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Framing non-western cinema at international film festivals: modern Thai cinema funded with foreign money

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Table of Content **Page**

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Introduction

When Hubert Bals (1937-1988) proclaimed that the new masters of cinema were to be discovered in Africa and Asia, he could hardly have imagined the dedication with which the International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR) that he founded in 1972 would continue to live up to his vision. The festival aspired to discover the 'masters' in these regions on an annual basis in the decades that would follow and The Hubert Bals Fund (HBF), which was realized after his death in 1988, fulfilled Bals' ambition to fund directors in areas where support for independent filmmakers is limited or non-existent. Now almost in existence for thirty years, the Fund has become an iconic element of the IFFR and a recognizable name within the film festival world. Although the IFFR was part of a relatively small, not yet fully institutionalized industry when Bals was in charge, there has been a mushrooming of film festivals around the globe over the last decades. This increase in both their number and their influence started in the 1980s, but the number of festivals has been exponentially growing since the beginning of the twenty-first century and seemingly every city wants to host its own film festival now. This exponential growth has spurred a growing body of scholarly research and discourse on the topic of film festivals as well, focusing on topics such as their relation towards Hollywood or mainstream cinema, how they work as a (self-sustaining) network or ecology, or their role within the production and distribution of cinema. This has been accompanied by interest among scholars from other fields of research such as cultural studies, organizational studies, anthropology or tourism studies, focusing on their role and usage within different frameworks, such as a festivals' usage for city branding. Since Marijke de Valck and Skadi Loist founded the Film Festival Research Network (FFRN) in 2008 and the University of St. Andrews started publishing the *Film Festival Yearbook* series in the same year, there has been an exponential growth in both the interest in and the body of research on the topic.[1] However, as David Archibald and Mitchell Miller suggest at the end of their introduction to the Film Festival Dossier three years later: "What film festival scholarship purports to describe and understand […] will not be answered definitively any time soon. But we offer up this dossier as a contribution to the debate."[2] Nearly a decade later, it has not become that much clearer. What has become clearer though is that film

[1] See the website http://www.filmfestivalresearch.org, where the aim and procedures of the projects are explained. The website includes an overview of published research on film festivals.
[2] Archibald and Miller 2011, p. 252

festivals have an ever increasing prominence and influence within the world of film production and their importance does not seem likely to diminish anytime soon.

In an increasingly globalized environment, with easier access to an ever-growing variety of films (including many transnational co-productions), film festivals, in part out of the necessity to stay healthy financially, have been initiating more and more business-oriented side-branches. This, in turn, has led to increasing debates among scholars regarding what the function of film festivals is, or should be, and how festivals have both influenced the annual production of (world) cinema and the discourse surrounding it. As a result, scholars have discussed the dichotomies present at film festivals between notions such as national and transnational cinema, 'first world' production companies and 'third world' cinema, and cinema successful on the international film market versus cinema successful in local theatres. Scholars such as Thomas Elsaesser, among others, have argued that film festivals and their increased prominence have influenced the type of films made across the globe.[3] Others have taken this argument further and have questioned both the hierarchical relationships between first and third world countries these 'festival films' are part of, and the so-called 'authenticity' of these films.[4] These are complex and usually sensitive issues that deserve our attention and research. However, a good part of the essays and debates regarding non-western films have been written and conducted from the standpoint of scholars from this same 'western world' as well and, without making any judgment about the quality or validity of their contributions, I do believe that this background does - involuntarily and unconsciously or not - influence the framework within which they conduct their research and the points of references they use. This framework includes, among other things, a hegemonic vision of what constitutes film theory, film history and history in general. One frequent result of this framework is a lack of historical, cultural or spatial knowledge and expertise in regions other than 'the west', which in turn influences one's perspective and research. While this is not necessarily problematic in itself, it can lead to problematic statements and claims. More importantly however, it limits the type and scope of possible research and analysis that is and can be done on non-western cinema. A remark by David Hanan in the introduction of *Film in South East Asia: Views from the Region* exemplifies how ubiquitous and persistent this hegemonic vision of film history in the

[3] Elsaesser 2005, p. 88
[4] See, for example, Ross, 2011.

west is. Hanan writes: "Of all the national cinemas of South East Asia featured in this book, only one (the Indonesian cinema) received any discussion in the recently released *Oxford History of World Cinema*".[5] Even according to a self-proclaimed 'History of World Cinema', the majority of non-western countries apparently do not even exist. The limitations imposed by this hegemonic framework leave us with a lot of room for potential analysis and underexplored angles.

