrent sites to request their cooperation in guarding *Love.net* as a representative of new Bulgarian cinema.<sup>618</sup> By appealing to a sense of nationhood in confronting piratical distribution, Djevelevkov strove to preserve and protect the hierarchy of the distribution system. He equated the value of

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<sup>613</sup> Iordanova, 2012, 3–6.

<sup>614</sup> Id., 7.

<sup>615</sup> Dimitar Staykov. "S *Love.net* tragva sait za onlain BG filmi za 1.20 evro" ["With *Love.net* Starts a Site for Online Bulgarian Films for 1.20 Euro"]. 24 Chasa Newspaper. 18 Nov. 2011. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.24chasa.bg/Article.asp?ArticleId=1115965>>.

<sup>616</sup> Ibid.

<sup>617</sup> Nicola Allieta. *Under the Milky Way: Digital Distribution and Marketing*. 18 Nov. 2013. Hearing on the Promotion of European Films Online.

<sup>618</sup> "Otvoreno pismo ot avtorite i produtsentite na balgarskiya film *Love.net*" ["An Open Letter by the Authors and Producers of the Bulgarian Film *Love.net*"]. cinefish.bg, 23 Nov. 2011. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.cinefish.bg/Otvoreno-pismo-ot-avtorite-i-producentite-na-balgarskiya-film-LOVENET-news7629.html>>.

Bulgarian cinema with national identity, thus, implicitly positioning film pirates as unpatriotic outsiders. This brings us back to Willemen and Vitali's observation that the rhetoric of national cinema is evoked in situations of commercial crisis.<sup>619</sup> However, instead of targeting competitors, this time 'foreign-ness' was imposed on transgressive domestic spectators. Active audience engagement was no longer invited and deregulated access was denounced once the film's development and marketing were complete.

The rhetoric against piracy utilised by *Love.net*'s director was similar to that of the Hollywood studios. Both employed questionable statistics and appealed for state protection and a change in consumer habits. According to Djevelekov, recent Bulgarian productions like *TILT* and *HDSP: Lov na drebni hishtnitsi/Hunting Down Small Predators* had suffered, accumulatively, 200,000 illegal downloads. He claimed that this presented undeniable evidence of the harm done to domestic cinema.<sup>620</sup> *Love.net*'s authors further expressed a concern over the loss of revenue and a hope that through cooperation between the media, the government and ordinary people, Bulgarian cinema would be protected against future infringements.<sup>621</sup> Similarly, in 2007 the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) issued a report, estimating a loss of 58 billion dollars per year due to copyright breach in the USA only.<sup>622</sup> The MPAA appealed for partnering with the technology and communications communities to reduce intellectual theft. It worked with domestic and international legislation and law enforcement agencies to safeguard intellectual property rights and called for the support of educators in promoting respect for copyright.<sup>623</sup> So, despite differences in economic scale, target markets and cultures, Bulgarian producers and the MPAA held a similar vision on film piracy. Free sharing of content was condemned as criminal, harmful both in financial and in creative terms, and an appeal to the moral judgment of the users was made central. Both visions evoked the role of the state as a regulator and a dubious sense of shared culture, implying informal access was prohibited.

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<sup>619</sup> Vitali and Willemen, 2006, 1–2.

<sup>620</sup> "Otvoreno pismo ot avtorite i produtsentite na balgarskiya film *Love.net*" ["An Open Letter by the Authors and Producers of the Bulgarian Film *Love.net*"].

<sup>621</sup> Staykov, 2011.

<sup>622</sup> Sean F. "MPAA Piracy Stats Pulled Apart - Every Pirate Would Buy 100 DVDs." *Digital Digest*. n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.digital-digest.com/news-63128-MPAA-Piracy-Stats-Pulled-Apart---Every-Pirate-Would-Buy-100-DVDs.htm>>.

<sup>623</sup> "Protecting Creativity, Expanding Consumer Choice." MPAA. n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.mpaa.org/contentprotection>>.

However, there are significant issues with the above arguments, advanced by major copyright holders. The evaluation of losses to free online distribution remains problematic, especially when contextualised within broader cultural and social tensions. In his discussion of piracy in the music industry, Lawrence Lessig explains that there are different types of online file-sharers and only one of them can be considered potentially harmful. Some users legally share content that is not copyrighted (or the owner has given away). Others use sharing networks to obtain access to material that is no longer available for purchase – a violation with no economic harm. Certain Internet users sample entertainment before making a purchase and, if targeted with direct advertising, could help improve legal profits. Yet some use sharing networks as substitutes for buying content. Lessig doubts that everyone from the latter category would buy the products that they pirate if they had no other alternative. If they would not be making the purchase in any circumstances, then their illegal sharing should have no negative economic consequence for the copyright holders. Lessig further admits “[w]hile the numbers do suggest that sharing is harmful, how harmful is harder to reckon.”<sup>624</sup> It is difficult to estimate the number of users who sample and, later, buy content and those that simply pirate it. However, Lessig points out: “[i]f every download were a lost sale... then the industry would have suffered a 100 per cent drop in sales...”<sup>625</sup> There is a fragile balance between business loss, on the one hand, and social gains from shared cultural products, on the other.<sup>626</sup> Hence, dealing with illegal online film distribution requires an objective, flexible and multifaceted approach.

The arguments advanced by Hollywood studios and their Bulgarian colleagues are predominantly one-sided. The MPAA bases its statistics on “internal estimates of piracy losses compiled by each of the copyright industries”.<sup>627</sup> Thus, its sources are rights holders groups with vested interest in content distribution who favour stronger copyright restrictions. It becomes clear that the MPAA report is potentially subjective and ideologically-charged. Djevelevkov’s statistics are more accurate because they are based on figures from the largest peer-to-peer website in Bulgaria, namely, zamunda.net. Nevertheless, it could be argued that he fails to account for the economic and social specificities of the Bulgarian market. Piracy often occurs as a consequence of poverty. The number of downloads does not necessarily translate into legal views lost. A significant

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<sup>624</sup> Lawrence Lessig. *Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology and the Law to Lock Down Culture and Control Creativity*. New York: Penguin Press, 2004, 68–69.

<sup>625</sup> Id., 70–71.

<sup>626</sup> Id., 73.

<sup>627</sup> Sean F.

proportion of ‘pirates’ in Bulgaria (and worldwide) simply cannot afford access to cultural goods. Hence, if peer-to-peer sharing was unavailable, they would have no alternative. The minimum monthly wage in Bulgaria in 2013 was 159 euros with 22 per cent of the population living below the poverty line.<sup>628</sup> While 1.20 euro for a legal download might not be overwhelming for some Bulgarians and while Djevelekov’s desire to protect and promote the local industry is fitting, his argument invites an assumption on what proportion of one’s budget should be spent on entertainment and access to cultural goods.

Piracy proliferates in developing countries. Vaidhyanathan insists that it is globalisation and standardisation that are forcing poor countries to respect rules written by their more powerful and established global competitors.<sup>629</sup> The author maintains that the tone of legislation such as the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA), outlawing circumvention of copy-prevention systems, is “absurd [...] in places where the majority of middle-class people cannot afford the cultural products they need to be citizens of global culture or players in the global economy”.<sup>630</sup> According to the author, the only way to prevent piracy is a global economic stabilisation and equalisation with similar living standards across all countries.<sup>631</sup> While this ideal world might reduce the threat of unregulated access and increase monetisation, there might be another, more profound concern related to free online access of cultural products.

Consumer attitudes evolved together with new technologies, fostering a belief that culture is shared and private transactions such as peer-to-peer networks are harmless.<sup>632</sup> The torrent-sharing platform zamunda.net registered over 1.5 billion individual visits and 460,000 active users in 2008 alone.<sup>633</sup> By 2011, piracy was such a common practice that Bulgarian forum users were

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<sup>628</sup> “Statistics Explained - Minimum wage.” n.d. 23 Sept. 2015.

<[http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics\\_explained/index.php/Minimum\\_wage\\_statistics](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Minimum_wage_statistics)>; “Bulgaria Population below poverty line - Economy.” n.d. 23 Sept. 2015.

<[http://www.indexmundi.com/bulgaria/population\\_below\\_poverty\\_line.html](http://www.indexmundi.com/bulgaria/population_below_poverty_line.html)>.

<sup>629</sup> Vaidhyanathan, 2004, 89–90.

<sup>630</sup> Id., 97.

<sup>631</sup> Id., 101.

<sup>632</sup> Id., 19.

<sup>633</sup> To avoid prosecution from the Bulgarian authorities, the torrent-sharing platform changed names and domains every couple of years so accurately measuring its popularity in the long run proves difficult (“zamunda.net Poseshteniya po godini” [“zamunda.net Yearly Traffic”] n.d. 23 Sept. 2015.

<<http://www.tyxo.bg/d/11641/yearly>>).

wondering why they could not access contemporary domestic films online and how the authorities managed to preserve them from being pirated.<sup>634</sup> Loopholes in legislation likely contributed to this relaxed attitude towards intellectual property in Bulgaria. According to article 24 of the Bulgarian Law on Copyright and Related Rights of 1993, temporary reproduction of works of intellectual property is allowed if it is transient or incidental and has no independent economic significance.<sup>635</sup> The phrasing of the article is vague enough to allow interpretation in defense of peer-to-peer sharing networks. The legislation has been updated on numerous occasions to account for digital distribution and television transmission, but article 24 remains unchanged, perhaps intentionally illustrating the need for legal flexibility when addressing shared audiovisual culture. I would like to believe that Bulgarian intellectual property law is progressive enough to account for global shifts in the consumption of culture and entertainment.

Illegal sharing proliferates outside of developing countries as well. According to Elastic Path's 2011 survey, 26 per cent of Americans believed downloading or watching pirated video was acceptable with younger audiences predominantly favouring the idea, having grown up with the concept of video, music and software sharing.<sup>636</sup> Although income also played a role in the statistics provided, it is important to note the expectations of new generations evolve together with technology and dictate economic and social norms. It becomes obvious that the deregulated nature of the Internet has contributed to a liberal attitude towards copyright and a shift in moral outlook not only in countries like Bulgaria.

Digital film distribution professional Nicola Allieta notes that the sense of being entitled to content available anytime, anywhere, on any device and, preferably, for free was the result of technology altering people's worldview.<sup>637</sup> However, Patrick Vonderau sees the shift as a natural development of practices surrounding shared culture. The Hollywood system has emerged as a

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<sup>634</sup> "Balgarsko kino" ["Bulgarian Cinema"]. n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://forum.networx.bg/viewtopic.php?f=9&t=32005>>.

<sup>635</sup> "Zakon za avtorskoto pravo i srodnite mu prava" ["Law on Copyright and Related Rights"]. 9 Oct. 2015. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://lex.bg/laws/ldoc/2133094401>>.

<sup>636</sup> "Monetising Online Video 2011." Vancouver, Canada/Reading, UK: Elastic Path, 2011.

<sup>637</sup> Allieta, 2013.

result of the cinema and copyright industry as well as of the partial turn to software business.<sup>638</sup> However, media devices are not a force coming from outside the social and capable of transcending history or natural human expression.<sup>639</sup> Vonderau notes that there is a fundamental misunderstanding of the underlying dynamics behind new technological visions. Human culture has always been based on sharing, interaction and choice. The difference now is that, with increased access to informal distribution, consumers have the ability to be highly critical and selective of content, appraising its value and choosing whether it is “worth it”.<sup>640</sup> Active audiences are no longer just interpreting texts but have the means to actively decide if and how to consume them. Ezra and Rowden similarly note that the development of the video cassette recorder, digital technology and the DVD, prompted a transformation in film cultures. They argue that technological shifts lay the grounds for transnational cinema by overcoming the processes of screening, censorship, rating and critique, previously confined to the national realm.<sup>641</sup> Websites like zamunda.net and the Swedish Pirate Bay are, thus, not countercultural or anarchist. They reflect clashes between buyers and sellers of cultural products.<sup>642</sup> Hence, the Bulgarian generation of the Internet were not rebels against the traditional copyright system; most of them simply existed in the transnational realm outside of it. The tension between Bulgarian ‘pirates’ and filmmakers, however, persists.

Predictably, soon after its legal online release, *Love.net* became part of the peer-to-peer catalogue. The perception of the uncontrolled web as threatening to (domestic) cinema was evident in the fast and uncompromising reaction to copyright infringements. Even though *Love.net* was largely publicly funded, the public was not allowed privileged access online for free. After just twenty-four hours of efforts on behalf of the producers the illegal torrents were deleted. Thanks to the unique code, embedded in each rented copy, the lawbreakers were identified and arrested. The offenders were expected to serve up to five years in prison and become subject to a hefty fine.<sup>643</sup> The non-stop monitoring of pirate websites continued with the

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<sup>638</sup> Patrick Vonderau. “Beyond Piracy: Understanding Digital Markets.” *Connected Viewing: Selling, Streaming, & Sharing Media in the Digital Age*. Ed. Jennifer Holt and Kevin Sanson. United Kingdom: Routledge, Jan. 2014. 99–123.

<sup>639</sup> Id., 101.

<sup>640</sup> Id., 111.

<sup>641</sup> Ezra and Rowden, 2006, 6.

<sup>642</sup> Vonderau, 2014, 114-115.

<sup>643</sup> There is no information on who the perpetrators were and what legal punishment they had to endure. Bearing in mind the vagueness of the Bulgarian intellectual property legislation, it is probable that they did

authors of *Love.net* insisting that Bulgarian citizens had to make a responsible and conscious choice whether to rent a film for a symbolic price or steal it.<sup>644</sup> This presents a rhetoric emphasising the value of national cinema and challenging transnational shifts prompted by new technology.

While Djevelekov's anti-piracy campaign raised publicity and awareness, its results were of dubious success. The film's encryption was ultimately overcome and it has since been uploaded to international torrent sites like Pirate Bay. Djevelekov's anti-piracy efforts served to further antagonise opinions. With the increased production of home-bred entertainment, Bulgarian producers and television channels invested in copyright infringement prevention measures amidst much public controversy.

In 2012 bTV launched an anti-piracy campaign entitled 'Fair Play' and featuring popular actor Assen Blatechki and hip-hop artist Krisko to point to the negative effects of copyright infringement. In the short videos Blatechki raids the fridge of a teenager who downloaded his films for free while Krisko steals the car of a fan who burned illegal CDs with his music. The main message conveyed was that quality content requires human, creative and financial resources and torrent websites rob Bulgarian cinema of its creative motivation.<sup>645</sup> What was interesting about this campaign was not the persistent emphasis on national cinema but the response that it evoked. Social media abounded with reactionary commentaries on the topic and blog posts that went viral. Most of the arguments focused on the difference between theft and content sharing. Niki Rusinovski, for instance, claimed that the Fair Play campaign led the audience astray. Theft, according to him, implied a change of ownership. Downloading music, films and TV series was an infringement against intellectual property, i.e., a wrongdoing, but not a crime. He accused bTV of launching the anti-piracy campaign as a PR stunt for the then newly established paid streaming

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not serve a five year sentence and the media announcement simply served to intimidate potential pirates and prevent further copyright infringements.

