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Transnational allegory/ transnational history: *Se sei vivo spara/Django Kill ... If You Live, Shoot!*

ABSTRACT

*This article explores how films can offer diverse international audiences a transnational allegory that speaks to their shared experiences of a global historical situation, such as the Cold War. Giulio Questi's bizarre western *Se sei vivo spara/Django Kill ... If You Live, Shoot!* (1967) is taken as a case study. This film provides a suggestive example of how spaghetti westerns, which are renowned for circulating internationally during the Cold War, offered narratives that resonated with audiences experiencing political turmoil and violent conflict during this historical period. Drawing on Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's idea of 'multitude', *Django Kill* is seen to provide a transnational form of history for geographically dispersed people around the world (even if they do not share the common cultural affinities that characterise, say, a diaspora), whose lives are influenced by similar ideological and material conditions.*

KEYWORDS

Django Kill
Giulio Questi
transnational allegory
transnational history
Cold War
multitude

This article considers how films can offer the possibility of transnational allegorical readings, by presenting multiple interpretative possibilities to different international audiences, particularly in instances where similar,

comparable or shared geopolitical realities – beyond that of diaspora – exist between the nations which produce the films and those which consume them. This is to pinpoint one way in which allegory can function transnationally in an increasingly decentred, globalized world. Undoubtedly, conceptions of nation, nationhood or national identity remain a primary source of meaning when examining allegory. Nevertheless, broader interpretative possibilities can be identified in films that either submerge or entirely lack a nationally signifying imagery, or in which such imagery exists in tandem with a more open allegorical engagement with issues that resonate transnationally.

My focus is Giulio Questi's *Se sei vivo spara/Django Kill ... If You Live, Shoot!* (Italy and Spain, 1967), a disturbingly violent spaghetti western that was heavily censored at the time of its release. It has been distributed in different places under various titles, such as the Spanish *Oro Hondo/Deep Gold*, but is nowadays perhaps most popularly known internationally as *Django Kill ... If You Live, Shoot!* (the subtitle is a literal translation into English of the film's original title). I choose this example because it offers, precisely, a broader critique of the economic and social conditions that existed during the Cold War, which have proliferated since then under neo-liberal globalization.

Django Kill's view of history is a transnational one, and it speaks to a time of increasing globalization. The film constructs a form of allegorical history which is at once pertinent for European audiences in the post-war era – *Django Kill* is a surreal expression of director Questi and editor Franco Arcalli's wartime encounter with fascism when fighting as partisans in Italy – but it also offers open-ended transnational political resonances for different audiences around the world. In this respect my argument follows the increasing turn to world cinemas in the discipline of film studies. This geopolitical turn matches the development of an ever-growing body of work on globalization across various disciplines, that has emerged since Immanuel Wallerstein's influential world systems analysis in the 1970s enabled a consideration of the globe beyond too narrow a focus on the nation (Wallerstein 1974). For instance, this shift in thinking has seen a burgeoning emphasis on transnational flows of people, commerce and images in economic and cultural terms, both in the works of various scholars of globalization (e.g. Augé 1995; Appadurai 1996; Castells 1996; Hannerz 1996; Bauman 1998 to name a handful) and numerous scholars of world cinemas. I thus attempt to understand how *Django Kill* constructs an allegory that functions transnationally, even if we might also, in what remains perhaps the 'usual' manner for film studies, explore it in terms of its national origins and meanings.

I argue that *Django Kill* provides a transnational critique of fascism, when this is understood in the manner described by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* (1972). In *Anti-Oedipus*, a book written around the time of *Django Kill's* release, Deleuze and Guattari develop and rework Wilhelm Reich's notion of the 'mass psychology of fascism' to demonstrate how all such repressive social structures are a product of desiring forces (1972: 29–30, 222–40, 346–47). Fascism is a product of capitalism, when capitalism is understood as 'not just one economic form among others but ... a tendency towards exchange and the creation of surplus' that characterises life (Colebrook 2006: 122). *Django Kill's* critique of the everyday manifestations of fascism would therefore have offered myriad points of entry for viewers experiencing clashes with totalitarian regimes

during the Cold War. These were regimes acting very often in collusion with a major military and economic power such as the United States, to suppress alternative forces of desire that might have shaped a different state.

In this way, *Django Kill* can be considered to offer the potential for a transnational allegory that addresses the concerns of what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in *Empire* dub 'multitude' (2000: xv). The term 'multitude' refers to globally dispersed, heterogeneous populations who each experience individual encounters with 'a *decentred* and *deterritorializing* apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers' (Hardt and Negri 2000: vii). Multitude, then, is understood to exist in relation to globalization, or that which Hardt and Negri categorize as Empire. *Django Kill* offers a way for these diverse populations to reconsider the impact of global capital on their lives. This is enabled by a deliberately decontextualized evocation of personal histories (on the part of the film-makers) of wartime fascism, coupled with a narrative that reveals the economic divisions of globalization. Together these aspects of the film offer the possibility of interpreting *Django Kill* as a comment on how wartime economic, and social divisions have continued into the Cold War era in a manner that now impacts globally.

