

International Project for Scientific Cooperation
National Center for Scientific Research, France / University of California, Santa
Barbara & University of Southern California

TRANSNATIONAL HOLLYWOOD:

**FRENCH-AMERICAN RELATIONS AND CIRCULATIONS IN THE SCREEN MEDIA
INDUSTRIES**

Project acronym: FAM

Abstract

This project explores the transnationalization of film and television industries, often referred to as the rise of “Global Hollywood,” by examining the *circulation* of screen media professionals between Paris and Hollywood. Partner researchers assess the French situation against other local cases to question the specificity of Paris by contrast with other media centers. This empirically grounded study develops in 3 directions: : 1) the historical influences that have shaped present circulations and modes of globalization; 2) the increasing mobility of screen media professionals and the consequent effects on careers and cultural products; 3) the role of digital technologies in shaping the patterns of circulation, giving specific form to the transnationalization of Hollywood. This program includes the organization of international events with professional partners, and leads to a joint publication.

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH PROGRAM

Project objectives

Existing work has started to explore the effects of the “globalization” of Hollywood on other local media industries. This project draws on their conclusions and on prior collaborations between the partner research centers to open new directions for understanding interdependent transformations and shifting geographies of national film and television industries. The French-American research team formed for this project brings together doctoral students, post-doctoral researchers, and senior scholars recognized in the fields of cultural sociology and media studies, from CNRS (National Center for Scientific Research, France) and UCSB (University of California, Santa Barbara), the primary partners in this project, together with other academic and professional partners.

Our project explores the relationship between French and American screen media professionals with respect to the practices that have contributed to the transnationalization of production, distribution, and exhibition. Although we focus primarily on this distinctive case study, we also *compare* the French situation to other local cases that further elaborate our understanding of the dynamics of transnational media. Our research collaboration examines transnationalization processes at the

granular level of individual circulations. This approach leads us to understanding the forms they take and the effects they carry. It also allows us to shed comparative light on the emergence of leading “media capitals,” questioning the specificity of Paris in contrast to other prominent centers of media activity (London, Dubai, Beijing, Vancouver...).

Relevance of the project

Studies of “global Hollywood” show how recent transformations have led both to the outsourcing of production activities in order to reduce the costs and secure other sources of financial support, and to the geographical expansion of distribution and exhibition in order to reach foreign audiences. Whereas the North American market used to generate 70% of all Hollywood film revenues, it now generates only 30%, deriving most of its income from overseas markets. This inversion illustrates the importance of penetrating other markets and strengthening the existing ties with industry professionals in foreign countries. Such changes go hand-in-hand with the reorganization of the structure of work and power relations in Hollywood. Major studios have become part of larger media conglomerates that are no longer Hollywood-focused, while the industry’s two dominant talent agencies have also diversified and globalized their activity.

In this context, Hollywood studios make fewer movies and tend to opt for the production of big tent pole films and “franchises” that require blockbuster financing and distribution arrangements. Interestingly, this situation strengthens the development of other avenues for the production of “independent films,” many of them international co-productions. Consequently, France has become an increasingly important territory because the professional and economic organization of the industry offers attractive financial benefits to Hollywood partners. Its importance to Hollywood is also rooted in the long-term aesthetic influence of French cinema as well as in the stability that this film industry provides to the always uncertain and instable endeavor of making an independent film.

French film professionals play an active role in establishing themselves as counterparts to Hollywood creative and business players, in adopting but also adapting locally some of the American norms and models, and in shaping these collaborations according to their own norms and models. On the French talent side, the appeal of crossing over to Hollywood seems to have intensified over time due to the penetration of Hollywood productions in the French market, but we lack a systematic study of conditions and effects of such talent circulations. Our research team explores such changes not as a unidirectional process driven by Hollywood forces, but as the more complex result of reciprocal exchanges – not in a situation of equal power but in one of tightly knit, historically grounded, interrelations.

A distinctive approach

We would like to underline here what constitutes the specificity of our approach:

1) First, it is centered on the *circulation* of film professionals, as well as on the circulation of the films themselves, and subsequently that of associated genres, categories, production norms and models, and production and distribution formats. Because we put the notion of *circulation* between two professional worlds at the center of the analysis, we prefer to use the word *transnationalization*, which stresses the idea of

crossing over local boundaries, rather than the more popular concept of “global Hollywood.”

In addition to focusing on the circulation of talent and artworks, we also examine the key roles that *middle men and “invisible architects”* (producers, distributors, agents...) play in mediating and catalyzing this process, an area of research that remains greatly understudied. Research conducted by some of our team members will also allow us to explore this circulation in comparison to television shows, another area of enduring and robust exchange that features boundary crossing between countries and between media, with talent increasingly circulating between film and television.

2) We maintain that understanding the constitution and transformation of Paris as a “Motion Picture Capital” in this context cannot be separated from the wider configurations of French-American relationships and institutions. France’s position in the wider process of screen media’s transformation can only be accurately described *in relation to other locations* which objectively compete with France to establish themselves as Motion Picture Capitals and are engaged in intense exchanges with Hollywood. The circulations between Paris and Hollywood are also impacted by the development of digital technologies because they allow for new and cheaper ways of making and distributing a film, which consequently engenders a new global geography of production.

3) We furthermore contend that understanding these changing relationships also means *historicizing* them: our approach connects an investigation of the historical foundation of Hollywood’s transnationalization since the 1930s to the analysis of the ongoing changes brought by digital technologies in the current era.

Our team members are solidly experienced in conducting empirical work on motion picture industries and are therefore ideally positioned to carry out this project. We are also able to capitalize on preexisting connections and collaborations with leading professionals of the French and American screen media industries.

Three interconnected dimensions

Even though our participating scholars specialize in one of the three research dimensions outlined below, they may also contribute to more than one dimension. Furthermore the strength of our analysis relies on drawing connections between these approaches and objects of study. Regular team meetings—both in person and via teleconference—will allow us to refine our ideas and forge collaborative linkages throughout the project.

1. Transnational Hollywood in historical perspective

Our program first looks at the mobility of film professionals, the circulation of films, and the appropriation of industry models and practices between the 1930s and 1960s to establish how the preconditions for today’s exchanges were formed. Through several complementary case studies of this historical process of Hollywood’s transnationalization, we will be able to outline interconnected transformations of the French and American industries.

2. Tracking transnational professionals: career paths and creative content

Second, we explore the interconnected mobility of film and television professionals, examining the characteristics and effects on career paths and creative choices, in order to empirically approach how the “globalization of Hollywood” really happens. We include an understudied dimension of such circulation processes: the key role played by brokers and middlemen who specialize in bridging the two film worlds.

3. How new technologies, platforms, and formats shape these circulations

Third, we examine the ways in which the transition to digital technologies and platforms directly affects circulations channels, but also alters the content that circulates, and who the middlemen are. This includes exploring the formation of transnational production teams, the creation and distribution of transnational content, and the impact on media formats and genres, especially with respect to media consumption practices.

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