<sup>644</sup> "GDBOP predotvrati nezakonno razprostranenie na Love.net" ['Chief Directorate Combating Organized Crime Prevented Illegal Distribution of Love.net']. 29 Dec. 2011. 23 Sept. 2015. <<https://svejo.net/1366924-gdbop-predotvrati-nezakonno-razprostranenie-na-love-net>>.

<sup>645</sup> "Fairplay.bg - Taka e chestno" ["Fairplay.bg – That's Fair"]. n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://ng.btv.bg/fairplay/>>.

service Voyo.<sup>646</sup> On the other hand, Stoyan Stoychev Valchev objected to the very idea of Bulgarian cinematic originality. He compared Dimitar Mitovski's crime television series *Pod prikritie [Undercover]* (2011- ) with American crime drama *The Departed* (Martin Scorsese, 2006) which, in turn, was an adaptation of the Hong Kong crime-thriller *Mou gaan dou [Internal Affairs]* (Wai-Keung Lau/Alan Mak, 2002). Valchev wondered whether Mitovski had paid for obtaining the copyrights for a remake and he pointed to the multiple product positioning in contemporary Bulgarian cinema which ensured profits.<sup>647</sup> For vlogger Ivan Vankov real fair play implied a reverence towards individual viewers instead of the defence of multinational corporations like Central European Media Enterprises, owner of bTV Media Group.<sup>648</sup> The aggressive reactions against attempts to regulate the Bulgarian digital market signified an active engagement with the rhetoric surrounding cultural production and consumption. It remains difficult to determine whether this engagement would lead to changes either in legislation or viewing habits.



Figure 18. bTV's Fairplay campaign with actor Assen Blatechki.

What *Love.net*'s case ultimately reveals is the need for a new system of national film circulation, providing free access to consumers and financial incentive for its creators. Piracy, like film

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<sup>646</sup> Niki Rusinovski. *Za bTV, Krisko i zashto taka NE E chestno [On bTV, Krisko and Why This IS NOT Fair]*. BG Tatkо, n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://bgtatko.bg/18181/za-btv-krisko-i-zashto-taka-ne-e-chestno/>>.

<sup>647</sup> Stoyan Stoychev Valchev. *Fairplay v internet?!* [Fairplay on the Internet?!]. n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://avantaj1.blogspot.co.uk/2012/05/fairplay.html>>.

<sup>648</sup> Ivan Vankov. *Fairplay – da be da.... [Fairplay – Yeah, Right...]*. n.d. 23 Sept. 2015. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uKYCO13ppC4>>.

remakes and innovation through imitation, is a legitimate form of transnationalism. Anderson recommends accepting the development of film piracy and seeking innovative business models to profit from free content circulation. One such way is through offering free content to the majority of users, subsidised through the premium subscriptions of a select minority. Embedded advertisement presents another possible solution to the problem.<sup>649</sup> What becomes clear is that further discussion on the topic would prove beneficial. It must avoid radical generalisations about the web and its users, providing instead a balanced perspective on the particular cultural territory as well as realistic and practical expectations of the local market. As Morley and Robins explain, “[the] analysis of the processes of creation of new image spaces and cultural identities needs to be grounded in the analysis of everyday practices and domestic rituals through which contemporary electronic communities are constituted and reconstituted (at both micro and macro levels) on a daily basis”.<sup>650</sup> This suggests that a future discussion of digital copyrights in Bulgaria should involve film professionals as much as politicians, software developers, law practitioners, anthropologists and consumer groups.

## 4.6 Conclusion

My case-study of the Sofia International Film Festival indicates that the Bulgarian festival works in co-operation with pan-European and local institutions in a manner which contributes to practices of transnational film production, distribution and exhibition in the region. In virtue of their nature, festivals require constant replenishment of resources such as funding, films, volunteers and festival guests.<sup>651</sup> As my investigation shows, this does not compromise their interconnectedness and self-sustainability. On the contrary, festivals like SIFF present an alternative to mainstream cinema, securing geographical balance, appeal to different sensibilities and demographics as well as opportunities for business and artistic co-operation.<sup>652</sup> That is why I believe that with adequate institutional support the Sofia International Film Festival can grow to be a driving force behind the progress of the transnational Bulgarian film industry.

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<sup>649</sup> Chris Anderson. *Free: The Future of a Radical Price*. New York: Hyperion, 7 July 2009.

<sup>650</sup> Morley and Robins, 2006, 300.

<sup>651</sup> Fischer, 2013, 30.

<sup>652</sup> Ruoff, 2012, 5–6.

Initiatives like Streams: The European Online Film Festival provide promising alternatives to traditional distribution models but need further development and improvement. The Bulgarian edition received limited publicity and had little impact on the general audiovisual landscape, despite the large numbers of technologically-savvy local spectators. I speculate that this was the result of a lack of interactive marketing and a stronger network between the VoD platforms involved. As already discussed in the previous two chapters, technological and infrastructural developments pre-determined the business and aesthetic changes in the Bulgarian film industry. Hence, it is likely that the move to digital distribution will shape not only the festival circuit but the domestic audiovisual environment in the future.

Following the development of websites like netcinema.bg as well as that of informal networks of sharing proves essential in outlining the new directions in film distribution in Bulgaria. Like his Hollywood colleagues, Ilian Djevelekov is shown as favouring a top-down approach to film distribution. Centralised access and stricter regulation might certainly be considered important for the protection of a small national film culture. However, they undermine emerging social preferences. Cultural producers need to overcome the polarising issues relating to intellectual property rights and account for collaboration with audiences instead.<sup>653</sup> As Elana Shefrin argues, the Internet has grown into a symbol of “the political struggle between utopian visions of participatory democracy and prevailing hierarchies of economic power”.<sup>654</sup> This case-study presents a question that applies not just to Bulgaria but to the global film industry. Discussing and testing new business models for digital distribution is as much the responsibility of national institutions and international organisations as it is the privilege of users and consumers.

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<sup>653</sup> Elana Shefrin. “*Lord of the Rings, Star Wars, and Participatory Fandom: Mapping New Congruencies Between the Internet and Media Entertainment Culture.*” *Transnational Cinema, The Film Reader*. Ed. Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden. LONDON: Taylor & Francis, 13 Jan. 2006. 261–281, 89.

<sup>654</sup> Id., 91.

# **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

## **5.1 Bulgarian Cinema – Not Unique but Significant**

Bulgarian cinema is not unique. It developed as an attempt to re-instate the cultural significance of the country, following a long period of colonial rule; its economic sustainability suffers from the limitations of its small domestic market and linguistic specificity, and, in this way, it exemplifies the characteristics of other small national cinemas around the world. At the same time, it faces many of the challenges that European film encounters: renegotiating its relationship with Hollywood, balancing state with private funding, reconciling the tension between the art-house canon and what local audiences recognise and go to see as domestic cinema. Bulgarian film is constantly adapting to changing political, economic and technological realities, and aiming to extend its international connections.

The early film environment in Bulgaria was characterised by open trade and competition. The transnational business links and aspirations of the first cinema hall – the Modern Theatre – for instance, positioned the country at the centre of Balkan distribution and exhibition.<sup>655</sup> National legislation did not keep pace with this environment of entrepreneurship and transnational interaction, providing less than adequate regulation. The silver lining in this situation was a turn to international co-operation, as my case-study of Alexander Vazov's *Cairn* proved. Indeed, the format of co-production, combining local history and literary traditions with Hollywood and Western European aesthetics and marketing activities, has been utilised to counter the lack of state funding and market limitations in the contemporary period as well. Three of the most profitable recent Bulgarian features – *The World Is Big and Salvation Lurks around the Corner*, *Mission London* and *Love.Net* – displayed transnational plots, diversified financing, product placement, aggressive marketing and saturation booking which contributed to the recent resurrection in domestic cinema attendance. International partnerships and artistic borrowing are often shaped by political alliances and the necessity to compete with Hollywood. After Bulgaria's 2007 accession to the European Union, the free flow of capital and labour proved essential for

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<sup>655</sup> Yanakiev, 2008, 200–201.

revitalising domestic filmmaking practices. It also prompted a renegotiation of Bulgaria's link to European culture.

Anxieties about Bulgarian cultural belonging were, in fact, not new. Despite its history of Ottoman domination and Communist rule, Bulgaria acted as a bridge, facilitating both business interaction between and combining film traditions from the East and the West. As a result, films from different periods and with diverse topics (such as *The Bulgarian Is Gallant*, *The Goat Horn*, *I Want America* and *Mission London*) repeatedly questioned the place of Bulgaria in world history and culture. Isolation was neither a real possibility, nor an explicit objective. The structure of the nationalised Bulgarian film industry during Communism, for instance, closely resembled the organisation of the classical Hollywood studio system while artistic collaboration in Eastern European creative units could be viewed as the blueprint of current *auteur*-centred production companies in Western Europe.<sup>656</sup> The Bulgarian Poetic Realist movement and the detective cycle appropriated narrative and aesthetic ideas from, respectively, the Italian Neorealism and British/American spy movies.<sup>657</sup> By allowing the circulation of Western entertainment in Bulgaria, the Communist regime sought a difficult compromise between ideology and viewers' predilections which ultimately broadened the scope of local film culture.<sup>658</sup> Spectators are, similarly, at the centre of emerging trends in contemporary Bulgarian film distribution and exhibition.

Commercial imperatives necessarily exert an influence over the development of events like the Sofia International Film Festival. However, its main functions remain the enrichment of local cinephile culture and the promotion of cross-border collaboration. Initiatives like Sofia Meetings, Sofia Film Fest on the Road and SIFF for Students offer not only business but also audience-development opportunities. Film education proves crucial in a time of increased media and technological convergence. Online film festivals such as Streams possess the potential to disrupt the traditional model of film distribution in Bulgaria where companies like Alexandra hold the monopoly over theatrical circulation and exhibition. However, further investment in marketing and audience interaction is needed. While the current VoD market in Bulgaria and, indeed,

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<sup>656</sup> Imre, 2012, 13.

<sup>657</sup> Holloway, 1986, 84, 86; Thompson and Bordwell, 2009, 265–268.

<sup>658</sup> Yanakiev, 2003, 236–237.

Europe is severely underdeveloped and fragmented, examples like myFrenchFilmFestival signify a gradual increase in reach for online distribution. Dealing with proliferating piracy as well as with the moral and practical implications of copyright reinforcement proves an urgent matter for Bulgarian filmmakers. Strict control over intellectual property might not be the single, most sensible option, especially when audience dynamics and predilections are taken into account.

While not one of a kind, Bulgarian cinema, nonetheless, carries significance for film scholarship. First of all, it illustrates that inconsistent film legislation and scholarly bias are among the factors that hinder the development of an economically viable industry. Secondly, Bulgarian film reveals that the notion of ‘national cinema’ varies and develops, based on changing legal definitions throughout the centuries, domestic audience predilections and which films receive international exposure. Last but not least, it is important that Bulgarian cinema receives attention from the English-language academic community as its market and artistic potential gradually gain more visibility across the European Union. Overcoming notions of cultural isolationism, imposed or imagined, would strengthen not only transnational film collaboration but also European political alliances.

## **5.2 The Effect of Film Legislation and Scholarship – A Multiplicity of Discourses on National Cinema**

Film legislation has always had a positive structural impact on the Bulgarian film industry. It regulates the relationship between local filmmaking practices and global film production, distribution and exhibition. In addition, during the different periods, national law conceptualised Bulgarian cinema as, respectively, an educational tool, a propaganda apparatus and a combination of commercial and artistic imperatives, in line with European cultural and business values. However, the lack of transparency in the implementation of the film law during the tsarist, Communist and democratic periods has undermined the authority of national institutions and the sustainability of national cinema. An inconsistency between what films are subsidised and recognised as representing Bulgarian cinema, which of them become audience’s favourites and which are hailed by domestic critics creates a multiplicity of discourses on what constitutes national cinema. My analysis so far shows that contemporary productions with full or partial private financing tend to be more aware of possibilities for international co-production and more

willing to exploit established commercial and festival distribution networks. In contrast, films that are fully state subsidised are often directed by filmmakers who came to prominence during Communism and fail to realise the significance of film marketing and distribution. Contemporary Bulgarian viewers tend to prefer the former pictures to the latter, unlike domestic critics and scholars. This presents a problem for conceptualising Bulgarian film.

At the time of completing this thesis, Bulgarian cinema is still predominantly examined as a self-contained entity with limited foresight for transnational parallels or for the implications of digital advancements. However, there is evidence for theoretical shifts in film scholarship. My ultimate aim is to facilitate international academic dialogue, raise curiosity about new Bulgarian pictures abroad and encourage future cross-border collaboration in the field.

Bulgarian film scholarship is still preoccupied with isolation and self-containment. During a 2015 conference, celebrating 100 years of the creation of the first Bulgarian picture, *The Bulgarian Is Gallant*, Bojidar Manov discussed Bulgarian cinema in the context of the “film Schengen” – the idea that certain countries are disadvantages both in terms of free travel and in terms of international film co-productions. He argued that Bulgarian films generally find it difficult to travel abroad because, unlike the Romanian New Wave, Bulgarian cinema lacks an identifiable style and funding is still arbitrarily distributed. He mentioned in passing co-productions like *Letter to America*, *TILT* and *The World Is Big...* which, in his opinion, proved an exception to the rule. When asked how he defined film success, Manov clarified he meant success on the international, implying art-house, circuit.<sup>659</sup> Manov is one of the most influential professors of film studies in the country, who built his career during Communism. It could easily be the case that he views Bulgarian cinema through the prism of nostalgia for the Communist past when the most thought-provocative Bulgarian pictures were the ones distributed abroad (and often censored at home). Regardless of the reasons behind it, it becomes evident that Bulgarian academics are still failing to explore popular cinema and the implications of domestic box office success. An implicit problem stems out of such an omission – what is defined as national cinema and who has the authority to determine it?

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<sup>659</sup> Bojidar Manov. “Nie i filmoviyat Schengen” [“We and the Film Schengen”]. *Balgarsko kino – 100 godini sled nachaloto* [Bulgarian Cinema – 100 Years After the Beginning]. Sofia: n.p., 15 Apr. 2015.