Due to the absence of much in the way of records of the film's international distribution (a methodological concern which I address in more detail momentarily), I take a necessarily speculative approach to *Django Kill*. I argue that an interpretation of the film as a critique of fascism would have been apparent in Europe, where there is evidence that *Django Kill* circulated, but may also have been observed in the various parts of the world where spaghetti westerns found favour internationally, across Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Asia (Eleftheriotis 2001: 106). For this reason, an analysis of the oft-neglected spaghetti western, *Django Kill*, opens up discussion of the larger question of how oblique or bizarre allegory may function transnationally, especially during times of political turmoil.

My contention is that in parts of the world with comparable or shared histories or experiences, films like *Django Kill* have the potential to function as transnational allegories. In this instance, the allegorical meaning relates specifically to changing economic and social conditions impacting increasingly on peripheral countries (then defined through the discourses of the 'third world' or 'underdevelopment') during the Cold War. In this sense *Django Kill* speaks to the myriad peoples that constitute 'multitude' worldwide, those increasingly experiencing the decentred fascism of Empire.

This focus on the likely global audience of the spaghetti western and its informing historical context resonates with Robert Burgoyne's (2011: 88–91) recent reading of *Gladiator* (Ridley Scott 2000), as a film addressing the life conditions experienced by Hardt and Negri's multitude. Arguing against existing interpretations of the film as solely an evocation of Empire, Burgoyne discusses *Gladiator* in relation to the post-9/11 world to argue that 'the imagery and narrative messages of the contemporary epic are open to appropriation in ways that are not limited by nationalistic or imperialistic expressions, but rather may serve different, vernacular needs' (2011: 87). The reading of *Django Kill* that I offer provides a similar suggestion of how the historical context in which the film was received (in this instance the Cold War as opposed to the post-9/11 world), may have influenced the way in which such a film was interpreted by different audiences worldwide, in relation to their specific 'vernacular needs'.

DJANGO KILL: FORGOTTEN CULT CLASSIC

Over the decades since its release, *Django Kill* has amassed a following as an underground film if not as a cult classic. For many years the film's reputation was kept alive by champions like the cult director Alex Cox, who introduced the film on British terrestrial television for BBC2's *Forbidden* season in 1997. What is now believed to be the most complete version in existence was re-released on DVD by Argent Films in 2004, with previously censored ultraviolent sequences reinserted, and extras including interviews with Questi and Cox.

Surprisingly, in light of its cult status, *Django Kill* has received next to no written coverage. This is partly because with the exception of one or two interviews there is very little published work, especially in English, on Questi's career (e.g. Derderian 1997). Yet the lack of critical coverage of *Django Kill* is remarkable considering the number of books that currently exist on Italian cinema and the increasing volume of work on the spaghetti western (both the globally well-known Sergio Leone films and the cheaper serial movies like Sergio Corbucci's *Django* (1966)) (Frayling 2000, 2008; Wagstaff 1992, 1998; Eleftheriotis 2001: 92–133; Martin-Jones 2008; Fisher 2011). Apart from a brief description of its graphic violence in Christopher Frayling's *Spaghetti Westerns* (1981: 82), *Django Kill* was for many years considered, as Peter Bondanella put it extremely briefly in the seminal *Italian Cinema* (1991: 267), one of several 'Django imitations' to follow in the wake of Sergio Corbucci's *Django* (1966).

In very recent years the film has been reappraised. Bondanella, for example, includes discussion of *Django Kill* in his *A History of Italian Cinema* (2009), a book which is effectively a revised edition of *Italian Cinema*. Bondanella notes that of all the westerns to follow in the wake of *Django*, *Django Kill* 'has absolutely nothing to do with Corbucci's popular film', and he then dedicates a page and a half of commentary to the film before concluding that *Django Kill* 'brought the western formula coined by Leone to a fever pitch of psychological weirdness' (2009: 354–56). In addition, *Django Kill* received a long overdue entry into the pantheon of great spaghetti westerns when it was recognized in Howard Hughes's surveys of the genre, *Once Upon a Time in the Italian West* (2004) and *Spaghetti Westerns* (2010). Finally, Alex Cox continues to champion the film in his *10,000 Ways to Die* (2009: 140–48), a book on the spaghetti western, which he dedicates to Questi, and in which the film receives its most considered, not to mention most enthusiastic write-up. Even so, these recent works, whilst extremely welcome, generally remain focused on the film itself. By contrast, I would like to move away from this emerging discourse on the film as something of a hidden masterpiece, and instead take this opportunity to explore what the film offers to our understanding of the way that political allegory can function in cinema, when circulating transnationally in a deterritorialized, global context.