In order to both challenge this shortcoming and to contribute to this relatively young but growing field of research, this thesis will seek to add a different perspective to the debate by providing some national, cultural and regional context for several non-western films. In order to prevent this thesis from becoming too generalizing and in order to do justice to both the films themselves and to contextual factors such as language, local history and political context, I believe it is beneficial that the focus of this thesis will be limited to one country. Thailand has been chosen as the country of focus for three reasons. Firstly, although the Thai film industry has a long and rich history, there has been a recent rise in prestige and recognition of Thai cinema on the annual film festival calendar and its visibility to non-Thai audiences has increased enormously. This is a phenomenon that slowly started somewhere around the turn of the century and has reached its most visible pinnacle - at least so far - when Apichatpong Weerasethakul (1970) won the *Palme d'Or* in Cannes in 2010. Secondly, although these films have, for a variety of purposes, often been framed as a form of 'national cinema' when presented at film festivals and sometimes have been branded and promoted as 'Thai cinema', both in- and outside of film festivals, I believe the films produced in Thailand over the past two decades, which have gathered international acclaim and travelled the festival circuit rather successfully, have been incredibly diverse and therefore provide an excellent case study to discuss several of the complex and recurring topics in these debates. Thirdly, in order to further limit the scope of this thesis and to address some of the dichotomies present at international film festivals, I have chosen to focus specifically on films that have been created with the help of one participant in the annual film festival circuit: The Hubert Bals Fund, which is often discussed and framed as a representative of western film funds. This specific 'success story' of modern 'Thai cinema' at an international stage would not have

[5] Hanan 2001, pp. 14-15

been possible without both the existence of the film festival network as we know it today and the financial support of international funds such as the HBF.

In order to understand the current annual production of 'world cinema' with the financial help of festival funds, its place within the festival circuit and what makes the current success of these films possible, it is necessary to take a brief look at the history of film festivals, on how they operate and how the field has changed over the course of its existence. Film festivals originated as European institutions with a nationalistic and political agenda and their early growth is closely connected to European history and geo-politics.[6] In the several decades it took for the phenomenon to grow and successfully spread across the globe, roughly three essential phases can be distinguished. The first phase starts when the first festival was held in Venice in 1932, initiated for propagandistic purposes by Benito Mussolini (1883-1945). This specifically political type of film festival saw fruition and maturity in the 1940s, with national and political agendas forming the key motivation in the organization of an annual festival. This ultimately led to the establishing of the Cannes festival as a democratic countermove to these political festivals. The second phase occurs following several upheavals in Cannes in 1968, after which the function of festivals gradually shifts from showcasing and promoting national cinema to promoting cinema as a form of art, increasingly shifting its focus to cinema from all around the world. The re-organization of Cannes in 1972, including the new competitions and side-bars, can be seen as the definite articulation of this change, and this edition would set the template for any future film festival that would follow.[7] The third phase occurs in the 1980s, when festivals became increasingly professional and institutionalized. This is essentially the model on which many film festivals are based today.[8]

An early essay addressing the film festival phenomenon as a valuable and under acknowledged topic of research in its own right is Bill Nichols' "Global Image Consumption in the Age of Late Capitalism" (1994), in which he already ascertained that international film festivals had become ubiquitous. Examining film festivals as a circuit which provides a continuous pattern of

[6] Elsaesser 2005, p. 84
[7] Ibid., p. 90, De Valck 2007, p. 19-20
[8] For a more detailed account of the history, growth, development and sustainability of film festivals, I suggest readers to consult de Valck's book *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia*.