Established film studies professor Vera Naydenova claimed contemporary films should feature symbolic visual carriers of Bulgarian culture, like traditional wood carving, recognisable paintings and scenes from the national folklore. She complained that national television funding had privileged crime action series *Undercover* over the adaptation of historical novel *Zhelezniyat svetilnik* [*The Iron Candlestick*].<sup>660</sup> Naydenova's argument favoured a very particular kind of filmmaking, leaving out the diversity of forms and genres that actually constitute Bulgarian cinema. Fellow film scholar Mariyana Lazarova similarly misrepresented the development of copyright legislation by omitting any of the challenges faced by copyright holders in the digital world. Instead, her presentation addressed generic legal positions before the rise of the Internet.<sup>661</sup> This selective representation of the Bulgarian audiovisual environment creates a false consciousness among academics, who also often serve as members of the artistic committee, evaluating projects and distributing funding through the National Film Centre.

Encouragingly, a new generation of researchers attempts to overcome the disconnection between scholarship and industry practice in Bulgaria. Aleksandar Donev addresses problems in domestic and European film distribution. He argues for continuity on institutional level and international grouping of films with similar themes to be sold as pre-packaged deals.<sup>662</sup> Ivo Draganov examines possible models for Bulgarian film distribution. He recommends a network of university cinemas as an alternative to Bulgarian multiplexes.<sup>663</sup> Teodora Doncheva highlights the independent sources of financing of new Bulgarian cinema and discusses the viability of product positioning, personal loans and advertising contracts.<sup>664</sup> These alternative research voices present valuable

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<sup>660</sup> Vera Naydenova. "Kulturniyat potentsial na balgarskoto igralno kino – neizpolzvani rezervi" ["The Cultural Potential of Bulgarian Feature Cinema – an Unutilised Reserves"]. *Balgarsko kino – 100 godini sled nachaloto* [Bulgarian Cinema – 100 Years After the Beginning]. Sofia: n.p., 15 Apr. 2015.

<sup>661</sup> Mariyana Lazarova. "Aktualni protsesi v kinoto – avtorskite prava v audioviziyata" ["Current Processes in Cinema – Copyright in the Audiovisual"]. *Balgarsko kino – 100 godini sled nachaloto* [Bulgarian Cinema – 100 Years After the Beginning]. Sofia: n.p., 15 Apr. 2015.

<sup>662</sup> Aleksandar Donev. "Priznati po sveta, nepriznati u nas" ["Acknowledged Abroad, Unacknowledged at Home"]. *Balgarsko kino – 100 godini sled nachaloto* [Bulgarian Cinema – 100 Years After the Beginning]. Sofia: n.p., 15 Apr. 2015.

<sup>663</sup> Ivo Draganov. "Vazmozhni modeli za razprostranenieto v balgarskoto igralno kino" ["Possible Models for Film Distribution in Bulgarian Feature Cinema"]. *Balgarsko kino – 100 godini sled nachaloto* [Bulgarian Cinema – 100 Years After the Beginning]. Sofia: n.p., 15 Apr. 2015.

<sup>664</sup> Teodora Doncheva. "Nezavisimi iztochnitsi za finansirane na novi balgarski filmi" ["Independent Sources of Financing New Bulgarian Films"]. *Balgarsko kino – 100 godini sled nachaloto* [Bulgarian Cinema – 100 Years After the Beginning]. Sofia: n.p., 15 Apr. 2015.

contributions to the academic field. Together with my thesis, they should inform future government policies and cultural agendas. While this might not overcome disagreements about what should constitute Bulgarian cinema, it would at least raise awareness about the multiplicity of interpretations currently at play.

### **5.3 The Value of the Bulgarian Market: Important Fields for Further Study**

Bulgarian cinema is significant to study because it forms part of a recent resurrection in Central and Eastern European film attendance during a time when Western Europe is facing a downward trend. According to the European Audiovisual Observatory, in 2013 and 2014, two thirds of EU markets experienced a decline in cinema attendance, while admission levels increased in only nine out of the twenty-eight EU territories.<sup>665</sup> In contrast with general attendance figures in the EU, in 2013 Bulgarian cinema attendance levels recorded a significant increase, rising from 4.1 million admissions in the previous year to 4.79 million. More 3D releases, with their higher ticket prices, accounted for an increase of 17.2 per cent in annual takings. While in 2012 the Bulgarian film market accumulated 17.4 million euro, in 2013 the amount was 20.3 million.<sup>666</sup> The scale of the film market is, admittedly, small compared to countries like Russia, Hungary, France or Germany.<sup>667</sup> However, analysing the reasons behind Bulgaria's increased attendance figures could benefit European markets in decline. I suggest that renewed interest in cinema was partially due to the increased media exposure domestic productions received. Bulgarian films employed interactive and engaging marketing strategies to reach their potential audiences. With the proliferation of multiplex chains, film festivals and travelling cinemas, film-going became a fashionable activity. The cinema experience in Bulgaria was re-invented in line with shifts in cultural and consumer mentalities. However, the lack of transparent and consistent state support possibly jeopardised sustainable growth.

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<sup>665</sup> European Audiovisual Observatory. *Strong performance in France and trend reversal in Spain slightly boost cinema attendance*. Cineropa - the best of european cinema, 12 Feb. 2015. 24 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.cineropa.org/dd.aspx?t=dossier&l=en&did=286875&tid=1967>>.

<sup>666</sup> Stefan Dobroiu. *Annual box-office takings rose by 16.6% in Bulgaria in 2013*. Cineropa - the best of european cinema, 7 Mar. 2014. 24 Sept. 2015. <<http://cineropa.org/nw.aspx?t=newsdetail&l=en&did=253217>>.

<sup>667</sup> European Audiovisual Observatory, 2015.

As already discussed, 2010 was one of the most successful years in domestic filmmaking since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Not only *Mission London* attracted close to 400,000 viewers, smaller films like *HDSP: Hunting Down Small Predators* also gained audience attention with a modest attendance of 16,000 for just three months. This set new standards for the box office performance of domestic features. Any Bulgarian film with less than 5,000 viewers was afterwards considered a failure.<sup>668</sup> The aggressive marketing and box office performance of mainstream films secured more visibility for festival premieres as well. In 2010 The Sofia International Film Festival premiered Kiran Kolarov's *Ako nyakoi te obicha... [If Somebody Loves You, 2010]*, Krassimir Krumov's *Svetoto semeystvo [The Saint Family, 2010]* and Stanimir Trifonov's *Staklenata reka [The Glass River, 2010]*.<sup>669</sup> Despite such promising developments, 2011 started with controversy involving new government budget cuts. The Ministry of Culture introduced a three-year budget plan for 2011-2013, which signified a decrease in film subsidy from 17,700,000 leva to 9,900,000 leva (or by approximately 49.5 per cent). In direct violation of the Film Industry Act of 2003, the Ministry of Culture did not include the development of cinema in its request for extra target subsidy.<sup>670</sup> The ten Bulgarian premieres scheduled for 2011 still proved successful.<sup>671</sup> However, the change in funding affected the domestic film output in the subsequent years.

As a result, popular cinema seems to have lost its momentum. The most successful home produced film for 2013 was the independent *Vila Roza [Roseville]* (Martin Makariev, 2013) which came 83<sup>rd</sup> in the yearly domestic box office with an income of 64,353 euro and around 10,000 viewers.<sup>672</sup> A co-production between Camera and Dream Team, the picture was the first Bulgarian attempt at the horror/thriller genre, based on a true story about an unresolved mass murder in a

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<sup>668</sup> "Interview with Aleksandar Yanakiev." Kultura newspaper, 14 Jan. 2011. 24 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.kultura.bg/bg/article/view/17865>>.

<sup>669</sup> *Naj-novite bulgarski filmi s primiera na SFF 2010 [The Newest Bulgarian Films Premiere at SIFF 2010]*. n.d. 24 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.club.bg/kino-i-televizia/286537-naj-novite-byulgarski-filmi-s-premiera-na-sff-2010.html>>.

<sup>670</sup> Diana Andreeva. *Za nevolite na bulgarskoto kino, opleteni v byudjetna protsedura 2011 [About the Hardships of Bulgarian Cinema, Entangled in Budget Procedure 2011]*. n.d. 24 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.filmmakersbg.org/Nevoli-kino-bg.htm>>.

<sup>671</sup> See Table 2 in Appendix B.

<sup>672</sup> "2013 Bulgaria Yearly Box Office Results." n.d. 24 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.boxofficemojo.com/intl/bulgaria/yearly/?yr=2013&p=.htm>>.

mountain villa.<sup>673</sup> Most successful for 2014 was the independent romantic comedy/drama *Zhivi legendi [Living Legends]* (Niki Iliev, 2014), coming 15<sup>th</sup> in the yearly box office and grossing 408,979 euro.<sup>674</sup> This was the second independent feature Niki Iliev directed. His debut romantic comedy *Chuzhdensat [The Foreigner]* (2012) attracted 52 916 viewers.<sup>675</sup> Action comedy *Korpus za barzo reagirane [Rapid Reaction Corps]* (Stanislav Donchev, 2012) and its sequel *Korpus za barzo reagirane: Yadrena zaplaha [Rapid Reaction Corps 2: Nuclear Threat]* (Stanislav Donchev, 2014) were commissioned by distributor company Pro Films and attracted 68,960 domestic viewers in total.<sup>676</sup> *Pistolet, kufar i tri smurdyashti varela [Pistol, Suitcase and Three Stinking Barrels]* (Georgi Kostov, 2012), a gangster comedy, running a very fine line between overt plagiarism and a transnational remake of Guy Ritchie's *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* (1998), was also independent and attracted close to 46,000.<sup>677</sup> What becomes evident is a tendency to complete films without state financial backing which leads to a decent but unimpressive box office performance.

Limited state financing affected popular feature-making in Bulgaria, causing reduced advertising budget and difficult distribution deals. Mariana Parvanova speculates that the small budgets of recent Bulgarian popular films (between 400,000 and 600,000 leva) precluded them from fulfilling their commercial potential.<sup>678</sup> Without the opportunity to saturate public space with advertising material about their release, the abovementioned films failed to turn into the cultural events that *Mission London* and *Love.net* had become. In addition, premiere dates were poorly co-ordinated. *Roseville* was released for distribution on 20<sup>th</sup> December, thus, directly competing with multinational Christmas blockbusters that year - *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug* (Peter

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<sup>673</sup> Tsvetelina Sheneva. "Elena Petrova ubedila Svetlin Neinski da produtsira balgarski psiho-trilar" ["Elena Petrova Convinced Svetlin Neinski to Produce a Bulgarian Psychological Thriller"]. *24 Chasa Newspaper*. n.d. 24 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.24chasa.bg/Article.asp?ArticleId=2855821>>.

<sup>674</sup> "2013 Bulgaria Yearly Box Office Results." n.d. 24 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.boxofficemojo.com/intl/bulgaria/yearly/?yr=2013&p=.htm>>.

<sup>675</sup> Mariana Parvanova. *2012 sprya novata valna BG kino* [2012 Stopped the New Wave of BG Cinema]. n.d. 24 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.monitor.bg/article?id=365793>>.

<sup>676</sup> Genoveva Dimitrova. "Vkusovi razminavaniya" ["Taste Differences"]. *Kultura Newspaper*. 19 Oct. 2012. 24 Sept. 2015. <[http://www.kultura.bg/bg/print\\_article/view/20197](http://www.kultura.bg/bg/print_article/view/20197)>.

<sup>677</sup> Anita Dimitrova. *Publikata razlyubi bulgarskoto kino* [The Audience Fell Out of Love with Bulgarian Cinema]. SEGA Online, n.d. 24 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.segabg.com/article.php?id=631636>>.

<sup>678</sup> Mariana Parvanova. *BG kinoto 2013 otstapi dve krachki nazad* [BG Cinema 2013 Goes Two Steps Back]. n.d. 24 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.monitor.bg/article?id=412735>>; "Zhivi legendi s podkreptata na UniCredit Bulbank razbi konkurentsiyata i prevze bulgarskiya boks ofis" ["Living Legends with the Support of UniCredit Bulbank Killed Competition and Took Over the Bulgarian Box Office"]. n.d. 24 Sept. 2015. <[http://www.unicreditbulbank.bg/bg/Media\\_Centre/News/2014/BG\\_NEWS\\_12\\_02\\_2014\\_L](http://www.unicreditbulbank.bg/bg/Media_Centre/News/2014/BG_NEWS_12_02_2014_L)>.

Jackson, 2013), *Frozen* (Chris Buck/Jennifer Lee, 2013) and *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* (Francis Lawrence, 2013). This positioned the film in unequal competition with big-budget Hollywood productions and, understandably, contributed to its poor box office performance.

Still, there is continuity in terms of genre preference and star presence exhibited in contemporary Bulgarian popular features. New domestic films function within clearly delineated film categories like the thriller, the comedy and the action movie. This not only provides genre diversity but also allows for marketing tailored to the format and topic of the picture. Capitalising on the presence of local and international popular actors, despite their modest budgets, illustrates a lesson contemporary films learned from previous popular features. *Roseville* features domestic TV series favourites Kalin Vrachanski and Elena Petrova as well as American *Baywatch* (1989-2001) actor David Chokachi. *The Foreigner* included cameos by Catherine Gautier and Christopher Lambert. *Rapid Reaction Corps* included well-known local actors and socialites. *Pistol, Suitcase and Three Stinking Barrels* capitalised on the presence of Assen Blatechki, maintaining a persona of an infamous bad boy and a contemporary domestic sex symbol.<sup>679</sup> So, independent popular feature filmmaking still catered to domestic tastes, even if on a small budget.

Bulgarian popular film aspires to replicate recent successful European productions. However, it currently lacks extensive international distribution. In 2014 locally produced European comedy attracted spectators at home and abroad. The most successful film of any nationality in present-day Sweden is *Hundraåringen som klev ut genom fönstret och försvann* [The 100-Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out Of the Window and Disappeared] (Felix Herngren, 2013). An adaptation of Jonas Jonasson's bestselling novel of the same name, the film appealed to audiences across the world, including Germany, Spain, South Korea, France and Italy. It grossed 44,495,082 euro in the international box office.<sup>680</sup> French comedy *Qu'est-ce qu'on a fait au Bon Dieu? [Serial (Bad) Weddings]* (Philippe de Chauveron, 2014) recently became the second-most popular film of the year in Germany, outperforming Matthias Schweighöfer and Torsten Künstler's locally produced

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<sup>679</sup> "Assen Blatechki – NEtraditsionniyat sekssimvol" ["Assen Blatechki – A NON-traditional Sex-Symbol"]. Novini - Rozali.com, n.d. 24 Sept. 2015. <<http://novini.rozali.com/zvezdi/p7094.html>>.