TRANSNATIONAL WESTERN TRAILS

In a certain sense the lack of critical appreciation surrounding *Django Kill* may not be so surprising, given that whilst the film's generic qualities would seem to clearly place it within the western genre, on closer inspection it also contains elements of the horror film and characteristics of art cinema. This mishmash of features makes it much harder to fathom generically. In fact, the film's status as a western is not straightforward. The 'Django' title was added by the film's UK distributors in the knowledge that linking it to the popular western

cycle would increase sales (Derderian 1997: 18–42, 31–32). Yet this was much to the distaste of director Questi, who has expressed his dislike of westerns in general, stating that he only made one western and only likes one, *Django Kill* (Derderian 1997: 19). Questi's position suggests that his intention was to produce a slightly different kind of film than the internationally recognizable Django brand might imply. Indeed, Questi's other films, in particular the remarkable *La morte ha fatto l'uovo/Death Lays an Egg* (1968), which was released the following year, suggest that he was not particularly concerned with staying consistent to generic forms in his trademark construction of bizarre allegories. *La morte ha fatto l'uovo*, after all, is a critique of the post-war Italian economic boom and the perversion of nature spawned by its all-encompassing drive to feed consumer spending (Derderian 1997: 23). Like *Django Kill*, it is also extremely difficult to place generically, at times appearing Godardian in its self-conscious pop art reflections in an art cinema mode, and at others simply a rather strange thriller about the genetic mutation of chickens.

Even so, it is when *Django Kill* is viewed as a spaghetti western, or at the very least a western-hybrid, that its curious, if not downright strange exploration of recent European history can be seen to have the potential to resonate with the Cold War experiences of various international audiences. As noted previously, the spaghetti western was a formula that was popular across several continents, including not only Europe but also parts of Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Latin America. *Django Kill* then provides an answer to André Bazin's famous question concerning the US western's worldwide appeal, posed in 1953:

What can there possibly be to interest Arabs, Hindus, Latins, Germans or Anglo-Saxons, among whom the western has had an uninterrupted success, about evocations of the birth of the United States of America?
(1971: 141)

Django Kill offers such diverse international audiences a way of considering the Cold War, particularly US involvement in peripheral countries. This is not to say that the film deliberately equates the struggles against fascism that took place during the Second World War in Europe with the violent unrest of the Cold War exactly. Rather, the fact that this bizarre allegorical rendering of the violence that took place due to fascism during the Second World War takes place in a surreal, seemingly depoliticized and decontextualized version of the Wild West, precisely leaves the possibility open to viewers worldwide of making an equation between their own experiences and the events in the film.

In making this interpretation I follow Dimitris Eleftheriotis's work on the spaghetti western in *Popular Cinemas of Europe*, in which he argues that:

It is useful to understand the spaghetti western ... as a phenomenon closely linked to the process of globalization. This not only follows accounts of Hollywood as global cinema but also highlights the accelerated mobility of cultural products around the world and their increasing detachment from national contexts. Such a model implies the weakening of national identities and perceives cultural production as operating not on a national but on a transnational, even global level.
(2001: 97–98)

Situating spaghetti westerns in relation to their deliberate appeal to international markets, Eleftheriotis analyses films like *Django* and *Jonny Oro/Ringo and*

his Golden Pistol (Sergio Corbucci 1967) and the cycles they spawned, to argue for an understanding of the spaghetti western as a hybrid format that offers audiences worldwide a form of ‘fantasy tourism’ into a cinematic version of the Wild West (2001: 102). In so doing, the spaghetti western uses the textual markers of the classical US western (men on horses, gunfights, isolated towns on the edge of the wilderness) but reconfigures them such that the protagonist is separated from the communities he encounters. For Eleftheriotis, the hero of the spaghetti western takes the transnational viewer on a journey ‘beyond the boundaries of the nation’ by erasing markers of national identity, and allowing thereby a type of fantasy tourism of the Wild West, to audiences in countries increasingly subject to US imperialism (2001: 126). In this way spaghetti westerns rewrite the US western’s myths of origin so astutely pointed out by Bazin. Such an understanding of how the spaghetti western may have functioned for different audiences suggests a more productive manner of engagement with westerns than might be offered by Eurocentric explanations of their global success, which too often consider their spectacular nature to be their major appeal. An approach informed by Eleftheriotis’s work, rather, provides a degree of agency to viewers who, whilst they may not necessarily interpret intentional national-allegorical subtexts in films from other countries in the manner intended by the film-makers, may nevertheless find therein their own (transnational-allegorical) political meanings.

As the following analysis of *Django Kill* demonstrates, spaghetti westerns provide an answer to Bazin’s question, as to what there is to interest diverse global audiences in the western genre, by demonstrating how the frontier myths of the classical US western were now relevant to many countries experiencing US-led market expansion during the Cold War. Immediately prior to the year of *Django Kill*’s release there was political turmoil in various parts of Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America, in particular with US intervention in Vietnam, and the increasing use of counter-insurgency experts in Latin America in the wake of the Cuban revolution. This included US support for the overthrow of democratically elected governments in places like Guyana, Brazil, Bolivia and the Dominican Republic. US intervention of this kind, whether through direct military action or via the backing of right wing dictatorships, was intended to support the global development of the market through the suppression of its potential political rivals. As Wallerstein succinctly summarizes, during the Cold War:

What was really being controlled – both in the West and in the East – was the ‘left,’ in the sense of all those elements who wished to put into question radically the existing world order, the capitalist world economy that was reviving and flourishing under U.S. hegemony.

(2000: 393)

The Wild West seen in such westerns, then, stands in for any number of peripheral countries encountering the United States’ continued ‘westward expansion’ into other territories (Martin-Jones 2011: 44–65), this expansion being figured in *Django Kill* as a form of fascistic conformity to the materialist demands of the market.