circulation and exchange, sustaining, in his words, a 'traffic in cinema', Nichols already addressed the dichotomies between politics and aesthetics, the local and the global, the international and the national, and the difficulties these bring with them. Trying to analyze festivals within the context of industrial capitalism, Nichols argues that film festivals recall Guy Debord's 'society of the spectacle' in the way they operate. He places festivals within post-modern models and the post-industrial economy, rather than earlier stages of capitalism, focusing on the circulating of images rather than physical artifacts, with their focus on new auteurs and new national cinemas (or *new waves*).[9] He also links festivals and the films they show to the concept of the 'Great Family of Man'[10], in that we recognize ourselves in the portrayed others (often in the form of third world cultures), which ultimately fosters cross-cultural understanding. The tension he notes between watching films with different spatial and cultural contexts than one's own and a predetermined idea or notion of some form of inherent qualities of 'international cinema' - a cinema transcending local cultural specificity - is crucial here, and continues to influence the discourse surrounding film festivals and the films they show. Nichols argued that the exposure of local films from different countries and cultures to a wider audience results in the production of new meanings, rather than the discovering of concealed ones.[11] Drawing on Benedict Anderson's concept of 'imagined communities', Nichols concludes that film festivals are not only an arena where imaginary nation-states are constructed, but other (imagined) communities can arise and articulate themselves, and he optimistically remarks that he suspects these festivals may "represent a nascent globalism no longer quite so squarely centered on western aesthetics or the curatorial powers of the great collectors of the western world."[12] As a first attempt to understand how film festivals work and influence film production, Nichols' publication is still insightful and remains a key text in the field and I will return to it later.

Before discussing several recent Thai films in the final chapter, the first two chapters of this thesis will elaborate on two of the topics Nichols addresses that continue to recur in debates and essays concerning film festivals and the annual production of (world) cinema shown at them. The first chapter will be concerned with the presentation, framing and discussion of cinema in

[9] Nichols 1994, p. 73
[10] See Barthes 1976, pp. 100-102
[11] Nichols 1994, p. 71
[12] Ibid., p. 72

'national' terms and will address how this framework relates to questions concerning (trans)national identity and imagined nation-building, as well as the problematic aspects these terms bring with them for film production and discourse within the international, globalized institution film festivals have become. The second chapter will address the idea of film festivals as 'producers of cinema'. The main focus of this chapter will be the film festivals funds' role as producer, specifically as a producer of non-western films, which has become a central point of debate in discourse. It will discuss the concept of the 'festival film' and discuss several recurring points of discussion and conflict surrounding the concepts of (trans)national production of world cinema. In order to do this, it will look at several key publications on film festivals film festivals and at literature published discussing both the HBF specifically and film festival funds in general. It will consider some of the conceptual models several scholars have come up with in order to explain the global, annual film production and to analyze how films funded with money from outside their own country reflect on or relate to their own national and cultural context(s). In order to answer some of the questions raised in the first and second chapters and in an attempt to provide several different perspectives to the debate, the final chapter will take a closer look at several Thai films that have been realized with help of the HBF. It will discuss how they fit within - or challenge - discourses of the national versus the transnational, national identity, neo-colonialism and western preconceptions and prejudices regarding third world nations and the implications thereof on both world cinema and the film festival circuit, such as discussed by various scholars in the previous chapters. The work of two directors will be of particular interest for my discussion, namely the films of Apichatpong Weerasethakul (1970) and Uruphong Raksasad (1977). Firstly, by taking a closer look at these films, this chapter hopes to identify some of the limitations imposed by these epistemological frameworks in the discussion of the annual production of world cinema. Secondly, this chapter will offer an alternative approach to frame and contextualize not only these films specifically, but non-western films in general. In conceptualizing this chapter I have been influenced by ideas developed by scholars such as Arjun Appadurai and Homi K. Bhabha. I am heavily indebted to Thongchai Winichakul's influential case study *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (1994) as well, in which he explores in detail the historical construction and formation of the borders (both literal and figurative) of what is currently Thailand, and the continuing influences this construction has on the (daily) lives of many people living within and around these borders. His work has expanded

my understanding of modern day Thailand and the films I discuss here more than I could explain. Finally, this thesis is also an effort to reduce the gap between the respective fields of Film Studies and Area Studies that I have encountered during my academic career.

Chapter 1: The Framing of a 'National Cinema'

1.1 *National cinemas at international spaces*

In his essay discussed earlier, Bill Nichols made two remarks regarding the concept of a 'national cinema' that are of interest here. He notes that film production, more than other forms of art, bears a metonymic relation with the nation-state, and a synecdochic one with national culture.[13] Secondly, he notes that film festivals at once both "attest to the uniqueness of different cultures and specific filmmakers and affirm the underlying qualities of an "international cinema."[14] This framing of films in national contexts, highlighting the 'uniqueness of different cultures' at international film festivals might seem somewhat contradictory at first, but it has a long history that can be traced all the way back to both the invention of sound in film and the first film festival held in Venice in 1932. Before the introduction of sound and the global dominance of Hollywood, silent film in Europe was a transnational product: it transcended linguistic barriers and was often co-produced between various countries. Films and their distribution were not bound by country or language and some filmmakers were searching for a common, international (or European) film language.[15] This changed with the introduction of sound, as the variety of spoken languages across Europe created difficulties for the production, distribution and exhibition of European films. According to de Valck, these problems were "intensified by lingering nationalistic feelings that were the remnants of World War I and a precursor of World War II."[16] However, the film festival model introduced in Venice provided an answer to this problem. As de Valck explains:

> The film festival combined the "international" with the "national" by inviting nations to participate in an international showcase where they could present a selection of their own finest films of that year. The festival was created as a new space where language was not an obstacle, but was instead considered an unproblematic "given" in the cultural competition between film-producing nations. In the context of the showcase for national cinemas, film sound actually contributed to cultural distinction at the festivals. By working explicitly with the nationalistic sentiments that divided European nations at the time and

[13] Nichols 1994, p. 77
[14] Ibid., p. 68
[15] De Valck 2007, p. 50
[16] Ibid., p. 23

> simultaneously addressing the necessary international dimension of the film industry, the international film festival instantly became an important factor.[17]

Similar to other global events such as the Olympic Games, a film festival became an international event where competitors are divided by nation and therefore provide a space for nationalistic sentiments. This specific framing of a film as something that belongs to a 'national cinema', and therefore can be seen as – at least in some form - representative of its country of origin, only became stronger through the years as other cities and countries started to host their own film festivals and nations were invited to send 'their' films to the festivals. As a result, these films were framed, discussed and analyzed as expressions of a national identity, bearing a synecdochic relation to their national cultures indeed. In addition to this, film festivals themselves were part of a larger, post-war effort across Europe to recover, both culturally and urbane, from the aftermath of the war. They also served as a response to the hegemony the American film industry had during the war, as European festivals and national funding offered "filmmakers a space to develop their own individual 'national' artistry"[18], which made film festivals a unique and solid platform where various types of national cinemas could be celebrated. In 1946, 21 different countries had a film in the program of the first edition of the Cannes film festival. De Valck remarks: "This kind of national diversity was unimaginable for any movie theatre of the time, as it remains unthinkable in commercial settings to this very day."[19] The number of film festivals rapidly rose after the establishment of Cannes and as the world became more globalized in the decades that followed, so did the ever-growing number of film festivals. And although the framing of films as 'national cinemas' has been a part of film festivals form the onset, the inclusion of an increasing number of films from countries outside of Europe and the U.S. only served to put an even greater emphasis on these 'national aspects'. Nowadays, over 100 different countries participate - and compete - in Cannes on an annual basis.[20] However, this framework has implications on how films are selected, shown and the ways discourse (r)evolves around them. The eventual rise of funds such as the HBF (i.e. funds based in Europe and funding films outside of Europe) can be seen as one result of this and added

[17] Ibid., p. 24
[18] Chan 2011, p. 259
[19] De Valck 2007, p. 92
[20] See http://www.cannesbythenumbers.com (accessed 28th of May, 2018)

an extra layer to the already complex dichotomy that has always been at play between the national and the international at film festivals.

In "The Concept of National Cinema" Andrew Higson explores some of the implications of the term 'national' in the discourse on cinema. He argues:

> "To identify a national cinema is first of all to specify a coherence and a unity; it is to proclaim a unique identity and a stable set of meanings. The process of identification is thus invariably a hegemonising, mythologizing process, involving both the production and assignation of a particular set of meanings, and the attempt to contain, or prevent the potential proliferation of other meanings." [21]

Higson continues: "very often the concept of national cinema is used prescriptively rather than descriptively, citing what *ought* to be the national cinema, rather than describing the actual cinematic experience of popular audiences."[22] One of the implications this has is that, once identified, not every type of film can be part of a particular 'national cinema', which in turn may mark such a film as not being suited for a festival and its audience. Drawing on Geoffrey Nowell-Smith's essay on popular culture, Higson argues that, for example, popular forms of cinema always have to struggle to be recognized as a "legitimate part of national culture".[23] Instead, only a few, select forms of cinema are seen as representative of 'National Cinema' and everything that does not fit gets left out. Several scholars have explored some of the issues that arise when new films and discoveries are presented as representatives of a national cinema as well. Felicia Chan for instance asks: "we need to consider how discourses frame themselves around these works and construct them as representatives of a particular national consciousness. In other words, do nations create cinema or does cinema create nations?"[24] Well knowingly that such question does not have merely one answer. Of course, this framework is not exclusive or specific to the film world and film festivals. It is present in the discourse surrounding other forms of art (such as *world fairs* and *Art Biennales,* where countries have their own pavilion) and other types of events where the national and the international collide such as sport events, where athletes often represent their country. A brief look at the press coverage of international events