<sup>680</sup> Louise Tutt. *European box office: Laugh track*. 5 Dec. 2014. 24 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.screendaily.com/features/european-box-office-laugh-track/5080691.article>>; "The 100-Year Old Man Who Climbed Out the Window and Disappeared (2015) - International Box Office Results." n.d. 24 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=intl&id=100yearoldman.htm>>.

romantic comedy *Vaterfreuden [Joy of Fatherhood]* (2014), Germany's top-grossing home-grown film to date.<sup>681</sup> This shows an increased preference for genre entertainment but also the importance of transnational collaboration for raising a big budget and appealing to an international audience. Notably, *The 100-Year-Old Man...* was a co-production between Sweden, Russia, the UK, France and Spain.

A recent Bulgarian experiment in co-production with Hollywood secured exposure on international markets but with little emphasis on the Bulgarian participation in the project. *Kod cherveno [Code Red]* (Valeri Milev, 2013) features Bulgarian director, co-producer and actors. However, the zombie apocalypse picture is listed on IMDb as American and, unsurprisingly so, since it bears close resemblance to American horror drama series *The Walking Dead* (2010- ).<sup>682</sup> In an interview film critic and historian Yanakiev proudly noted that *Code Red* had been sold for distribution in 130 territories which signified a “[Bulgarian] breakthrough on foreign markets”.<sup>683</sup> However, evidence shows that the picture received distribution only in Bulgaria, Kuwait and South Korea. It was released on DVD in Japan, the Netherlands, the US and Germany.<sup>684</sup> There is limited information on the film’s performance abroad and little evidence to suggest that it contributed to the international visibility of Bulgarian popular cinema. It is likely that *Code Red* was an American production, seeking to capitalise on local filmmaking incentives by employing a Bulgarian director.

A setback for film production in Bulgaria presents the 2015 bankruptcy of Dimitar Mitovski’s company Camera. Having mortgaged its property and equipment as well as the copyrights for its production (including *Mission London* and *Avé*) and amidst rumours of delaying the payment of lead actors, Mitovski transferred the ownership to his partner Dimitar Gochev and is currently attempting to start over with Camera Entertainment. He managed to preserve the rights of the successful television series *Undercover*. It remains unclear what caused the poor financial

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<sup>681</sup> Tutt, 2014.

<sup>682</sup> “Parviyat balgarski ekshan-zombi film” [“The First Bulgarian Zombie-Action Film”]. cinefish.bg, n.d. 24 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.cinefish.bg/Kod-cherveno-Code-Red-id34041.html>>.

<sup>683</sup> Elena Kirilova. *Subsidiiite sa grabnakat na balgaskoto kino, tvardi ekspert* [Subsidies Are the Spine of Bulgarian Cinema, Says an Expert]. Investor.bg, 30 Dec. 2014. 24 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.investor.bg/zoom/355/a/subsidiiite-sa-grybnakyt-na-bylgarskoto-kino-tvyrdi-ekspert-186475/>>.

<sup>684</sup> *Code Red* (2013). n.d. 24 Sept. 2015. <[http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2119404/releaseinfo?ref\\_=tt\\_dt\\_dt#akas](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2119404/releaseinfo?ref_=tt_dt_dt#akas)>.

situation of Camera and whether this would seriously affect Bulgarian feature film production.<sup>685</sup> Nonetheless, Mitovski's bankruptcy undermines the idea that Bulgarian film producers have finally obtained the skillset to secure sustainable industrial development in the future.

At the same time, more cultural institutions expressed an interest in co-production activities. In 2015 the Bulgarian National Palace of Culture, the largest multifunctional conference and exhibition centre in South-East Europe, also owned by the state, announced its intentions to invest in the production of feature and documentary films. This brought a shift from the explicitly exhibition-oriented character of the institution which had previously been involved in local film festivals.<sup>686</sup> It could be argued that popular filmmaking is an increasingly attractive venture for local businesses but only time will show whether this can lead to a real diversification of financing.

Festival films continue to represent Bulgarian cinema on the international art-house circuit. *Viktoria* (Maya Vitkova, 2014) is a fantasy tale of a girl born without an umbilical cord during Communism. She is showered with gifts and attention until the disintegration of the Eastern Bloc. The film investigates inter-generational conflict and adaptation to the new political regime. It premiered at the 2014 Sundance Film Festival where it received the World Cinema Grand Jury Prize. As a result, the film secured further festival distribution in the US. Young and resourceful, Maya Vitkova wrote, produced and directed *Viktoria* through her own production company Viktoria Films (Bulgaria) and Anca and Cristi Puiu's Mandragora (Romania). International sales are also being handled by Viktoria World Sales and Distribution.<sup>687</sup> Thanks to Vitkova's sustained efforts and business know-how, *Viktoria* travelled successfully to festivals in Central and Eastern Europe, the UK, Hong Kong and South Korea.<sup>688</sup> Despite the international recognition that the film obtained, the Bulgarian National Council on Cinema nominated veteran filmmaker Ivan Nichev's *Balgarska rapsodiya* [Bulgarian Rhapsody] for the 2015 best foreign-language Oscar. Nichev was a

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<sup>685</sup> "Korabat potava, Mitovski zapochva 'na chisto'" ["The Ship is Sinking, Mitovski Starts Afresh"]. Ploshtad Slaveikov, 30 Mar. 2015. 24 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.ploshtadslaveikov.com/korabat-potava-mitovski-zapochva-na/>>.

<sup>686</sup> "NDK shte produtsira i filmi" ["NPC Will Also Produce Films"]. n.d. 24 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.novini.bg/news/>>.

<sup>687</sup> Carlos Aguilar. *Bulgarian Sundance Gem "Viktoria" Set for U.S. Release Via Big World Pictures*. SydneysBuzz, 28 May 2015. 24 Sept. 2015. <<http://blogs.indiewire.com/sydneylevine/bulgarian-sundance-gem-viktoria-set-for-us-release-via-big-world-pictures-20150528>>.

<sup>688</sup> *Viktoria* (2014). n.d. 24 Sept. 2015. <[http://www.imdb.com/title/tt3400872/releaseinfo?ref\\_=tt\\_dt\\_dt](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt3400872/releaseinfo?ref_=tt_dt_dt)>.

member of the committee which made the decision even though, allegedly, he did not participate in the anonymous vote. His film, part of a trilogy on the plight of Bulgarian Jews during World War Two, received distribution in Bulgaria and Israel. *The Hollywood Reporter* described it as “[a] solidly middlebrow period piece with an old-fashioned moral message”.<sup>689</sup> Amidst controversy and accusations of conflict of interests, the division between new and old Bulgarian filmmakers became palpable again.<sup>690</sup> Ironically, *Viktoria* illustrated inter-generational conflict and clash of values both on- and off-screen. It shows the persistent gap between film generations is still relevant to Bulgarian filmmaking.

Another debut festival feature, *Urok [The Lesson]* (Kristina Grozeva/Petar Valchanov, 2014), attracted international attention. Winning awards across Europe, Asia, the US and Canada, the film also secured distribution deals in Brazil and France.<sup>691</sup> It tells a universal story of a school teacher, set on uncovering a petty class thief until she finds herself in serious financial difficulty. A Bulgarian-Greek co-production, *The Lesson* benefitted from the LVT Post-Production Prize at Sofia Meetings 2013, amounting to 5,000 euro in post-production services.<sup>692</sup> This signifies that the Sofia International Film Festival continues to play an important role for Bulgarian film business, providing exposure to additional financing and international partnerships. Successful initiatives like Sofia Film Fest on the Road inspired further development in alternative film distribution in Bulgaria.

In 2012 the Bulgarian National Television started a travelling cinema project with open-air screenings during the summer. Free to attend and featuring famous Bulgarian films from all historical periods, it is now in its fourth edition. The event is inclusive and attempts to reach audiences across the country. By 2015 it had featured 99 screenings, gathering more than 70,000

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<sup>689</sup> Stephen Dalton. “Bulgarian Rhapsody”: Film Review. *The Hollywood Reporter*, n.d. 24 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/bulgarian-rhapsody-film-review-759977>>.

<sup>690</sup> Nick Holdsworth. *Bulgaria’s Oscar Nominee Criticized for Director’s Role on Selection Committee*. *The Hollywood Reporter*, n.d. 24 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/bulgarias-oscar-nominee-criticized-directors-730973>>.

<sup>691</sup> “Premiera na filma *Urok*” [“A Premiere for the Film *The Lesson*”]. Bulgarian National Television, n.d. 24 Sept. 2015. <<http://bnt.bg/news/kultura/premiera-na-filma-urok>>.

<sup>692</sup> “Balgarskiyat film *Urok* s nagrada ot festivala v San Sebastian” [“The Bulgarian Film *The Lesson* with an Award from the San Sebastian Festival”]. Cross.bg, n.d. 24 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.cross.bg/sebastian-filmov-festival-1432316.html#axzz3g4vQyW2y>>.

viewers in total.<sup>693</sup> Improvised drive-in cinemas are also gaining recognition. In 2015 a drive-in cinema initiative travelled to the twenty-four biggest towns in the country, featuring a programme of contemporary Bulgarian, European and American films.<sup>694</sup> Thus, initiatives like open-air screenings and travelling cinema present opportunities for future development in distribution. If audience interest persists, they would prove a viable opportunity for challenging the domination of the multiplex.

The other alternative for Bulgarian film distribution remains the Internet. The video-on-demand website netcinema.bg is in the process of digitising older pictures and building a catalogue of Bulgarian films, organised by topics and genres. No additional investment has been made in Streams – The European Online Film Festival, because it remains difficult to secure long-term programming and sponsorship for the online event. However, netcinema.bg benefits from a close partnership with the Bulgarian National Film Centre, which shares its catalogue with the website. The focus on film heritage and the addition of high definition services provided extra media coverage. *Love.net* has so far been the most successful film, uploaded on the platform. As a result of its extensive marketing, the picture accumulated close to 14,000 views. Without appropriate advertisement, the rest of the titles in the catalogue gain significantly less attention. With Day-and-Date release pending as a future development, it would prove intriguing to follow the future development of netcinema.bg and evaluate whether it causes shifts in the future of mainstream and festival cinema.<sup>695</sup>

This short update on the development of the Bulgarian film industry signifies a vibrant market, often in conflict with state legislation and regulation. Studying Bulgarian cinema is important in this context, because it illustrates the challenges a small national cinema needs to overcome but also the productiveness of seeking alternative models of sustainable development. In my thesis I chose to focus on the Bulgarian feature film industry, including popular and festival productions.

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<sup>693</sup> “Patuvashko lyatno kino s BNT – chetvarti sezon” [“Travelling Summer Cinema with BNT – Fourth Season”]. Bulgarian National Television, n.d. 24 Sept. 2015. <<http://bnt.bg/about-bnt/liatno-kino/patuvashko-lyatno-kino-s-bnt-1-chetva-rti-sezon>>.

<sup>694</sup> “Patuvashko avtokino v 24 oblastni grada na Bulgaria” [“A Travelling Drive-In Cinema in 24 Townships in Bulgaria”]. Peika.bg, n.d. 24 Sept. 2015.

<[http://www.peika.bg/Patuvashko\\_avtokino\\_v\\_24\\_oblastni\\_grada\\_na\\_Balgariya\\_l.e\\_i.94354.html](http://www.peika.bg/Patuvashko_avtokino_v_24_oblastni_grada_na_Balgariya_l.e_i.94354.html)>.

<sup>695</sup> “Netcinema – alternative na piratstvoto s HD kachestvo” [“Netcinema – an Alternative to Piracy with HD Quality”]. n.d. 24 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.dnesplus.bg/News.aspx?n=702803>>.

However, Bulgarian cinema includes various forms and genres. Fruitful soil for future exploration could prove animation, documentary and television. Subject to the same forces that shape popular and festival film in Bulgaria, in the last decade short animations, feature-length documentaries and mainstream television series receive increasing exposure both at home and abroad. It would be intriguing to trace how they fit in the context of a transnational Bulgarian film industry and what their role is in interrogating questions of identity and belonging.

Compote Collective is one of the leading animation production companies in Bulgaria. Its independent co-production with Croatia and Germany *Father* (Ivan Bogdanov et al., 2012) proves one of the most critically acclaimed Bulgarian animations in recent years, with awards from international festivals across Europe, Asia and America.<sup>696</sup> A completely different approach was adopted by the creators of the animated web series *Balgar* (2008- ), who capitalised on free online distribution instead of on festival circulation. The following 3D feature-length animation *Balgar: Filmat [Balgar: The Movie]* (Nedelcho Bogdanov, 2014) was independently made and secured distribution with Pro Films, based on the five million views that the series had previously accumulated online.<sup>697</sup> The two animations address very different issues. *Father* explores universal family values and childhood trauma while *Balgar* gains its comic appeal from stereotypical representations of simple-minded, profit-driven contemporary Bulgarians. They would prove interesting case-studies to compare with Bulgarian animated films from previous periods. Todor Dinov, a newspaper caricaturist, had made the first Bulgarian cartoon *Yunak Marko [Brave Marko]* (1955) in the vein of native folk traditions. Dinov's visual explorations, mixing Disney-style animation with Bulgarian folk traditions in style and content had been praised at both national and international levels for its display of "dry wit, a graceful line, warm characters, and a surprise twist to the conventional story".<sup>698</sup> Bulgaria has a long tradition in animated cinema and an inclusive approach in film studies should recognise that. A potential exploration of festival and online distribution of Bulgarian animated film would fill in a niche in recent film scholarship. Nadezhda Marinchevska's *Balgarsko animatsionno kino 1915-1995 [Bulgarian Animation Cinema 1915-1995]* (2001) is perhaps the only text on Bulgarian animation

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<sup>696</sup> "FATHER." *Compote Collective*. n.d. 24 Sept. 2015. <[http://www.compote-collective.com/project/152/father@read\\_more-1.htm](http://www.compote-collective.com/project/152/father@read_more-1.htm)>.

<sup>697</sup> "Parviyat balgarski film na 3D skoro v kinata!" ["The First Bulgarian 3D Film Soon in Cinemas!] *ProFilms*. n.d. 24 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.profilms.bg/?b=12&nID=18>>.

<sup>698</sup> Holloway, 1986, 136.

and, with the rise of digital technologies and the proliferation of distribution channels, it is in dire need of updating.