After all, this US-led market expansion, along with the increasing power of labour in the United States itself, paved the way for the economic shift towards neo-liberal economic policy, the expansion of multinational capital in the form of transnational corporations, at the expense of nation states in

peripheral regions of the world. As Masao Miyoshi argues, the Cold War can be considered a form of 'third world, or global containment' that gave way to 'transnational corporatism' in the wake of the internal conflict and higher wage demands during the United States's militarily disastrous (although economically beneficial) war in Vietnam and increasing economic competition from resurgent Germany and Japan (1998: 252–53). Thus, *Django Kill* emerged at the incipient moment of the new decentred Empire that globalization transformed into during this period, at the point in time at which, as Wallerstein noted in 1974, post-Second World War US global primacy of 1945–1965 gave way to increased freedom of international capitalism (2000: 198–99).

This context clarifies why, in *Cinematic Uses of the Past*, Marcia Landy observes that the spaghetti western 'reveals that "the West" is no longer the United States; rather, Americanism is a phenomenon that is larger than the geographic and cultural boundaries of the United States and its Cold War domination, coming to represent worldwide transformations and conflicts' (1996: 82). Accordingly, as I discuss further below, although *Django Kill*'s original title, *If You Live, Shoot!*, may immediately evoke a western, it could also be considered an imperative for a time of often violent revolutionary struggle against global capitalism, not only in European nations like Italy, but in many parts of the world.

TRANSNATIONAL ALLEGORIES

Before turning to examine the film, a final word is necessary on the difficulties of defining transnational allegory. Various scholars have explored the contested 'cross-cultural' ground between national and transnational understandings of films.¹ Yet what unites many such recent discussions is what distinguishes *Django Kill* from them. From Christina Klein (2004) on *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* (Ang Lee 2000), to Jeff Menne's work on New Mexican Cinema (2007), the point is often made that diasporic audiences are able to identify with a depiction of an originary cultural heritage (from China to Mexico) that resonates with notions of 'transcultural memory' (Erl 2010: 305). As Astrid Erl's work suggests, in line with much-discussed seminal texts by Laura U. Marks and Hamid Naficy from the early 2000s, international audiences can identify with 'aspects of remembering and forgetting which are located between, across, and beyond the boundaries of national cultures' (Erl 2010: 311). However, *Django Kill* does not offer such a straightforward case for understanding the transnational functioning of allegory, as the audiences likely to respond to it share not a national or cultural origin, as a diaspora does, but a geopolitical present.

For this reason, whilst it might seem appropriate at one level to agree with Ismail Xavier's nationally focused assessment of cinematic allegory that 'we have to understand ... film as situated in its own time, the ways in which it can be taken as an allegory referring to the specific political juncture from which it arose' (2005: 354), on the other hand we might disagree in as much as the film text may offer transnational viewers further interpretative possibilities. Put another way, whilst the emphasis on understanding films as products of the national contexts in which they were produced and consumed (in order to avoid culturally uninformed conclusions) is a valuable approach that has been strengthened by research into cinemas outside of the United States and Europe, nevertheless, certain films also suggest that other kinds of interpretations are equally valuable. Transnational readings of allegory, after all, may well be, by their very nature, uninformed of the culture from which the film originated. This is the case whether

1. Antonio Lázaro-Reboll, for instance, points to the different interpretations of Guillermo del Toro's *El espinazo del diablo/The Devil's Backbone* (Spain and Mexico, 2001) in Spain, Mexico and the United States.

it is a deliberate appeal to international audiences that necessarily renders the allegory ambiguous and applicable in various contexts, or whether the film is simply open to interpretation due to the potential for transnational application of its narrative and its imagery. The latter instance, I believe, more accurately describes *Django Kill*. In this respect Xavier's earlier point in the same article is perhaps more instructive, that 'allegory is not an intrinsic property of a text' and as such 'the more enigmatic a text, the greater its chance of provoking allegorical interpretations' (2005: 343). When the potential for allegory offered by a film like *Django Kill* speaks to an experience of fascism in the pursuit of wealth that emanates from no apparent national, or otherwise identifiable origin, this provocation is all the more likely during a time of political turmoil caused by the very forces of fascism the film critiques: those that constitute Empire.

The question remains of how one can hope to assess the transnational interpretations that a film may encounter on its travels? This is difficult even for contemporary films, and when we attempt such an investigation with an older film like *Django Kill*, it becomes even harder to ascertain what audiences at the time may have interpreted from it, across the various territories in which spaghetti westerns were popular. However, in another context, there has been an attempt to approach this very question, of how exactly to consider film history when gathering such data may be prohibitively difficult, or perhaps even impossible. Iordanova and Eleftheriotis have addressed the oft-held belief that it is only in recent decades that popular Indian cinema has begun to successfully circulate internationally, by exploring the international circulation of Indian film during the period of the 1930s to the 1960s. In order to chart the massive popularity of Indian films outside the West during this period, however, they have had recourse to 'anecdotes and personal testimonies' (Iordanova and Eleftheriotis 2006: 80). This strategy was used to counter the lack of official statistical evidence from a period during which, with film distribution nothing like as centralized as it is today, records rarely if ever exist. In a somewhat similar spirit, I argue that to address a question like that posed of the western by Bazin requires that a speculative mode be taken towards historiography. After all, many of the territories in which spaghetti westerns found favour in the 1960s and 1970s were also those in which Indian films were popular (including many parts of Africa and the Middle East). Accordingly, it is also practically impossible to know how well such films fared internationally, due to the lack of existing records.