[21] Higson 1989, p. 37
[22] Ibid., p. 37
[23] Ibid., p. 37
[24] Chan 2011, p. 255

provides numerous examples of personal performances framed within national contexts, immediately telling how ubiquitous the national(istic) framework is at global, transnational events.[25] It does not come as a surprise then, that between 1951 and 1968, it was custom for national selection committees to send the films they thought represented their country best to the three big film festivals (Berlin, Venice, Cannes).[26] All of this is part of a larger framework that exists because of the ideological power and the apparent self-evidentiality of the nation-state. Even though the sustainability of the nation-state as the dominant form of collective communities in the world today has been questioned by scholars such as Arjun Appadurai and Benedict Anderson, nations (and therefore nationalism) remain some of the strongest and most influential constructions in society, influencing human relations in endless variety of ways on a daily basis. As long as this remains the case, films will be described, analyzed and catalogued within the context of the national. It is an efficient form of presentation and when branded in a right way (for example as part of a *new wave*), it helps selling the product. This is far from a recent phenomenon, and an endless amount of telling examples can be found throughout film history. One famous example is the origin of the term 'Japanese New Wave' (*nuberu-bagu*) in the 1960s, by now an accepted and canonized term to talk about films by a number of directors such as Nagisa Ôshima and Shohei Imamura. However, the term was coined and invented in the 1960s by the Shōchiku Company in order to link their films to the French *Nouvelle Vague* from a commercial point of view. The directors associated with the movement did not like the term, and there was no manifesto or connection between them that suggested any concrete standpoints, ideas or movement, but the term was taken over by journalists and critics, became fashionable and has stuck to the films ever since.[27] It helped to sell the product.

[25] Especially in sports, press coverage seems particular keen to highlight personal achievements within a national context. For example, when Andrea Petković reached the semi-finals at Roland Garros in 2014, the press coverage at the time was filled with statements such as "[s]he is the first German to reach the penultimate round in Paris since Steffi Graf in 1999" (see https://www.porsche-tennis.de/prod/pag/tennis.nsf/web/english-porscheteam_news_T14_0449_en, accessed 14th of March, 2019) and "[i]n 2011 she became the first German to crack the top 10 since Steffi Graf" (see https://www.si.com/tennis/beyond-baseline/2014/06/04/french-open-andrea-petkovic-ten-things-to-know, accessed 14th of March, 2019). A different example of the ubiquity of national framing is newspaper and website coverage of accidents, where the focus of local headlines is often concerned with how many Dutch people were involved, rather than the total number of casualties. A headline such as "Five Dutch people die in plane crash" is exemplary (https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/vijf-nederlanders-komen-om-bij-crash~b73033fc, accessed 18th of March, 2019).
[26] Elsaesser 2005, pp. 89-90
[27] Standish 2005, pp. 267-268

Films included in any *new wave* only constitute a small part of the national film production, and one of the returning critiques these films receive is that they often generate international acclaim while remaining largely ignored in their home country. However, the nation in question does not seem to play any role in this reception, and this is certainly not limited to 'third world' countries. It seems related to a larger, universal phenomenon, regardless of the nation of origin. In the Netherlands, directors like Nanouk Leopold (1968), Boudewijn Koole (1965) or even more established director such as Alex van Warmerdam (1952) and Martin Koolhoven (1969)[28], increasingly have to look for funding elsewhere in Europe, since they do not fit within the popular trends in Dutch cinema, or at least not with what the people in charge of the national funds perceive to be the popular trends. In some cases, this ends up influencing choices made in the script, location and casting. Boudewijn Koole's *Verwijnen* (2017), partly funded with Norwegian money, is set in Norway and features Norwegian actor Jakob Oftebro. Similarly, Van Warmerdam's *Borgman* (2013) is made possible by Danish and Belgium money, and features roles for Danish actress Sara Hjort Ditlevsen and Belgium actors Jan Bijvoet (as the titular character), Gene Bervoets and Tom Dewispelaere. Other Dutch directors, such as David Verbeek (1980), are clearly influenced by foreign films and directors and his films are made with international funding and seem tailor-made for exposure through the film festival network. His latest feature length film, *An Impossibly Small Object* (2018), is a case in point. The film is shot both in Taipei and in Amsterdam and is funded with Dutch, Croatian and Taiwanese money. These are examples of films that are often acclaimed at festivals such as Cannes or Berlin, but the regular screenings in their home country, if any, sometimes hardly attract visitors. Although there are certainly exceptions, I have often seen the work of many of these Dutch directors in nearly empty theatres. Few films seem capable of being popular in their own country and have their fair share of critical acclaim abroad as well. Exceptions seem to be mostly genre-films, such as martial arts movies from Hong Kong, for which the critical acclaim has been steadily growing, with numerous retrospectives in various countries over the years and steady fan bases across the world. However, these exceptions clearly differentiate from the films successful at