Production collective Agitprop draws attention to the new Bulgarian documentary. It is responsible for the creation and successful dissemination of pictures like *Georgi i peperudite* [*Georgi and the Butterflies*] (Andrey Paounov, 2004), *Koridor №8* [*Corridor No. 8*] (Boris Despodov, 2008), *Momcheto, koeto beshe tsar* [*The Boy Who Was a King*] (Andrey Paounov, 2011) and *Dad Made Dirty Movies* (Jordan Todorov, 2012). Most of the company's projects are in co-production with foreign TV broadcasters such as: Channel 4, Sundance Channel, ARTE, RAI and many others.<sup>699</sup> Thus, Agitprop's projects suggest transnational connections and an awareness of the commercial imperatives, dictating documentary filmmaking as well. It would be useful to compare their films to documentaries from the transition to democracy like Adela Peeva's *Chiya e tazi pesen?* [*Whose Is This Song?*] (2003), preoccupied with Balkan identity and acclaimed at international festivals. In addition to their fixation with Bulgarian, Balkan, European and world cultural heritage, domestic documentaries are valuable to film scholarship because of their economic resilience. Having a small average budget and working closely with television channels, Bulgarian documentary film was much more adapt at dealing with changing financing budgets and distribution realities than feature film. As a result, there was no palpable crisis in documentary filmmaking in the 1990s.<sup>700</sup> Thus, it would be useful to study the industrial flexibility of the format and its pre-mutations in the new century in order to make recommendations for feature film sustainability.

Parallel to the revival in popular cinema, domestic television series proliferated. BNT commissioned the crime action *Undercover* (2011- ), comedy series *Angliiskiyat sased* [*The English Neighbour*] (2010-2011) and political thriller *Chetvartata vlast* [*The Fourth Estate*] (2013). bTV featured family drama *Staklen Dom* [*Glass Home*] (2010-2012), comedies *Stolichani v poveche* [*Sofia Residents in Excess*] (2011- ) and *Domashen arest* [*House Arrest*] (2011-2013), as well as musical romantic youth drama *Revolutsiya Z* [*Revolution Z*] (2012-2014). Nova Television invested in a soap opera – *Zabranena lyubov* [*Forbidden Love*] (2008-2011), a sitcom – *Etazhna sobstvenost* [*Condominium*] (2011-2013) and a crime drama – *Otplata* [*Payback*] (2012). The 2010s brought a

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<sup>699</sup> "The Company." *Agitprop*. n.d. 24 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.agitprop.bg/#/info/company>>.

<sup>700</sup> Holloway and Iordanova, 2006.

remarkable change in Bulgarian television programming, which now features much more domestically produced entertainment. Bulgarian audiences enjoy a variety of domestic television genres and it would be intriguing to investigate whether that influences their cinema predilections as well. Importantly, BNT's *Undercover* was successfully distributed abroad, after its rights were sold to New Films International, an American production and sales company, specialising in the production, acquisition, and worldwide licensing of theatrical feature films and television series of high production quality.<sup>701</sup> *Undercover* secured exhibition on Fox Crime for Russia and the Balkans. It also gained a following in Italy, after being featured on Premium Action.<sup>702</sup> Future research could investigate what factors influence the success and popularity of exported Bulgarian television series.

Debate surrounding Bulgarian cinema is extensive and multifaceted even at local level. Bulgarian film history needs to be reconceptualised in the aftermath of post-Communist restructuring and ideological changes. Popular filmmaking should receive theoretical and institutional attention. Improvements in legislation, film financing, marketing and distribution are still pending. In spite of a promising revival in the last decade, issues surrounding local film distribution and exhibition persist. Alternative solutions like digital and festival distribution deserve further testing and investment. I hope that my initial findings motivate more English-language scholarship in the area of Bulgarian cinema as well as more Bulgarian writing on the industrial context in which film is created, circulated and consumed in the country.

In the meantime, the once cold and unhospitable Iskra cinema in Kazanlak has re-opened (even if only on weekends) now with air-conditioning. Together with the full-time functioning small multiplex Latona Cinema, it seeks to implement a more interactive approach with its predominantly pre-teen and teenage audience by posting updates about future screenings on its official Facebook page.<sup>703</sup> Iskra and Latona have already gained a substantial following on social media with cinema-goers posting pictures, asking questions and sharing content. The availability

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<sup>701</sup> "About us." *New Films International*. n.d. 24 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.newfilmsint.com/about-us/>>.

<sup>702</sup> "Pod prikratie veche tragna i v Italia" ["*Undercover* Airs in Italy"] 24 Chasa Newspaper. 17 Sept. 2015. 24 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.24chasa.bg/Article.asp?ArticleId=4990491>>.

<sup>703</sup> "Kino Iskra - Kazanlak - Movie Theatre." n.d. 24 Sept. 2015. <<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Кино-Искра/123474151134176>>; "Latona Cinema/gr. Kazanlak." n.d. 24 Sept. 2015. <<https://www.facebook.com/latonakaznluk>>.

of cinema theatres seems to have reinvigorated cultural life in Kazanlak. The shift to private investment in film exhibition in small Bulgarian towns signifies that cinema might be becoming a profitable industry, despite market limitations. Only time will tell if there would be sustainable growth in Bulgarian cinema but whatever the outcome, it will necessarily be the result of an interaction between local predilections, national legislation, transnational film practices and global business.

## **Appendices**

## Appendix A

### FILM INDUSTRY ACT

*Prom. SG. 105/2 Dec 2003, amend. SG. 28/1 Apr 2005, amend. SG. 94/25 Nov 2005, amend. SG. 105/29 Dec 2005, amend. SG. 30/11 Apr 2006, amend. SG. 34/25 Apr 2006, amend. SG. 98/27 Nov 2007, amend. SG. 42/5 Jun 2009, amend. SG. 74/15 Sep 2009*

#### Chapter one. GENERAL PROVISIONS

Art. 1. This law shall regulate the relations in the making, distribution, promotion, and showing of films in the Republic of Bulgaria and the state support for the Bulgarian film industry, creating conditions for its development.

Art. 2. (1) For the purposes of this law, film industry shall be defined as the making, distribution, promotion, showing, and storage of films.

(2) The activities related to the storage of films shall be carried out by the Bulgarian National Film Archive, a state cultural institute of national importance.

Art. 3 (1) State support for the film industry shall have the following purposes:

1. to reinforce film art as an important area of national culture;

2. to stimulate the making, distribution, promotion, and showing of national film productions;

3. to promote the creation and distribution of film works of high artistic value;

4. to protect and preserve films as part of the European and world cultural heritage.

(2) The priorities of state policy in the film sector shall be:

1. the right of public access to various forms of film art;

2. protection of viewers' rights and interests;

3. support for new talents and young authors;

4. presentation of Bulgarian cinema works in the country and abroad;

5. creating conditions for the work of foreign film productions on the territory of the country.

(3) The principles governing state support in the film sector shall be:

1. protection of the freedom of expression of authors;

2. equal treatment of artists and organisations with activities in the film industry sector;

3. protection of intellectual property in the film industry sector.

Art. 4. State support under this law shall be carried out in cooperation with

professional associations and not-for-profit corporate bodies in the film industry sector.

## Chapter two. NATIONAL FILM CENTRE EXECUTIVE AGENCY

Art. 5. (amend. SG 28/05, amend. SG 94/05) The National Film Centre Executive agency, referred to hereafter as the Agency, is an administrative body under the Minister of Culture; a corporate body, located in Sofia, supported in part by the state budget and in part by revenues from the Agency's own activities.

Art. 6. (1) The Agency shall:

1. support the creation, distribution, and showing of Bulgarian films in the country and abroad;

2. prepare drafts for statutory laws in the film industry sector;

3. (amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) maintain and administer the register referred to in Art. 19, par. 1 and a register of the state aid of production, distribution and showing of films;

4. (new – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) not later than 31 March of the current year present to the Minister of Finance an annual report in compliance with the Law for the State Aid concerning the state aid of the film industry based on the reported data of the preceding year, which shall be published on the internet site of the agency;

5. (prev. item 4 – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) cooperate with similar organisations in other countries, as well as funds and programs of the Council of Europe and the European Union;

6. (prev. item 5 – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) interact with not-for-profit corporate bodies in the film industry sector, with professional associations of film makers and the companies for collective management of rights in the film industry sector in the country;

7. (prev. item 6 – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) organise and support festivals, panoramas, and viewings of Bulgarian and foreign films in the Republic of Bulgaria, as well as showing of Bulgarian films abroad;

8. (prev. item 7 – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) carry out information related activities, collect and summarise data on the making, distribution, and showing of films, and make that data public;

9. (prev. item 8 – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) mediate at the conclusion of framework agreements among professional associations of film artists for the development of a protective mechanism with regard to remuneration in the film industry sector;

10. (prev. item 9 – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) cooperate for the protection of copyright and related rights in the film industry sector;

11. (prev. item 10 – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) exercise production rights over Bulgarian films, when such rights have been granted to the Agency by virtue of a legal act or a contract;

12. (prev. item 11 – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) support the training and qualification of film industry personnel;

13. (amend. SG 28/05, amend. SG 94/05; prev. item 12 – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) carry out other functions, related to the application of the law, or determined by the Minister of Culture.

14. (new – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) support the activity of Bureau MEDIA-Bulgaria.

(2) (amend. SG 28/05, amend. SG 94/05) The activities, structure, work organisation and staff of the agency shall be determined in the Rules of Procedure of the Agency, proposed by the Minister of Culture and sanctioned by the Council of Ministers.

Art. 7. (1) The Agency shall be managed and represented by the Executive Director.

(2) (amend. SG 28/05, amend. SG 94/05) The Executive Director of the Agency shall be appointed by the Minister of Culture, after a competition, for a term of five years.

(3) The Executive Director of the Agency shall be a Bulgarian citizen with higher education, holding the education and qualification degree of Master in social, economic, or legal studies, or arts, with a professional experience in the film industry sector of no less than 5 years.

(4) (amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008; amend. – SG 42/09) The Executive Director is not allowed to:

1. hold another state position;

2. perform commercial activity or to be a manager, trade attorney, trade representative, trade agent, liquidator or trustee in bankruptcy;

3. be a member of managing or control body of a non-profit organization, trading company or association;

4. be a freelancer, except for, scientific or teaching activity or exercising copyright or related rights.

(5) (new – SG 42/09) The Executive Director may take part as a representative of the state or a municipality in the managing or control bodies of trading companies with state or municipal participation in the capital or of legal persons established by a law, for which he/she is not entitled to remuneration.

Art. 8. (1) The following advisory expert bodies shall be established under the Executive Director:

1. National Cinema Council;

2. (amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) National Artistic Commissions for;

a) feature films;

b) documentaries;

c) animation films.

3. National Film Categorization Commission;

4. National Technical Commission;

5. Financial Commission.

(2) The members of the advisory expert bodies under (1) shall receive remuneration for their participation in these bodies, determined in the Rules of Procedure of the Agency.

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(3) The operation of the bodies under (1) shall be supported by the administrative units of the Agency.

Art. 9. (1) (amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) The National Cinema Council shall be appointed for a term of two years by an order of the Executive Director of the Agency and shall be composed of 12 members: persons with higher education with education and qualification degree of “Master” in the field of “Arts” or “Social, economic and legal studies” and no less than 5 years of experience in the film industry sector.

(2) (amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) The members of the National Cinema Council shall be nominated under a proposal of professional associations and of the non-profit legal persons, carrying out an activity in the film industry sector. As a member of the Council one representative, nominated by the agency, obligatorily must be included.

(3) The National Cinema Council shall:

1. (amend. SG 28/05, amend. SG 94/05) develop and propose to the Minister of Culture via the Executive Director of the Agency a National Program for the Development of the Film Industry;

2. (amend. SG 28/05, amend. SG 94/05) in cooperation with the Executive Director, propose and justify before the Minister of Culture the amount of state funding for the implementation of the national policy in the film industry sector;

3. (new – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) draw up, discuss and propose to the Executive Director of the Agency drafts of legislative acts in the field of film industry under a proposal of professional associations and non-profit legal entities in the field of film industry;

4. (prev. item 3 – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) propose to the Executive Director of the Agency Bulgarian films an annual quota for production of Bulgarian debut films;

5. (prev. item 4 – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) propose to the Executive Director of the Agency Bulgarian films for showing at European and world competitions and nominations.

Art. 10. (amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) (1) The National Artistic Commissions of feature, documentary and animation cinema shall be appointed by an order of the Executive Director of the Agency for a period of one year. Each commission shall be composed of 9 members, 8 of whom shall be proposed by professional associations and non-profit legal entities in the field of film industry, and one member, nominated by the agency.

(2) The National Artistic Commissions of feature, documentary and animation cinema shall review the submitted projects, shall estimate them in compliance with the criteria under Art. 27, par. 1, items 1, 2 and 5 and shall rank them for state aid with a motivated decision for each project.

Art. 11 (1) (amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) The National Film Categorization Commission shall be appointed for a term of two years by order of the Executive Director of the Agency. It shall be organised in 8 equal panels with 7 members

each.

(2) (amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) Each panel of the Commission under par. 1 shall be composed of:

1. a representative of the Ministry of Culture;
2. (amend. – SG 74/09, in force from 15.09.2009) a representative of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science;
3. three representatives, nominated by the National Cinema Council;
4. a representative, nominated by the Agency,
5. a psychologist.

(3) The National Film Categorisation Commission shall propose to the Executive Director of the Agency a category for each film to be distributed or shown on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria.

Art. 12. (1) The National Technical Commission shall be appointed by order of the Executive Director of the Agency for a term of two years. It shall consist of 5 members, of whom:

1. two image experts;
2. two sound experts;
3. an expert on cinema and video equipment.

(2) The National Technical Commission shall evaluate the technical quality of completed films that have received state support under this law.

Art. 13. (1) The Financial Commission shall be appointed for a term of two years by order of the Executive Director of the Agency. It shall be composed of 7 members with a good track record in the organisation and funding of film production, of whom:

1. (amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) four representatives, nominated by the professional associations and non-profit legal entities in the field of film industry;
2. a representative of the Bulgarian National Television;
3. (amend. SG 28/05, amend. SG 94/05) a representative of the Ministry of Culture;
4. a representative of the Agency.

(2) (amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) The Financial Commission shall carry out expert estimations according to the criteria of Art. 27, par. 1, items 1, 2 and 4 and shall propose to the Executive Director of the Agency the amount of state aid for each individual project of film production, distribution, promotion and showing of films.

Art. 14. (1) (amend. SG 28/05, amend. SG 94/05; amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) Two months before the end of the term of office of each body under art. 8, par. 1 the Minister of Culture shall announce a list of the professional associations and the non-profit legal entities, carrying out activities in the field of film industry, and their quotas.

(2) The same person may not be proposed in the bodies under Art. 10 for two consecutive terms.