I find myself in accord with the polemical thrust of Iordanova and Eleftheriotis's position, then, that when official figures or critical debates, presuming they even exist, are unlikely to offer any meaningful way of knowing the film's impact internationally, nevertheless we should try to understand how they may have functioned at the time. Although only scant box-office figures and theatrical release dates exist for *Django Kill*, and mostly across parts of Europe, to avoid discussing it altogether would seem tantamount to bowing to the dominance of histories of the mainstream cinemas that do keep such records, the most prominent of which is Hollywood. Accordingly, this article does not attempt to argue that *Django Kill* was internationally popular, in fact it is difficult to know whether it circulated widely beyond Europe or not, was popular or not, or whether or not audiences around the world interpreted it in the manner I suggest. Rather, I use this neglected film to explore how people in many parts of the world may have read spaghetti western narratives allegorically, in a manner that drew out the resonances with their own life experiences. Such an approach is taken to suggest ways in which transnational allegory may be understood to function for different audiences,

by furthering Eleftheriotis' attempts to acknowledge the agency of international audiences viewing spaghetti westerns. This acknowledgement is often missing from considerations of why these films were popular in areas of the world beyond Europe and the United States. Yet ignoring the interpretive or critical faculties of international viewers can lead to a replication of Cold War discourses that primitivized the 'third world' by emphasizing the consumption of spectacle over any possible engagement with broader, political issues.

Such a Eurocentric denial of agency to audiences in the 'third world' would seem strange, not only because market expansion into the 'third world' encountered politically engaged opposition in numerous contexts, but also considering how many parallels could be drawn between the Italian context from which films like *Django Kill* appeared and material conditions in these more peripheral parts of the world. After all, the scholars of Italian cinema that I discuss below consider *Django Kill* to have very deliberately engaged with the political context in Italy, in spite of its 'weirdness'. Why, then, would we not consider 'third world' audiences to be able to see a similar connection between their lives and the events on screen?

Therefore, although the approach I take is, in the light of the lack of distribution figures, speculative by necessity, it is in other ways no different from any interpretation of a film text that tacitly posits a viewer able to read it in the manner suggested by the critic. The major difference here is that the manner of this speculation is foregrounded in my argument in order to illustrate how allegory may function, transnationally, when audiences in very different parts of the world experience similar political and economic conditions.

PERSONAL HISTORIES – EUROPEAN HISTORY – TRANSNATIONAL HISTORIES

Django Kill begins with a man with no name (Tomas Milian), who is referred to as The Stranger, being helped out of his own grave by two passing Native Americans, and setting out to take revenge on his killers. Whether he is actually dead or alive is uncertain. The Stranger seeks his double-crossing ex-partner in crime, Oaks (Piero Lulli) and his gang. It was they who shot the dual-heritage Stranger (who is Anglo Mexican, or in generic terms, a 'half-breed') and his Mexican *compadres* at the start of the film. However, when The Stranger arrives in town he discovers that the sadistic townsfolk have already killed most of the gang and stolen their gold. The film's conventional revenge narrative is completely derailed as a consequence. Indeed, The Stranger quickly kills Oaks, his revenge completed very early on in the narrative. The Stranger then comes up against powerful cattle magnate Mr Zorro (Roberto Carmadiel) and his gang of black-shirted cowboys. Eventually, after much brawling, shooting and exploding, he kills them all and rides away.

Django Kill consists of a series of spectacles. This is very much in the manner Christopher Wagstaff notes of spaghetti westerns produced during the 1960s and 1970s (1992: 253), for viewing conditions which suggest that the western format functioned somewhat akin to the early silent cinema of attractions famously theorized by Tom Gunning (1990) as spectacles designed to hail the distracted spectator. Unsurprisingly, then, for a spaghetti western of the time, one contemporary reviewer described *Django Kill* as:

Savage, largely incomprehensible goings-on, with mass-hangings, mass shootings, mass blowings-up, and buckets of blood. Should go well

with those who couldn't care less about the story so long as everyone ends up mincemeat.

(Anon 1969: 5)

This description is fairly accurate. The spectacles are myriad, as a brief list of just some of its standout instances illustrates. *Django Kill's* spectacles include: The Stranger's emergence from the grave; a flashback to a riverside ambush and robbery of US military gold; a saloon song sung by Lori (Marilu Tolo); the lynching and murder of Oaks' men by the townsfolk; The Stranger's shooting of Oaks with gold bullets; the townsfolk plucking the bullets from Oaks' dying body; The Stranger's disturbing and violent dream; The Stranger and the two Native Americans chasing down wild horses on foot; The Stranger having a drunken trick shooting competition; The Stranger becoming briefly romantically entangled with Elizabeth (Patrizia Valturi), a home-imprisoned unfaithful wife straight out of the Gothic tradition; the townsfolk scalping one of the Native Americans; The Stranger captured by Zorro's men, stripped, tied in a crucifix and submitted to torture by bat (as in, the animal, not a blunt instrument); Zorro sharing a drink and a chat with his parrot; The Stranger setting loose a dynamite-laden horse amongst Zorro's men; an exploding horse; The Stranger killing Zorro; Elizabeth dying in a house inferno; Elizabeth's husband's head engulfed in molten gold; and so on.