[28] His latest film, Brimstone (2016), is a Dutch, French, German, Swedish, Belgium, American and British co-production. Furthermore, it is shot in Spain, Austria, Hungary and Germany.
(https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1895315, accessed 14th of March, 2019)

festivals, and they are rarely produced with international money.[29] On a side note, the current trend of co-productions between China and the United States would provide an interesting research topic in itself.

1.2 *Third world films at first world spaces*

If we look specifically at non-western cinema, this framework and the myth of a distinctive, fixed national identity has an even stronger influence on the discourse surrounding the films shown at festivals, as it is combined with other hegemonic frameworks and ideologies that continue to exist about the 'third world'. One of the most well-known and influential examples of this is Fredric Jameson's assertion that all third world texts should be read as national allegories.[30] His approach has been criticized by other scholars, in part for prioritizing the national experience over other experiences such as ethnical, regional or gendered ones, since, in Jameson's own words, this allegorical vision has an "epistemological priority".[31] Nonetheless, it has remained influential and various scholars have returned to the concept since.[32] Aijaz Ahmad identifies several of the key problems underlying this theory and one aspect that he highlights is of importance to me here. He argues that underlying Jameson's text is "the proposition that the "third world" is a singular formation, possessing its own unique, unitary force of determination in the sphere of ideology (nationalism) and cultural production (the national allegory)."[33] Creating this set category for third world texts (which, if it exists, is too large a category for any scholar to properly tackle in a lifetime), and then trying to formulate a theory of its 'cognitive aesthetics', is exemplary of the tendency to search for all-encompassing theories in favor of a multitude of approaches. Ahmad offers an alternative approach as well, which I will return to in the next chapter.

Furthermore, this framework is constantly strengthened and reinforced by claims and statements made about non-western cinema by (usually western) scholars and film critics, such as the

[29] Although even in this case, co-productions between nations are becoming more common every year, since there are large amounts of money to be made outside of one's national borders as well.
[30] Jameson 1986, p. 69
[31] Ibid., p. 86
[32] For an overview of the debate this concept has spurred over the past decades, see Mattos dos Santos 2013, pp. 2-9. For an assessment of its importance in post-colonial and literature studies, see Szeman 2001.
[33] Ahmad 1987, p. 22

assertions that third world films are only successful when they showcase what some critics label 'poverty porn', that non-western films which circulate the festival circuit confirm stereotypes about third world culture, or that they are artifacts made for a first world audiences and institutions and that the way they are produced reproduce unequal, beneficiary relationships, recalling colonial times (just to name a few). And this is not limited to third world countries; the discourse surrounding cinema from other non-western countries is limited by imposed frameworks as well. In his recent PhD thesis, Tom Mes shows how the Asia Extreme label, launched by British film distributor Tartan films, focused on releasing specific Asian films in the west. By framing Asian cinema as a cinema that possessed certain qualities (transgressive, violent, extreme) a very specific image of films from these countries was reinforced. Mes argues that this played a key role in both the promotion and distribution of (East) Asian films in the west, as well as the discourse surrounding them.[34] He draws on Gary Needham, who identifies a parallel between the construction of these films as new 'cinematic extremities' and the construction of Asian people as the yellow peril.[35] As the label became more prominent, these films came to "represent the Asian cinema as a whole."[36] This is exemplary of the constant recreation and reinforcement of stereotypes that serve this notion of 'the other' in order to heighten its appeal and sell a product. The combination of these distinctive, pre-set values and categories for cultural products from non-western countries and the hegemonic framework favoring the nation-state as a natural given continue to influence the discourse surrounding film festivals and the films they show and help produce in various ways.

