CALL FOR PAPERS

World cinema in the age of Netflix

Over the course of less than a decade, the streaming phenomenon – that is, the online distribution of audiovisual content (mainly films and series) through pay-per-view or subscription services – has radically changed cinema’s ecosystem. This issue of Studies in World Cinema sets out to explore the specific effects of streaming on the production, distribution and consumption of primarily non-Western cinema. The focus is not on the American streaming giant Netflix as such – Netflix is rather used as a generic nomer or shorthand for international streaming services at large. Yet, there is no denying that Netflix is indeed of particular interest for its blurring of boundaries within the usual local/global dialectics, as pointed out by Ramon Lobato in his book Netflix Nations: The Geography of Digital Distribution (2019).

Netflix is currently available in practically all countries around the globe (China being the most notable exception), and although the bulk of its films are mainstream US entertainment fare, Netflix is also keenly aware that when it comes to programming for an international audience, one size does not fit all. Across the world, the company is therefore supplementing its catalogue of American programmes with both licensed local content and original local films that are either commissioned by Netflix or, in one way or the other, produced or funded by the streaming giant.

This raises a number of questions of relevance to the study of world cinema, such as: Can Netflix (and other companies like it, such as, e.g., Amazon Prime and HBO GO) be said to benefit world cinema by enhancing the visibility of films that are otherwise rarely seen outside their countries of origin and/or the film festival circuit? Do, on the contrary, local films that are not distributed by Netflix risk becoming even more invisible for not having this online exposure? And how, if at all, do Netflix’s algorithms for personalised recommendations affect the visibility of world cinema? Also, what are the effects of Netflix’s investments in local production? Do they represent a welcome boost in funding, or do they come at too high a cost, in the shape of loss of control and demands for international streamlining of the films produced, for example? Will production companies that have not yet caught Netflix’s eye tend to adopt styles and narrative structures supposedly favoured by Netflix in the hope of attracting funding and/or gaining visibility, potentially at the expense of local authenticity? Is there a risk that local audiences – many of whom may not have access to high-speed internet connections, or the means to pay for streaming – will be left behind? Will we see a splitting of local film production into two strands: one geared towards international audiences (and local urban elites), with sufficient funding to secure a professional mode of production but out of touch with less affluent local audiences; and another, more artisanal, locally rooted and perhaps, in some cases, genuinely popular one, distributed locally but largely invisible to the outside world? Or, if this division arguably already exists, does the involvement of international streaming services contribute to enhancing, diminishing or otherwise
changing it? These are some of the pertinent questions that we would like to address and debate from a variety of perspectives in this special issue, but the list is far from exhaustive.

Possible topics for contributions include, but are not limited to:

- The potential effects of Netflix on world cinema storytelling and aesthetics
- Netflix (and other streaming services like Amazon Prime and Disney+ Hotstar) in India
- Netflix in Nigeria
- The effects of Netflix's (and other international streaming services) investment in local film production in other countries, like, e.g., Mexico and South Korea
- The effects of Netflix's involvement in local production seen from a local audience perspective
- Case studies of individual production companies and/or filmmakers before and after their cooperation with Netflix or other international streaming giants (such as HBO GO, Amazon Prime, Hulu etc.)
- Streaming services dedicated to the promotion of cinema from all corners of the world, like, for instance, the UK-based mubi.com
- 'Regional' OTT streaming services featuring primarily non-Western cinema and TV series (such as Viu in South-East Asia and the Middle East)
- The Chinese streaming service iQIYI, its pan-Asian rollout and global ambitions in a world cinema perspective
- 'Alternative' streaming services such as the Nollywood platform iROKOtv or Eros Now (dedicated to Bollywood)
- Shifts in distribution and exhibition models of world cinema since Netflix (perhaps case studies of individual sales agents and distributors dedicated to world cinema)
- Netflix and the phenomenon of serialisation in the context of world cinema

Timeline for contributions:

Proposals, consisting of a title and a 3-400-word abstract + a short author's bio, should be sent to evaj@hum.ku.dk prior to 15 June 2021. Notifications of acceptance or non-acceptance will be sent out in early July.

The submission deadline for accepted, full articles (max 8,000 words) is 15 January 2022. All contributions will undergo double-blind peer review. Publication is planned for October 2022.

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