Yet, there is more to this film than simply the use of a string of spectacles to hail the wandering attention of the spectator. In *Django Kill* these spectacles have an allegorical function that assists the film's construction of a politically engaged narrative, albeit diffuse and unfocused in its target. Admittedly, *Django Kill* lacks the more directly allegorical links seen in westerns set during the Mexican revolution, such as Damiano Damiani's *Quien Sabe?/A Bullet for the General* (1966) and Sergio Leone's *Giù la testa/A Fistful of Dynamite* (1971), the former being scripted by Franco Solinas, who also wrote Gillo Pontecorvo's *La battaglia di Algeri/The Battle of Algiers* (1966) (Frayling 1981: 232). Nevertheless, if we understand the genesis of *Django Kill* in the personal experiences of director Questi and editor Arcalli during the Second World War, this particular spaghetti western can be interpreted as being just as politically engaged as these contemporaries, even if the global political situation it has the potential to critique is broader than that of the nation from which it originated.

As an 18-year-old, Questi joined a band of partisans and spent two years living in the mountains of Italy fighting against the fascists during the Second World War (Cox 2009: 143). In an interview included in the Argent Films DVD extras, Questi deliberately links his experiences during the war to the storyline of *Django Kill*, with its guerrilla fighter, The Stranger, and his Native American friends battling the homosocial (and also homosexual) grouping of black-shirted cowboys. One way to read the film, then, is as a product of, and reflection on, the life of director Questi. On such a view, Zorro's black-shirted cowboys could be interpreted as a caricature of Second World War European fascism, as it was encountered by Questi. For this reason their actions are portrayed as being as deliberately uniform as their dress code, particularly as they march somewhat comically in unison to obey the commands of Zorro. As Questi observes in an interview for the journal *Spaghetti Cinema* in 1997, there is a lot of truth in such an interpretation of the film as an allegory for the war that stems from his personal experiences:

I didn't use the movie Western formula, only the look: [...] I wanted to recount all of the things, the cruelty, the camaraderie with friends, the death, all the experiences I had of war, in combat, in the mountains.
(Derderian 1997)

He continues in the same interview: 'Yes, it is a Western, but it's a story of the life I knew then, the war, the violence' (Derderian 1997: 21–22).

Although it is not normally mentioned in relation to *Django Kill*, to this we can presumably add the wartime experiences of *Django Kill*'s co-writer and editor, Arcalli. Arcalli and Questi worked together on the scripts for Questi's early films, including *Django Kill* and *La morte ha fatto l'uovo*. Arcalli worked as editor on several auteur classics of the 1960s and 1970s, including films by Michelangelo Antonioni and Bernardo Bertolucci (he also worked as a writer on several scripts, including Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in America* (1984)), before his death from cancer in 1978. Arcalli not only edited Bertolucci's critically acclaimed *Ultimo tango a Parigi/Last Tango in Paris* (1972), but also received a co-scriptwriting and an assistant director credit for his work on the film. In various interviews, Bertolucci credits Arcalli with having completely changed his perspective on the importance of editing in film-making when they edited *Il Conformista/The Conformist* (1970) (Gili 2000: 121; Nowell-Smith and Halberstadt 2000: 252), suggesting that his influence contributed to the success of the film. However, what is perhaps less well known is Arcalli's relationship with Questi, which undoubtedly influenced the final, extremely distinctive form of his most famous features, *Django Kill*, *La morte ha fatto l'uovo* and *Arcana/Arcana* (1972), all of which Arcalli co-wrote with Questi. We might presume that the earliest standout moment in *Django Kill*, footage of a dead body rolling downhill that has been inserted into the film *upside down*, as part of The Stranger's surreal dream between death and life (which very effectively demonstrates a world turned upside down by greed) is a signature of Arcalli's editorial influence on the film. Perhaps equally as important as recognizing Arcalli's influence in this respect, however, is the correspondence between his own personal history of the war and Questi's. Arcalli, like Questi, fought with the partisans during the war, after Arcalli's father was killed by the fascists. He joined when he was 14, and was a Political Commissar in the Garibaldi Brigades, also spending time fighting in the mountains (Nowell-Smith and Halberstadt 2000: 252). It is from this period of his life that his nickname 'Kim' originates.

Django Kill, then, is presumably an expression of both Questi and Arcalli's personal histories. Yet the origin of *Django Kill* in Questi and Arcalli's wartime experiences, whilst perhaps crucial to understanding the origins of the film, is only half the story. The film offers itself both to specifically national and more broadly transnational interpretations, by refusing to pinpoint the source of the fascism and greed that is seen to permeate all of society, in its reimagining of European colonization of the Wild West.