[34] Mes 2018, p. 206
[35] Ibid., p. 209
[36] Ibid., p. 210

Chapter 2: The film festival as producer

2.1 *festival films and the dogma of discovery*

Film festivals contribute to a director's career by giving their work exposure (by selecting and showing it), and by adding cultural value to certain films by placing them in competition or bestowing awards on them. Over the past decades however, festivals have come to play an increasingly bigger part in the annual production of cinema around the world as well. According to some scholars, they form a special circuit for what has sometimes been labeled as the 'film festival film'. Since this festival circuit has exponentially grown over the last decades and festivals compete yearly for premieres of films by high-profile directors as well as smaller but otherwise interesting or unique films by new, promising directors, it does not come as a surprise that their role within global film production has become increasingly prominent. Two different types of production can be distinguished here. Firstly, various larger festivals now have funds associated with them which (co-)produce films that are 'destined' to enter the festival circuit when they are finished and have their premiere, if possible, at the festival associated with the fund in question. The HBF is an example of this type of production. Secondly, more difficult to define and more often than not determined as such in hindsight, there has been an understanding that the increased importance of festivals (and the focus on world premieres at those festivals) has influenced the type of films made and produced globally as well. Thomas Elsaesser discusses both of these forms of production when he argues that the larger festivals increasingly offer development money with their prizes and organize talent campuses or training courses in order to be sure of their annual supply of interesting, quality films. Festivals try to bind new, talented directors to them and try to brand the films they make as 'their' discoveries. The result is that some films seem to be tailor-made to nicely fit the program slots of some of the annual film festivals.[37] In *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia*, Marijke De Valck argues that after the success of the *Nouvelle Vague*, the notion of *auteurs* and a 'dogma of discovery' have become central to film festival programming, as festivals are now constantly searching for new auteurs and *new waves* to exhibit. This, in turn, has led to the production of 'festival films', which De Valck describes as "films that successfully travel the international film

[37] Elsaesser 2005, p. 88

festival circuit, but fail to "make it" outside of the circuit", arguing that this type of programming has provided "a blueprint for filmmakers seeking festival exposure".[38] In "First You Get the Power, Then You Get the Money: Two Models of Film Festivals" Mark Peranson argues that there seems to be a nurturing, especially by openly business-minded festivals such as Sundance, of certain kinds of these 'film festival films'. According to Peranson, the main goal seems to be the 'discovery' of films with potential success in art-house cinemas after they left the festival circuit (and on DVD or VoD afterwards).[39] As a result of this other, more experimental, unique, subversive or otherwise challenging films become more and more obscured and will have to fight harder for their slots and spots on both the festival calendar and for any form of distribution afterwards, making it increasingly harder to reach a possible audience. For less (openly) business-minded festivals such as the IFFR, the situation is more comparable to the image De Valck sketches. A 'dogma of discovery' certainly influences its programming, but the festival seems mainly concerned with discovering the new masters and selecting films because of their innovative way of storytelling, different angles on relevant topics and debates, or because of their interesting take on or usage of the medium itself. Any form of potential success after the films have left the festival-circuit is a bonus, and at times some effort is put into trying to get several films a release in cinemas in the Netherlands after the festival is over, but it does not seem to be of primary concern. Although both types of production are interesting topics of research in their own right, in this thesis I am specifically interested in the productions made with the help of funds associated with festivals.

2.2 *Transnational funding*

The HBF, as one of the oldest and most recognizable festival funds, has an influential role as producer on the annual festival calendar. As Katja Hofmann notes in "Fest Funds Team Up to Boost World Cinema" (2005), the success of the fund and its format over the years have inspired other festivals to create similar funds in the hope of both contributing to world cinema and extending their range of influence on the festival circuit as well. The Berlin's World Cinema Fund for example, initialized in 2004, has explicitly stated they hope that the WCF logo will