(3) The powers of the members of a body under Art. 8, Para 1 may be

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terminated before the term by submitting a resignation or in case of inability to fulfill their obligations for more than three months or in case of a decease.

(4) In cases of par. 3 within one month the Executive Director of the Agency shall appoint a new member for a period till the end of the office of the discharged member under a proposal of the professional associations and the non-profit legal entities, announced and proposed pursuant to par. 1. In this case the associations and the legal entities under par. 1 shall nominate a representative within 14 days.

Art. 15. The operational procedures of the National Cinema Council and the national commissions shall be determined in the Rules of Procedure of the Agency under art. 6 (2).

## Chapter three.

### FUNDING

#### Section I.

##### Revenue

Art. 16 (1) (amend. SG 28/05, amend. SG 94/05) The Agency shall be a secondary administrator of budget credits under the Minister of Culture.

(2) (amend. SG 28/05, amend. SG 94/05) The transfer of funds from the budget of the Ministry of Culture to the Agency shall be determined by the Law of the annual state budget of the Republic of Bulgaria.

(3) The Agency shall administrate the following revenues:

1. fees and charges collected under this law;
2. fines and property sanctions imposed under this law;
3. transferred producer rights on Bulgarian films, when they have been granted to the Agency by virtue of act, or a contract;
4. revenues from the execution of contracts for funding of production, distribution, or the showing of films and other audio-visual products;

5. (new – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) finances from international funds and programs;

6. (prev. item 5 – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) claims or interests for default of contracts, to which the Agency is party;

7. (prev. item 6 – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) donations;

8. (prev. item 7 – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) interests on deposits of own funds;

9. (prev. item 8, suppl. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) other revenues, determined by a law or another legislative act.

Art. 17. The Annual Budget of the Republic of Bulgaria shall allocate:

1. (amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) A subsidy to the Agency with an annual amount not smaller than the sum of the average preceding year budgets for 7 feature films, 14 long documentaries, and 160 minutes of animation;

2. funding for membership fees to international organisations, funds and programs in the film industry sector, of which the Republic of Bulgaria is a member;
3. funding for the support of the Agency.

## Section II. Expenditures

Art. 18 (1) (amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) The funds collected under art. 16 (3) and art. 17 (1) shall be used for the state support of projects in the area of making, promotion, distribution, and showing of Bulgarian films and of films created in co-production with states, being parties under the European convention on cinematographic coproduction, concluded at Strasbourg on 2 Oct., 1992 (ratified by a law – SG 30/04) (SG – 86/04) and with countries, with which the Republic of Bulgaria has concluded agreements in the film industry sector.

- (2) The funds under (1) shall be allocated as follows:
  1. no less than 10 per cent for funding under art. 32;
  2. up to 5 per cent for funding under art. 34;
  3. (amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) no less than 80 per cent for funding under art 28 (1);
  4. (new – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) up to 5 per cent – for financing under Art. 30a.
- (3) The funds under art. 17 (2) shall be spent as earmarked and according to allocated used.

## Chapter four. REGISTRATION

Art. 19. (1) The Agency shall create and maintain a single public register of:

1. (amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) film producers;
2. film distributors in the Republic of Bulgaria;
3. persons showing films on the territory of Bulgaria;
4. cinema halls in the Republic of Bulgaria;
5. film productions made by foreign producers on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria, including those co-produced with Bulgarian producers.
6. films, which have received visas for distribution and showing in the Republic of Bulgaria;
7. (new – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) films, produced with the support of the Agency or in cooperation with the Bulgarian National Television.

(2) For the registers under (1), items 1-5, a registration application shall be submitted by the producer, or respectively the person distributing and/or showing the film.

(3) (suppl. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) Registration under (1), items 6 and 7, shall be made by the Agency ex officio.

(4) (amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) Subject to registration under par. 1. items 1- 3 shall be persons, registered as traders in compliance with the laws of

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a European Union Member State, or of another state within the European Economic Area or Switzerland.

Art. 20. (1) The following documents shall be attached to the application for registration in the register under art. 19 (1), items 1-3:

1. (amend. - SG 34/06, in force from 01.10.2006; suppl. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) current certificate of registration in the commercial register or a certified by the consulate office translation of a document, issued by a competent body in the state of incorporation of the foreign person, certifying that it has the right to carry out producer's activity, respectively an activity related to distribution or showing of films;
2. (revoked – SG 34/06, in force from 01.10.2006 );
3. (revoked – SG 34/06, in force from 01.10.2006);
4. (revoked – SG 105/05, in force from 01.01.2006)
5. document of paid registration fee.

(2) The following documents shall be attached to the application for registration in the register under art. 19 (1), item 4:

1. declaration on the place, type, and schedule of operation of the cinema hall, type of cinema equipment, and number of seats;
2. document of paid registration fee.

(3) The application for registration in the register under art. 19 (1), item 5, shall be submitted no later than 14 days before the commencement of the work on the production in the Republic of Bulgaria. The following documents shall be attached to the application:

1. professional CV of the producer;
2. copy of a contract with a Bulgarian executive producer or co-producer;
3. copy of the contract for transfer of copyright or any other proof of ownership of copyright for the commercial use of the film;
4. copy of the script;
5. list of the main artistic and technical experts of the participating countries;
6. schedule of the work on the production to be carried out on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria;
7. plan of the places of filming;
8. draft budget of the part of the production to be made on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria;
9. document of paid registration fee.

Art. 21. (1) The Agency shall make a decision on the registration application within 7 days of application submission, and shall issue a certificate of registration.

(2) In cases of omissions or imprecision in the sets of documents, the applicant shall be notified in writing, within three days, of the need to correct them. In case the omissions or imprecision have not been corrected within one month of the date of notification, the application shall be deemed withdrawn.

(3) The effect of the registration and the registration certificate for registration under art. 19 (1), items 1-4, is not time limited, and those under art. 19 (1), item 5 shall be in effect for the term of making of the registered production.

Art. 22. In case of changes in the data subject to registration, these changes are also subject to registration in the register under art. 19 (1) within 14 days after their occurrence.

Art. 23. (1) Registration shall be terminated by order of the Executive Director of the Agency, and the certificate issued shall become invalid at:

1. request of the registered person;
2. death of the individual registered, or termination or liquidation of the corporate body registered;
3. established lack of veracity of some of the circumstances declared;
4. in case of entry into effect of a penalty ruling for a repeated violation under this law.

(2) (amend. - SG 30/06, in force from 12.07.2006) The order under (1), items 3 and 4, shall be subject to appeal under the Administrative procedure code.

(3) The deletion of registration and the voidance of the certificate shall be announced by the agency in a proper manner.

Art. 24. (amend. SG 28/05, amend. SG 94/05) The activities on maintaining the register under this Chapter shall be regulated by an ordinance of the Minister of Culture.

Art. 25. (amend. SG 28/05, amend. SG 94/05) Fees shall be collected for entering into the register under art. 19 (1), determined in a tariff proposed by the Minister of Culture and approved by the Council of Ministers.

## Chapter five. STATE SUPPORT FOR THE FILM INDUSTRY

### Section I. General Provisions

Art. 26. (1) Via the Agency, the state shall support:

1. the making, distribution, and showing of Bulgarian films;  
2. (amend. and suppl. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) the distribution and showing of films, created as co-productions with countries which are a party under the European convention for cinematographic production and with other countries, with which the Republic of Bulgaria has concluded agreements in the film industry sector, as well as of European films;

3. (amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) the promotion of Bulgarian films.

(2) (suppl. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) State support shall be administered through allocation of earmarked funds in compliance with the requirements of the Law for the State Aid and the regulation for its application.

(3) (suppl. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) Persons that have received state support shall be accountable for and shall justify of the spending of funds provided

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by the Agency. Prior to payment of the last part, the persons, having received state support, shall present a financial statement on the effected expenses, certified by an independent financial auditor.

(4) The persons using the funds received under this law for purposes other than allocated shall return the full amount under the contract concluded, and pay the lawful interest and a fine.

(5) (amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) The members of the national artistic commissions, the financial commission and the employees of the Agency may not apply for financial support under this law.

(6) (new – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) A member of a body of Art. 10 and of Art. 13, having been discharged from it, may not apply for financial support under this law until the expiration of the mandate of the respective body.

(7) (new – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) Legal entities, in the managing, control or supervision bodies of which the Executive Director of the Agency participates or gets remuneration in any form, may not apply for financial support under this law.

(8) (prev. par. 6 – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) An application fee shall be paid for projects applying to the Agency for financial support, to the amount determined in the tariff under art. 25.

Art. 27 (1) Projects applying for state subsidy shall be ranked according to:

1. their artistic potential within the context of the European cultural diversity;
2. their commercial potential and opportunities for international recognition;
3. the economic justification of the proposed budget;
4. the thoroughness of the strategic plan submitted by the producer with regard to the management and promotion of the project;

5. the professional experience of the producer and the director, the viewers' recognition of their earlier works, as well as the recognition of these works at international festivals and nominations of professional organisations and associations.

(2) The provisions under (1), item 5, shall not be applied with regard to state support for Bulgarian debut films.

## Section II. State Support of Film Making

Art. 28. (1) State support in the film industry sector shall be provided for:

1. the creation of Bulgarian films;
2. (amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) the creation of films on co-production with countries, which are a party under the European convention for cinematographic co-production and with other countries, with which the Republic of Bulgaria has concluded agreements in the film industry sector and audio-vision;
3. the creation of films in co-production with the Bulgarian National Television and other television operators of national coverage;
4. the preparation of projects, including creation of film scripts for Bulgarian films for co-productions with Bulgarian participation;
5. the creation of Bulgarian debut films.

(2) (amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) The financial support for projects under (1), item 1, may not be less than 30 per cent of the average budget for the respective type of film for the preceding year.

(3) (amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) The amount of funds for the state support of films under (1), item 2, when funds are provided by a foreign co-producer, may not exceed 20 per cent of the film-making funds under art. 18 (2), item 3.

(4) The financial support under (1), item 4, may not exceed 5 per cent of the average budget for the respective type of film for the preceding year.

(5) (amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) The National Cinema Council shall apply annual quotas for financing film projects under (1), item 4, in the amount of not less than 10 per cent of the film-making funds under Art. 18 (2), item 3.

(6) (new – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) The amount of the resources for state support of a film under par. 1 must not exceed 50 per cent of the project budget, and for low-budget films – 80 percent of the project budget.

(7) (prev. par. 6 – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) No less than 75 of the earmarked funds under this law shall be spent on the territory of Bulgaria. The National Cinema Council may make annual decisions on a higher percentage rate.

Art. 29. (1) Only producers registered under art 19 (1), who have no outstanding liabilities to the Agency or outstanding public liabilities to the state, may apply for support under art. 28.

(2) No projects preaching violence, intolerance based on faith, race, or ethnicity, or containing pornography, shall be granted state support.

Art. 30. (1) State supports under art. 28 shall be granted in earmarked funds after a competition.

(2) The Executive Director of the Agency shall open the competition procedure by and order containing:

1. the type of film project under art. 28 (1);
2. the total amount of funds for the support of applying projects;
3. the deadline for submission of the documents;
4. the date, place, and time of the competition;

5. (suppl. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) special requirements to the participants, when necessary. In these cases the requirements shall be announced within 6 months prior to the date of holding of the competition.

(3) (amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) The National Artistic Commissions shall consider the submitted projects, shall evaluate them according to the criteria, determined in art. 27, par. 1, 2 and 5 and shall rank them with a motivated decision for each project.

(4) (new – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) The Executive Director of the Agency shall issue an order, by which he/she shall determine the awarded projects in compliance with the total amount of financial resources under par. 2, item 2 within three days after the adoption of the decision of par. 3.

(5) (prev. par. 4, amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) The projects, determined in the decision of the Executive Director of the Agency of par. 4, shall be considered by the Financial Commission, which shall propose to the Executive Director

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a motivated decision on the amount of state support for each individual project. The proposed total amount may not exceed the announced amount of the financial resources under par. 2, item 2 and under Art. 30a..

(6) (prev. par. 5, amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) On the ground of the decisions of the National Artistic Commission and the Financial Commission, the Executive Director of the Agency shall issue an order determining the amount of state support for the winning projects.

(7) (prev. par. 6, amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) The Executive Director of the Agency shall refuse with motivation to issue an order under par. 6, in cases where the decisions under par. 3 and 5 have been adopted in violation of this law or the Rules of Procedure of the Agency.

(8) (prev. par. 7, amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) The order under par. 6 respectively the refusal under par. 7 shall be issued within 7 days of the date of the decision of the Financial Commission, and shall be announced in the residence of the Agency in a place accessible to all interested persons, shall be published on the internet site of the Agency and shall also be advised in writing to the applicant within three days.

(8) (amend. - SG 30/06, in force from 12.07.2006; prev. par. 8, amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) The orders under par. 4 and 6 or the refusal under par. 7 may be appealed by the participants in the competition, in line with the Administrative procedure code.

(10) (prev. par. 9, amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) On the grounds of an effective order under par. 6, the Executive Director of the Agency shall conclude a state support contract with the winning candidates.

Art. 30a. (new – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) State support of Bulgarian films, related to national events and celebrations of events and famous personalities, shall be done upon a proposal of the Minister of Culture, whereas Bulgarian producers shall apply before the Agency in an extraordinary competition session and the projects shall be considered under the provisions and following the procedure laid down in this law.

Art. 31. (amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) (1) State support of projects, for which funding is provided by a foreign co-producer from a country, which is a party under the European Convention for cinematographic co-production, or from a country, with which the Republic of Bulgaria has a concluded agreement in the film industry sector, shall be granted, whereas the Bulgarian producer shall apply before the Agency and the project shall be considered under the provisions and following the procedure laid down in this law.

(2) Bulgarian producers may apply for the state support of par. 1 if the following terms and conditions are met:

1. the resources for financing of the project, provided by the foreign co-producer are from an international, national or regional fund or institution and/or a television operator with national coverage in the territory of the country of the foreign co-producer;

2. the share of the Bulgarian producer in the project budget is not less than 20

per cent for a co-production of two countries and not less than 10 per cent for a co-production between many countries.

(3) The project shall be considered following the procedure of Art. 30 in sessions of the respective national artistic commission and of the financial commission within three months as from the day of its submission.

**Art. 31a. (new – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008)** Participation of persons under the age of 18 in film productions in the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria shall take place in compliance with the applicable laws and following a procedure, laid down in an Ordinance of the Council of Ministers.

### Section III. State Support for the Distribution and Showing of Films

**Art. 32 (1) (amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008)** State support for the distribution and showing of films shall be provided for Bulgarian films and films created in co-production with countries, which are a party under the European Convention for cinematographic co-production and with other countries, with which the Republic of Bulgaria has concluded agreements in the film industry sector, and also for European films.