Viewing the film allegorically is also useful to situate *Django Kill* as a product of the shifting ideological terrain of Italian politics of the period. Gian Piero Brunetta briefly does precisely this in *The History of Italian Cinema*, considering *Django Kill* to contain the same 'revolutionary leanings' as many Italian films of 1966–1976, including its contemporary *La battaglia di Algeri* (2009: 178). In *Radical Frontiers in the Spaghetti Western*, Austin Fisher goes further still and groups *Django Kill* along with other spaghetti westerns that negotiated a resurgence in fascism in Italian politics at the time that, Fisher

argues, film-makers like Questi seemed to perceive as a legacy of the Second World War (2011: 79–115). Fisher's reading very compellingly explains the film's depiction of the townsfolk's motivation to violence by greed as part of a broader critique of the latent fascism underlying bourgeois liberalism in post-war Italy (2011: 92–93). We might also suggest further ways of interpreting *Django Kill* as a national allegory, for instance, by drawing associative links between the film's focus on gang violence, which we might perhaps relate to fascist *squadristi* (Mussolini's black-shirted squads), or perhaps to the mafia, or again we might relate the greed for gold of the townsfolk to the drive for material gain associated with the Italian economic miracle (*Il boom*), and so on. Such a nationally focused allegorical reading makes sense when considering how influential Questi and Arcalli's personal histories were to the film's script, and their false-crediting of the story to a Spanish writer, María del Carmen Martínez Román, in order to obtain co-production status (Cox 2009: 143). This was not a transnational co-production, after all, it was only designed to give the impression of being one for financial reasons.

Yet my point is not to argue against such interpretations. Rather, I am suggesting that alternative readings exist alongside them, depending on who views the film, which we can consider to be equally as important to our understanding of the film if we shift our attention from the film's national-allegorical potential to its transnational-allegorical openness. *Django Kill's* political, perhaps revolutionary, message is open to interpretation in a broadly accessible way that enables it to cross over into different territories than solely those that share the wartime histories experienced first-hand by Questi and Arcalli. Rather like the loosely allegorical use of the Mexican revolution as setting in the more pointedly politically engaged spaghetti westerns noted above (*Quien Sabe?*, etc.), Questi's more obliquely allegorical film, albeit inspired by events in the Second World War, offers just as many open-ended interpretations for audiences worldwide in the late 1960s. These would have been especially pertinent in what were then considered 'third world' contexts where revolution, dictatorship, US imperialism (or simply the threat thereof) were increasingly a part of the negotiation of everyday life.

WEALTH DIVIDE VS ETHNIC DIVIDE

The opening shooting of the dual heritage Stranger, along with the Mexicans and one African American who took part in the gold robbery, is instructive in respect of *Django Kill's* transnational openness. Here we see how the film divides its characters along lines which, whilst they often correspond directly with an ethnic divide and are in turns fuelled by racism, are, in fact, an expression of a global wealth divide that has the potential to disregard ethnic differences in favour of financial status.

Oaks and his men betray and murder their erstwhile partners in crime on purely racist grounds. Noting the 'stink' on their 'skin' Oaks states that he does not wish to share the bounty with no 'motherless Mexicans', before he and his Anglo men taunt their condemned prisoners, suggesting that they say their prayers in Spanish. As in the more obviously political westerns set in Mexico, here the United States's neighbouring Mexican 'Other' is used to represent a boundary, only this time not between the powerful northern nation and its southern neighbours specifically, but the greed of the 'developed' and the poverty of the 'developing' worlds more generally.

This wealth divide is apparent not only in the massacre in the opening sequence. Again, the scalping of one of The Stranger's Native American companions by the townsfolk in one of the previously deleted scenes, although it also initially seems to suggest a society divided along lines marked out by ethnic divisions, actually points to the larger, financial division. After all, the townsfolk who perform the scalping also brutally dispatch Oaks and his Anglo gang for their loot immediately on their arrival into town. Indeed, this apparent belief of the majority in their right to kill the 'Other' for financial gain is not only held by the townsfolk. Zorro's men, some of whom appear to be coded as Mexican through make-up, facial hair and costume, hold a similar view, making any too neat a reading of the seemingly racist motivation of the opening massacre of The Stranger's *compadres* difficult to sustain. Rather, the differences between The Stranger's Mexican allies and Zorro's mix of Anglo and apparently Mexican men, are used to emphasize once more that it is wealth, and not ethnicity, that separates social classes. This is most clearly apparent in their starkly contrasting costumes. The Mexicans killed by Oaks' double cross in the opening slaughter are dressed in simple peasants' clothes and carry guns without the luxury of holsters. Zorro's men, by contrast, are dressed in fine, matching black outfits, accompanied by leather holsters, smart hats and black shirts (the resonances with fascism of this last item being clearly intentional).

The portrayal of the two Native Americans adds weight to this interpretation. As is typical of the spaghetti western, the Native Americans are unconvincingly costumed and made-up to such a degree that they almost create an unintentional parody of the US western's use of similarly stereotyped 'Red Indians' (often played by Anglo American actors) in classical westerns like *The Searchers* (John Ford 1956). The Native Americans are a vaguely defined 'Other' to the ordinary townsfolk, appearing at times more like gypsy travellers in a horse-drawn wagon. They function, then, as an oblique 'Other', along with the Mexicans massacred in the opening sequences, against which to contrast the ordinary, everyday fascism of the two ruling groups (fascism that takes the form of materialist thuggery in the service of profit, rather than a political ideology), the white European settlers and Zorro's black-shirted cowboys. In this way *Django Kill* uses such wealth contrasts to explore how conformity and fascism can exist anywhere under the corrupting influence of greed. This can indeed breed racist tensions, but can equally be seen as a form of socially sanctioned violence against the poorest sectors of society, which often coincides with an ethnic 'Other'. This is the socially divided Italy that Questi and Arcalli experienced during the war, no doubt, but also resonates more broadly with the political turmoil of the 1960s (both in Italy and various parts of Europe), as well as evoking the negative impact of the Cold War on the subaltern internationally.

The major distinction between this reading of *Django Kill* and the conclusions drawn by Eleftheriotis in relation to *Django*, then, is that in this particular film the reinvasion of the United States's colonialist take on the western genre (Stam and Spence 1983) is not so much fantasy tourism as is the eventful wanderings of The Stranger in a purgatorial nightmare caused by the fascism (when understood in the manner defined by Deleuze and Guattari outlined earlier) that underlies the expansion of market capitalism during the Cold War. His adventures take place amidst such greed for gold that the frenzied plucking of gold bullets from a dying man's body, and the similarly motivated disintering of bodies from graves in search of further hidden loot, appear horrific

because of their seeming banality. As Questi notes in interview, along with the more obvious equation between Zorro's black-shirted followers and fascists, the film places the utmost propensity for violence (including murder, torture and mutilation, all in the pursuit of financial gain) in the hands of establishment figures amongst the townsfolk (Derderian 1997: 22). For this reason, *Django Kill's* non-nationally specific narrative is open to application to various contexts, its version of the Wild West as a struggle against a banal, conformist, capitalist form of fascism that divides people along lines determined solely by wealth, irrespective of issues like ethnicity, conceivably standing in for peripheral countries all over the world.

TRANSNATIONAL WILD WORLD

Finally, *Django Kill's* transnationally appropriable political allegory is further enhanced by the film's exploration of the interaction between past and present. *Django Kill* opens with a grasping hand emerging from the ground, as The Stranger slowly climbs from the grave. As he writhes deliriously, a stream of images of his death are intercut with that of his face as he remembers the past. The rapidity of the montage creates a flashing of images as the past invades the present. They are followed by a series of further disconcerting and seemingly disconnected images of the gold robbery (including the upside down footage), before The Stranger settles on a particular narrative of the past. His flashback of the robbery and betrayal run smoothly from thereon. The opening flashbacks that accompany The Stranger's emergence from the grave suggest the possibility that the past, the ideological struggles against fascism of the Second World War in particular, still inform the Cold War present in which 'he who lives, shoots'. The following comment by Questi, again taken from the Argent Films DVD interview, illustrates how the purposeful construction of the film as a series of spectacles (in particular its opening flashback sequence) offered a solution to the difficulty of depicting precisely this continued effect of the past in the present.

Because the film didn't have any psychological elements – it was meant as a series of dramatic events that generated tension – we needed a way to set past events in the present action. We needed to find something in the edit that could allow us to do this and so we came up with this solution.

As Questi notes, in a film designed as a series of spectacles, and therefore without the possibility of a psychologically informed individual flashback of the sort found in Leone's revenge westerns (e.g. *C'era una volta il West/Once Upon a Time in the West* (1969)), this particular piece of editing was devised to show the invasive and ongoing presence of the past in the present. In this way *Django Kill* offers the possibility of interpreting this story as an allegory for the return of the historical past in the present. Thus the same struggle against fascism that Questi and Arcalli encountered during the Second World War is reconstructed in a deliberately fantastical manner that could equally be interpreted as occurring internationally during the Cold War. When placed in a spaghetti western, a European-produced genre that characteristically gave viewers worldwide access to a fantasy version of the Wild West, the flashbacks serve not to suggest events of the Second World War exactly (even if their origin lies in Questi and Arcalli's personal experiences), but rather to suggest

the 'return' of the same struggles of this recent period of the European past in the global present, during the Cold War.

Therefore in *Django Kill* the non-specific use of Wild West locations creates an oblique allegory open to interpretation by audiences worldwide during the Cold War. The film suggests that the same struggles against fascism that Questi and Arcalli experienced during the Second World War have returned to haunt the Cold War present. As Bazin's famous question suggests, the audience for such westerns was international, hence it is pertinent to consider spaghetti westerns like *Django Kill*, in particular, because of their erasure of all identifying characteristics of recognizable national significance in favour of a more transnationally applicable story, as having the ability to speak to various audiences worldwide. The context that informed the audience's understanding of these films was broader than just political turmoil in 1960s Europe after all, and accordingly *Django Kill* constructs an oblique historical allegory, leaving itself open to a wealth of interpretations transnationally. It therefore has the potential to appeal in particular to audiences on the front line, experiencing life in the new Wild West under the everyday fascism of the Cold War.

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