(2) (amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) State support of showing of films shall be provided in the shape of earmarked funds amounting to no more than 50 per cent of the average ticket price in the preceding year in the respective cinema hall or a cinema hall in a cinema complex, multiplied by the number of seats therein and by the number of showings of the film, subject to application under par. 1.

(3) State support for the distribution of a film under (1) shall be provided in the shape of earmarked funds amounting to no more than 50 per cent of film's distribution and advertising budget.

(4) (amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) State support for the distribution of European films beyond the cases under par. 2 and 3 shall be granted for no more than 25 per cent of the incurred by the distributor expenditures for the respective film.

(5) (new – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) State support for the showing of European films beyond the cases under par. 1 shall be granted in the amount of up to 25 per cent of the total revenues from sold tickets in the respective cinema hall or cinema hall in a cinema complex incurred by the distributor expenditures for the respective film.

(6) (new – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) State support for the showing of films under par. 2 and 4 shall be granted on the grounds of projects, which may include up to 4 films.

**Art. 33. (1)** State support under art. 32 shall be granted at a request of the persons showing the film, who shall provide information on their activities under art. 43.

(2) The Financial Commission shall review the requests submitted and shall propose to the Executive Director of the Agency the amount of state support,

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determined according to art. 32, (2), (3), and (4).

(3) On the grounds of the decision of the Financial Commission, the Executive Director of the Agency shall issue an order determining the winning project and the amount of state support.

(4) The Executive Director of the Agency shall refuse to issue an order under (3), providing motivation for the refusal, in cases where the decision under (2) has been made in violation of this law or the Rules of Procedure of the Agency.

(5) The order under (3) or the refusal under (4) shall be issued within 7 days of the date of the decision of the Financial Commission, and shall be announced in the residence of the Agency in a place accessible to all interested persons and sent in writing to all candidates within three days.

(6) (amend. - SG 30/06, in force from 12.07.2006) The order under (3) or the refusal under (4) may be appealed by the candidates in the competition in line with the Administrative procedure code.

(9) On the grounds of an effective order under (3), the Executive Director of the Agency shall conclude a state support contract with the winning candidate.

Art. 34. (amend. and suppl. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) The Agency shall support the promotion of Bulgarian films at international and national film festivals, weeks and fairs of Bulgarian cinema by way of earmarked funds for advertising materials, film copies, subtitling, and other expenditures related to their showing.

Art. 35. (1) (prev. Art. 35 – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) Only persons registered under art 19 (1), who have no outstanding liabilities to the Agency or outstanding public liabilities to the state, may apply for support under art. 32 and 34.

(2) (new – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) The Agency may use films, produced with state financial support for international cultural events, whereas it shall pay a fee for copyright and related rights under the concluded contracts until the full repayment of the granted state financing.

## Chapter six.

### DISTRIBUTION AND SHOWING OF FILMS. INFORMATION DISCLOSURE

Art. 36. The distribution and/or showing of films on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria shall be carried out after the issuance of a visa.

Art. 37. (1) For the issuance of a visa under art. 36, the person distributing the film shall submit a written request following a provided model. The request shall provide:

1. name of the person and certificate for registration in the public register of the Agency;
2. type of visa requested: for distribution or showing.
3. title of the film in the original language, and if the film is not Bulgarian, the Bulgarian title under which the film is to be distributed or shown on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria;

4. name and address of the producer of the film;
5. person that has transferred the distribution or showing rights and correspondence address of that person;
6. length of the film in time and in meters;
7. type of film carrier;
8. number of copies for the showing of the film;
9. earliest date when the distributor of the film may organise a showing of the film before the National Film Categorisation Commission;
10. date of start of distribution and/or showing of the film on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria;
11. category of the film determined in the country of origin, in case it has not been made in the Republic of Bulgaria.

(2) The following documents shall be attached to the request under (1):

1. head credits of the film;
2. one page annotation of the film;
3. copy of the contract, certifying the acquisition of the distribution and/or showing rights of the film for the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria, accompanied by a certified translation in cases where the original is not in Bulgarian;
4. document of paid fee.

(3) In case of omissions in the list of documents, the Agency shall notify the requesting party, which shall correct the omissions within 14 days. In case that the omissions are not corrected within the deadline, the request shall be considered withdrawn.

(4) Within 7 days of the reception of a valid request, the National Film Categorisation Commission shall determine the category of the film as follows:

1. (amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) Category A, when the film is for children and is of educational nature;
2. (amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) category “B” when the film affirms humanistic ideals, promotes national and world culture and in no way contradicts the commonly acceptable moral norms in the country and has no restricting recommendations from the Commission;
3. Category C, when the film contains some frames depicting erotic content, use of alcohol, stimulants, drugs, or violence;
4. Category D, when the film contains a significant share of frames depicting erotic content, use of alcohol, stimulants, drugs, or violence;
5. (amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) Category X, when the film is naturalistically erotic.

(5) Films with content that contradicts commonly acceptable moral norms, promoting or justifying cruelty, violence, or drug use, or calling for hate on the basis of race, gender, religion, or nationality, shall not be categorised.

(6) Within three days if its making, the decision of the National Film Categorisation Commission under (4) or (5) shall be announced to the person who has submitted the request. The person may appeal before the Executive Director of the Agency within 7 days of the reception of the announcement. In case of appeal, the Executive Director shall request an opinion from another panel of the Commission, which is to make a statement within three days after the date of the appeal.

(7) By way of an order, The Executive Director of the Agency issues a distribution

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or showing visa, or rejects the application within three days of the final decision of the Commission.

(8) The Executive Director of the Agency shall reject the request for a visa in case that:

1. the requesting person does not own the distribution and/or showing rights for the film on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria;

2. the film has not received a category, as under (5).

(9) (amend. - SG 30/06, in force from 12.07.2006) The order under (7) is subject to appeal according to the provisions of the Administrative procedure code.

Art. 38. The visa shall contain:

1. a number;

2. the original title of the film, under which it is to be distributed and or/shown on the territory of the country;

3. the title of the film in the original language;

4. name of the film producer;

5. name of the holder of the distribution of showing rights of the film for the Republic of Bulgaria;

6. category of the film and age restrictions, where applicable;

7. type of visa: distribution and/or showing;

8. date, until which according to the contract the requesting person has the right to distribute and/or show the film on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria.

Art. 39. On the grounds of the distribution and/or showing visa issued, the Agency shall enter the film ex officio into the public register of the Agency.

Art. 40. (1) The distribution and/or showing visa shall be exhibited in the cinema hall in a place visible for all viewers.

(2) (amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) The image of the visa shall be added before the first frame to each copy of the film.

(3) The image of the visa shall be placed on any carrier of the film, when the film is distributed on video or on any other carrier.

Art. 41. (1) (new – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) Foreign films in the Republic of Bulgaria shall be distributed and/or shown translated into Bulgarian language.

(2) (prev. par. 1 – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) The distribution and showing of long animation films of Category A shall be done in a version dubbed in Bulgarian.

(3) (prev. par. 2 – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) In all advertisements and PR materials in the distribution or showing of the film, on the cover, under which the film is distributed, as well as in the distribution and/or showing visa that the film has received, the following inscriptions shall be placed depending on the category that the film has received:

1. For films of Category A: "Recommended for children."

2. (new – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) For films of category "B" –

"Without age restrictions";

3. (prev. item 2 – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) For films of Category C: "Not recommended for children under 12."

4. (prev. item 3 – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) For films of Category D: "Prohibited for persons under 16."

5. (prev. item 4 – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) For films of Category X: "Prohibited for persons under 18."

(4) (prev. par. 3 – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) At the showing of films of category C no persons under 12 shall be admitted into the cinema hall, except when accompanied by an adult.

(5) (prev. par. 4 – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) At the showing of films of category C no persons under 16 shall be admitted into the cinema hall.

(6) (prev. par. 5 – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) The showing of films of category X may be carried out only if the cinema hall is exclusively specialised for the showing of films of category X and no persons under 18 are admitted.

(7) (prev. par. 6 – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) Renting or sale of carriers, containing films of category D, to persons under 16, and of category X, to persons under 18, shall be prohibited.

(8) (prev. par. 7 – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) A film may be distributed or shown on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria only in the form in which it has received the visa.

(9) (prev. par. 8 – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) Each film distributed and/or shown on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria, must contain final credits, listing all artists, performers and technical staff who have participated in the creation of the film, the titles of the music pieces, used in whole or in part in the film, and the holders of the copyright over them.

Art. 42. (suppl. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) For the issuance of a distribution and/or showing visa, depending on the film category and type, a fee shall be paid to the amount determined in the tariff under art. 25.

Art. 43. (1) The persons engaged in distribution and/or showing of films shall provide the Agency with the statistical information, necessary for the execution of the responsibilities of the Republic of Bulgaria under international treaties.

(2) The statistical information under (1) shall contain:

1. titles distributed or shown;

2. number of showings of each title by hour slots;

3. total number of viewers for each cinema hall for each film shown by hour slots;

4. total number of films sold or rented on videotape or other carriers;

5. revenues from the distribution of each title;

6. revenues from the showing of each title.

(3) The information under (1) shall be provided by the 15th day of the following month.

(4) The information under (1) shall be provided following a model, approved by the Executive Director of the Agency.

(5) Officials, authorised by the Executive Director of the Agency, shall carry out

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checks in the cinema halls and shall exercise control with regard to the veracity of information under (2).

Art. 44. (suppl. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) No less than 15 per cent of the total annual time in each cinema hall and cinema hall in a cinema complex must be allocated to European films. The time for the showing of Bulgarian films may not be less than 5 per cent of the total annual time of each cinema hall, evenly distributed in all hour slots.

Art. 45. For the distribution of films, the following periods shall be observed:

1. (amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) for distribution of video-, DVD, internet or through a free television channel the period is no less than three months after the date of the premiere showing in a cinema hall, except for cases, when the distribution contract provides otherwise;

2. for broadcasting by a television channel, no less than 6 months after the date of the premiere showing in a cinema hall.

## Chapter seven. ADMINISTRATIVE PENALTY PROVISIONS

Art. 46. (1) Persons engaged in film production or film distribution or showing of films without a registration under this law shall be sanctioned with a fine of BGN

8 000 or BGN 20 000, and in cases where the violation has been committed by corporate bodies or sole traders – by a property sanction to the same amount.

(2) In case of repeated violation under (1), the fine or property sanction shall amount to BGN 16 000 to BGN 40 000.

Art. 47. (1) (suppl. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) Persons engaged in the production or distribution of films without distribution and/or showing visa, or in breach of art. 40 and art. 41, unless the act constitutes an offence, shall be sanctioned with a fine of BGN 5 000 to 15 000, and where violation has been committed by corporate bodies or sole traders – by a property sanction to the same amount.

(2) In case of repeated violation under (1), the fine or property sanction shall amount to BGN 10 000 to BGN 30 000.

Art. 48. (1) Persons not disclosing information under the terms and conditions of art. 43, (1-4), or preventing an official from performing checks under art. 43 (5), shall be sanctioned with a fine of BGN 1 000 to 5 000, and where violation has been committed by corporate bodies or sole traders – by a property sanction to the same amount.

(2) In case of repeated violation under (1), the fine or property sanction shall amount to BGN 2 000 to BGN 10 000.

Art. 49. (1) Persons showing films in violation of art. 44 shall be sanctioned with

a fine of BGN 7 000 to 14 000, and where violation has been committed by corporate bodies or sole traders – by a property sanction to the same amount.

(2) In case of repeated violation under (1), the fine or property sanction shall amount to BGN 14 000 to BGN 28 000.

Art. 50. (1) Persons distributing films in violation of art. 45 shall be sanctioned with a fine of BGN 1 000 to 5 000, and where violation has been committed by corporate bodies or sole traders – by a property sanction to the same amount.

(2) In case of repeated violation under (1), the fine or property sanction shall amount to BGN 2 000 to BGN 10 000.

Art. 51. (1) The acts on established administrative violations shall be prepared by officials authorised by the Executive Director of the Agency.

(2) (amend. SG 28/05, amend. SG 94/05) The penalty acts shall be issued by the Minister of Culture or an official authorized by the Minister.

(3) The establishment of the violations, and the issuance, appeal, and execution of the penalty acts shall be carried out as provided in the Law of administrative and penalty proceedings.

## Additional provisions

### § 1. For the purposes of this law:

1. "Film" shall be defined as connected images fixed in any way on a material carrier, of any length, with or without a sound track, perceivable as a moving picture, in the shape of feature, animation, or documentary cinema works for distribution and showing.

2. "Bulgarian film" shall be defined as a film that meets at least one of the following conditions:

a) (amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) collects at least 15 points under Annex 1;

b) has an original version in Bulgarian and at least two of the authors are Bulgarian citizens, one of whom is the script writer or the director;

c) (amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) the financial participation of the Bulgarian producer is no less than 20 per cent of the budget of the film in case of co-productions between two countries and no less than 10 per cent in case of co-productions between three and more countries, and the Bulgarian elements total at least 10 points under Annex 1;

3. "European film" shall be defined as a film that meets the following requirements:

a) the European elements in the film total no less than 15 points under Annex 2;

b) (amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) the film has been produced in its larger part by one or more producers from countries, which are parties under the European Convention on Cinematographic co-production.

4. (amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) "Debut film" shall be defined as the first film of a director out of the process of education in a higher school;

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5. "Film making" shall be defined as an artistic creative process encompassing the following phases: preparation, shooting, editing, sound engineering and making or the answer print.

6. "Film copy" shall be defined as a lasting material carrier on which the film has been fixed, copied from the original by any copying technology and allowing the making of further copies from the copy, as well as showing it to the public directly or by any type of equipment.

7. "Author" shall be defined as a person under Art. 62 (1) of the Law of copyright and related rights.

8. "Showing" of a film shall be defined as its projection for commercial purposes in any manner, by means of any type of equipment, on any place, accessible to an unlimited circle of people.

9. (amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) "Cinema hall" shall be defined as one hall or another place, including one in the open, equipped with the necessary equipment and technical devices for the showing of films for commercial purposes.

10. (new – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) "Cinema complex" ("multiplex", "cine-plex", "multi-hall cinema") shall be defined as a number of cinema halls, concentrated in one facility, equipped with the necessary equipment and technical devices for the showing of films for commercial purposes.

11. (prev. item 10, amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) "Distribution" shall be defined as all forms of commercial distribution, meant for the audience: in cinema halls, on the television, for home use, distribution of multimedia productions "offline" or "online". Broadcasting in museums, cultural organizations and educational institutions shall not be deemed commercial distribution. Distribution in particular is the sale, exchange, donation, renting out or loaning out copies of films, as well as offering copies of films for sale or for rent.

12. (prev. item 11 – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) "Promotion" shall be defined as any activity, organised with the purpose to promote the film and encourage its distribution and sale, including the presentation of the film at national and international events, film festivals and film markets.

13. (prev. item 12 – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) "Average revenues from one showing" shall be defined as the revenues of tickets sold for the respective period, divided by the number of showings in that period.

14. (prev. item 13 – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) "Average budget of a feature film" shall be defined as the budget of a feature film of a length of over 2600 m (over 90 minutes), shot on 35 mm film reel, calculated on the basis of the expenditures accounted for, for the completed films, as well as the budget expenditures of films in production over the preceding year, including the spending on the making of 5 copies of the film, translation and subtitling into two foreign languages, as well as the spending on advertisement and promotion to the amount of 10 per cent of the budget, recalculated on the basis of the official inflation index for the preceding year.

15. (prev. item 14 – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) "Average budget of a documentary" shall be defined as the budget of a documentary of a length of over 1600 m (over 60 minutes), shot on a 35 mm film reel, calculated on the basis of the expenditures accounted for, for the completed films, as well as the budget expenditures of films in production over the preceding year, recalculated on the basis of the official inflation index for the preceding year.

16. (prev. item 15 – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) "Average budget of an animation film" shall be defined as the budget of an animation film defined on the basis of a minute of screen time, shot on 35 mm film reel, calculated on the basis of the expenditures accounted for, for the completed films, as well as the budget expenditures of films in production over the preceding year, recalculated on the basis of the official inflation index for the preceding year.

17. (prev. item 16 – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) "Head credits of a film" shall be defined as the list of the main artists and technical persons, who have participated in the making of the film, as well as the actors, performing leading roles, supporting roles and special roles.

18. (prev. item 17 – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) "Long film" shall be defined as a film of a length of over 70 minutes.

19. (prev. item 18 – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) A violation shall be defined as "repeated" where the violation has been committed within one year after the entry into effect of a penalty act, by which the violating person has been sanctioned for the same type of violation.

20. (prev. item 19, amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) "Producer" shall be defined as a person initiating and organizing the realization of a film on his/her personal behalf, providing relevant for this purpose financial resources and other conditions.

21. (prev. item 20 – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) "Answer print of a film" shall be defined as the material carrier, over which the first recording of the film has been made and from which the film can be copied in an unlimited number of copies by any copying technique.

22. (prev. item 21, amend. – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) "International co-production" shall be defined as a project or a film made jointly by Bulgarian and foreign producers.

23. (new – SG 98/07, in force from 01.01.2008) "Low budget movie" shall be defined as a film with a budget not exceeding 60 per cent of the average statistic budget of a European film in the preceding year as per information of the European audiovisual observatory.

## Transitional and concluding provisions

§ 2. (1) (amend. SG 28/05, amend. SG 94/05) The Council of Ministers, within one month of the entry into effect of this law, shall transform the National Film Centre under the Ministry of Culture into a National Film Centre Executive Agency under the Minister of Culture.

(2) (amend. SG 28/05, amend. SG 94/05) The activities, property, archive, rights, and liabilities, including the ex officio and labour relations of the employees of the administration of the National Film Centre under the Ministry of Culture shall be transferred to the National Film Centre Executive Agency.

(3) (amend. SG 28/05, amend. SG 94/05) Until the bodies under art. 8 (1) are constituted, their functions shall be performed by the respective commissions with the National Film Centre under the Ministry of Culture.

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§ 3. (amend. SG 28/05, amend. SG 94/05) Within two months of the entry into effect of this Law, the Minister of Culture shall issue the ordinance under Art. 24 and propose to the Council of Ministers Draft Rules of Procedure for the National Film Centre Executive Agency and a Draft Tariff of the fees and charges under Art. 25.

§ 4. (1) The Persons under art. 19 (1), item 1-3 shall be obliged to register within three months of the effective date of this law.

(2) (amend. SG 94/05) The registration of persons registered by the National Film Centre under the Ministry of Culture shall remain valid for a period of up to 6 months of the effective date of this law.

(3) (amend. SG 28/05, amend. SG 94/05) The distribution and showing visas, issued by the National Film Centre under the Ministry of Culture shall remain in effect.

§ 5. (1) (amend. SG 28/05, amend. SG 94/05) Within two months of the entry into effect of this Law, the Minister of Culture shall announce, by way of an order, the list under art. 14.

(2) Within one month of the announcement of the order under (1), the organizations and associations under art. 14, as well as the Ministry of Education and Science and the Bulgarian National Television, shall appoint their representatives for the panes of the National Cinema Council and the national commissions with the Agency.

§ 6. (amend. SG 28/05, amend. SG 94/05) The implementation of this law is assigned to the Minister of Culture.

The act was passed by the 29th National Assembly on November 19, 2003, and has been affixed with the official seal of the National Assembly.

## Transitional and concluding provisions TO THE TAX-INSURANCE PROCEDURE CODE

(PROM. – SG 105/05, IN FORCE FROM 01.01.2006)

§ 88. The code shall enter in force from the 1st of January 2006, except Art. 179, Para 3, Art. 183, Para 9, § 10, item 1, letter "e" and item 4, letter "c", § 11, item 1, letter "b" and § 14, item 12 of the transitional and concluding provisions which shall enter in force from the day of promulgation of the code in the State Gazette.

## Transitional and concluding provisions TO THE ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE CODE

(PROM. – SG 30/06, IN FORCE FROM 12.07.2006)

§ 123. In the Law of film industry (prom. - SG 105/03; amend. - SG 28, 94 and 105/05) the words "Law of the administrative procedure" shall be replaced by "Administrative procedure code".

.....  
§ 142. The code shall enter into force three months after its promulgation in State Gazette, with the exception of:

1. division three, § 2, item 1 and § 2, item 2 – with regards to the repeal of chapter third, section II "Appeal by court order", § 9, item 1 and 2, § 15 and § 44, item 1 and 2, § 51, item 1, § 53, item 1, § 61, item 1, § 66, item 3, § 76, items 1 – 3, § 78, § 79, § 83, item 1, § 84, item 1 and 2, § 89, items 1 - 4§ 101, item 1, § 102, item 1, § 107, § 117, items 1 and 2, § 125, § 128, items 1 and 2, § 132, item 2 and § 136, item 1, as well as § 34, § 35, item 2, § 43, item 2, § 62, item 1, § 66, items 2 and 4, § 97, item 2 and § 125, item 1 – with regard to the replacement of the word "the regional" with the "administrative" and the replacement of the word "the Sofia City Court" with "the Administrative court - Sofia", which shall enter into force from the 1st of May 2007;
2. paragraph 120, which shall enter into force from the 1st of January 2007;
3. paragraph 3, which shall enter into force from the day of the promulgation of the code in State Gazette.

**Transitional and concluding provisions  
TO THE LAW FOR AMENDMENT AND SUPPLEMENTATION OF  
THE LAW OF FILM INDUSTRY**

(PROM. – SG 98/07, IN FORCE FROM 01.01.2008)

§ 31. (1) The powers of members of the bodies under Art. 8, par. 1 shall be terminated within one month after entering of this law into force.

(2) Within the term of par. 1 the Minister of Culture shall announce the list and quotas under Art. 14, par. 1.

(3) Within one month after the expiration of the term under par. 2 the Executive Director of the Agency shall appoint by an order the members of the bodies under Art. 8, par. 1.

§ 32. Granted visas for distribution and/or showing of films of categories "A", "B" and "X" shall keep their validity.

§ 33. The law shall enter into force from 1 January 2008, except for § 10, which shall enter into force from 1 January 2009.

**Transitional and concluding provisions  
TO THE LAW OF THE COMMERCIAL REGISTER**

(PROM. – SG 34/06, IN FORCE FROM 01.10.2006)

§ 56. This law enters in force from 1st of October 2006, except § 2 and § 3, which enter in force from the date of promulgation of the law in the State Gazette.

**Concluding provisions  
TO THE LAW ON AMENDMENT AND SUPPLEMENTATION OF  
THE LAW FOR THE VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

(PROM. – SG 74/09, IN FORCE FROM 01.10.2009)

§ 48. The Law shall enter into force from the date of its promulgation in the State Gazette, except for § 1, which shall enter into force from the 15th of September 2009 and § 47, which shall enter into force from the 1st of October 2009.

Annex No. 1 to § 1, para 2, a) and c):

Bulgarian Elements	Points
Group of artists who are right holders under the Law of the Copyright and Related Rights:	
Script writer	3
Director	3
Composer	1
Cameraman	1
total	8

Note: For animation films the distribution shall be as follows:

Script writer	2
Director	2
Composer	1
Art Director	3
subtotal	8
Actors' Group	
Leading role	3
Supporting role	2
Role	1
subtotal	6

All roles shall be graded depending on the significance of the role or the number of filming days.

Technical and Camera Team	
Sound and mixing	1
Editing	1
Set and costumes	1
Studio or place of filming	1
Place of postproduction operations	1

subtotal	5
total	19

Annex No. 2 to § 1, para 3, a):

European Elements	Points
Script writer	3
Director	3
Composer	1
Cameraman	1
First role	3
Second role	2
Third role	1
Sound and mixing	1
Editing	1
Set and costumes	1
Studio or place of filming	1
Place of postproduction operations	1
total	19



## Appendix B

Table 1. Bulgarian Film Market 1994-2013<sup>704</sup>

Year:	Number of cinemas:	Number of screens:	Million attendances:	Income from tickets in million euro:	Market share of US films:	Market share of domestic films:	State subsidy for film in million euro:
1994	148	156	12.2	1.5	---	---	0.88
1995	153	160	11.4	2.8	---	---	0.96
1996	134	154	2.69	0.67	---	---	0.39
1997	96	121	2.68	1.93	---	---	1.46
1998	88	106	2.33	4.08	---	---	2.00
1999	191	191	2.48	5.26	---	---	3.41
2000	179	202	2.21	4.54	93.2%	---	1.92
2001	179	202	2.00	4.34	---	---	---
2002	179	194	2.01	4.45	---	---	---
2003	149	194	3.04	6.13	---	---	---
2004	56	208	3.12	6.43	---	---	---
2005	61	80	2.42	5.96	---	---	3.13
2006	66	98	2.36	6.11	---	---	3.17
2007	62	124	2.47	6.69	---	1.6%	3.37
2008	57	109	2.82	9.80	78.4%	2.8%	5.57

<sup>704</sup> Cholakov, 2012; "Yearbook 2012 – Final Edition." *MEDIA Salles*. n.d. 21 Sept. 2015.<<http://www.mediasalles.it/ybk2012/index.html>>; "Yearbook 2013 – Final Edition." *MEDIA Salles*. n.d. 21 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.mediasalles.it/ybk2013/index.html>>; "Yearbook 2014 – Final Edition." *MEDIA Salles*. n.d. 21 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.mediasalles.it/ybk2014/index.html>>.

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2009	---	---	3.17	12.89	85.8%	1.3%	6.03
2010	---	---	3.97	16.59	86.3%	11.2%	5.05
2011	---	---	4.72	18.74	80.7%	14.2%	5.16
2012	---	---	4.10	17.36	---	6.0%	6.19
2013	---	---	4.79	20.36	---	0.9%	6.50

Table 2. Most successful Bulgarian films 2003-2013 based on data from  
the Bulgarian National Film Centre, IMDb and  
boxofficemojo.com

No:	Film Title:	Director:	Production company:
1	Misja London/Mission London	Dimitar Mitovski	SIA Advertising, Fidelity Films, Cinematix Film, Premiere Picture, Dream Factory
2	Love.net	Ilian Djenelevkov	Miramar Film
3	Operatsiya Shmenti kapeli/Operation Shmenti Capelli	Ivan Mitov	C and R Productions
4	TILT	Viktor Chouchkov	Chouchkov Brothers, Osticht Filmproduktion, Bulgarian National Television
5	Stapki v prasaka/Footsteps in the Sand	Ivaylo Hristov	National Film Centre, Nu Boyana Film Studios, Pro Films
6	Chuzhdenetsat/The Foreigner	Niki Iliev	New World Films
7	Korpus za harzo reagiranje/Rapid Reaction Corps	Stanislav Donchev	Pro Films, Dynamic Arts
8	Pistol, kifar i 3 smirdyashchi varela/Pistol, Suitcase and Three Sinking Barrels	Georgi Kostov	Media Productions
9	Kevoke/Sneakers	Valeri Yordanov/Ivan Vladimirov	Gala Film
10	Svetat e golyam i spasenite deblne otvoryakade/The World Is Big and Salvation Lurks around the Corner	Stephan Komandarev	RFF International, Pallas Film, Vertigo/Emotionfilm, Infotag Studio, Bulgarian National Television
11	Dzitt/Zift	Javor Gurdiev	Bulgarian National Film Centre, Bulgarian National Television, Miramar Film
12	Iztochni pjesi/Eastern Plays	Kamen Kalev	Waterfront Film, Film i Väst, Chimney Pot
13	Mila of Mars/Mila from Mars	Zornitsa Sophia	Kirov Consult, All Things, Dolj Media, Studio Kirov Opera
14	Ostroval/The Island	Kamen Kalev	Bulgarian National Television, Art Eternal, Chimney Pot, Film i Väst, Film i Västerbotten, Waterfront Film
15	Lovnia drebni lishnititsi/HDSP: Hunting Down Small Predators	Cvetodar Markov	Camera
16	Lora or surfin do vechet/Lora from Morning till Evening	Dimitar Kotzev-Shosho	Spotlight Production Company



## Filmography

*Ako Nyakoi Te obicha/If Somebody Loves You.* Dir. Kiran Kolarov. Bulgaria. 2010.

*Alice in Wonderland.* Dir. Tim Burton. USA. 2010.

*Amour.* Dir. Michael Haneke. France/Germany/Austria. 2012.

*Angliiskiyat sased/The English Neighbour.* TV Series. Bulgaria. 2010-2011.

*Archeo.* Dir. Jan Cvitković. Slovenia. 2011.

*Aszparuh.* Dir. Ludmil Staykov. Bulgaria. 1981.

*Avantazh/Advantage.* Dir. Georgi Djulgerov. Bulgaria. 1977.

*Avatar.* Dir. James Cameron. USA/UK. 2009.

*Avé.* Dir. Konstantin Bojanov. Bulgaria. 2012.

*Balgar.* Web Series. Bulgaria. 2008- .

*Balgar: Filmat/Balgar: The Movie.* Dir. Nedelcho Bogdanov. Bulgaria. 2014.

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