[38] De Valck 2007, p. 176
[39] Peranson 2008, p.33

have a similar effect as the HBF has in the future: attracting interest, festival selection and chances of distribution.[40] The increasing influence and prominence of international funds within the festival circuit and the apparent success of the films associated with them, together with the notion that festivals not merely create a space for these films to reach an audience, but actively influence and produce the films that end up filling these spaces as well, has led scholars to question the role these funds play. The focus of most contributions to this debate has been on the (post-colonial, hierarchical) relationships they develop between first and third world countries and the influence they have on the stories and identities that are portrayed in these films. With regard to the production of non-western films that end up getting selected (and awarded) at international festivals, two scholars have examined the HBF specifically, focusing on its contribution to new 'Latin American Cinema'. In "Fostering international cinema: The Rotterdam Film festival, CineMart, and the Hubert Bals Fund", Daniel Steinhart argues that even though the several Latin American films he discusses (*Batalla en el cielo*/*Battle in Heaven* (Carlos Reygadas, 2005), *Sangre* (Amat Escalante, 2005), *Glue* (Alexis Dos Santos, 2006), among others) tell culturally specific stories and are "steeped in local flavor", they address universal themes such as existential crises, teenage rebellion and coming of age.[41] While some of these films arguably follow so-called established, European traditions of art cinema (such as making use of techniques such as the *long shot/long take*, which allows space for the viewer's interpretation and contemplation), Steinhart concludes that the style of the various films he discusses cannot be pinned down, as they draw from different influences, ranging from recent, international films to classical and local influences. Instead of contributing to and showcasing a uniform style or theme, specific to a region, the produced films differ and are not necessarily by form or content recognizable as HBF products. Rather, Steinhart argues, the HBF functions as a "seal of approval to ensure excellence".[42] He notes that "few regional film activities are isolated or impervious to international influence"[43] and he is optimistic about the increasingly globalized film industry, with its strong European market and the increasing co-productions beyond nations and continents. Combined with new technological developments, he mainly sees possibilities for both the IFFR and the international, independent art cinema in the future.

[40] Hofmann 2005
[41] Steinhart 2006, p. 11
[42] Ibid., p. 11
[43] Ibid., p. 1

While Steinhart mainly praises the fund for its accomplishments and contributions, Miriam Ross is more skeptical and senses there are a variety of pitfalls the fund should be wary of. In "The Film Festival as Producer: Latin American Films and Rotterdam's Hubert Bals Fund", she is critical of the role the HBF plays and questions to what extent the fund moves beyond being a source of finance and distribution and becomes a producer, influencing the filmmaking process instead. In order to understand the producing role of the HBF and its impact on cinema, she examines three aspects: the type of projects associated with the Fund, the constructed relationships between first and third world cultures and the effects of the fund on films that are produced. One of the fund's rules is that the film should be located and shot in a country that is eligible for funding.[44] This means that a Latin American director aspiring to set or shoot his film somewhere in, for example, the USA will be unable to receive funding from the HBF. By emphasizing the film as a product from and portrait of a developing country, the fund limits potential transnational or global aspects the film could touch upon, such as (illegal) immigration. Ross argues that the films produced are in line with what film festival audiences have come to expect: the films represent minority or marginalized culture, distinct from the situations most of the audiences are living in, and they confirm their expectations about third world countries - i.e. they are characterized by aspects such as poverty and crime.[45] Although the Netherlands is always listed as one of the producing countries in films which have been made with the support of HBF, Ross argues that **"**[p]ress releases from HBF and the IFFR highlight the Latin American country attached to the film, and in this way downplay transnational elements that are involved in the film's production"[46] which she calls an "emphasis on a 'developing country' identity."[47] These expectations and emphases create difficulties for filmmakers as they are expected to represent their country or communities with a certain authenticity, and are only provided funding to tell certain types of stories. This expectation creates a difference between dominant groups (in this case filmmakers from the first world), who are allowed or even encouraged to include diversity in their work, while minority groups are expected to "represent minority or marginalized culture, something that is distinct and other from the western modes of

[44] Ross 2011, p. 263
[45] Ibid., p. 265
[46] Ibid., p. 263
[47] Ibid., p. 263

existence".[48] This 'responsibility' (and the implications it brings forth) has been conceptualized elsewhere as a 'burden of representation' many non-western artists have to struggle with.[49] These issues correspond to Higson's argument that only a select few forms of cinema are framed as representative of a 'national cinema' and terms such as 'national cinema' or 'third world cinema' are used prescriptively rather than descriptively.[50] Ross concludes that while the HBF's positive contributions are undeniable, the Fund replicates the unequal relationships and hierarchies between developed and developing countries through funding and selecting projects, and we cannot escape the "view that third-world countries are producing cultural artefacts for their first-world benefactors".[51] However, the financial support they offer aims to be a horizontal, business transaction, and the fund approaches filmmakers in this way. The HBF intends for filmmakers to have complete freedom over the content of their products, because it is their ideas and concepts that they were interested in in the first place. And if the final product ends up being disappointing, the festival can decide not to show it, rather than trying to actively influence the film. But this is a grey area, and what happens in discussion rooms behind the scenes usually stays there. Filmmakers do ask for advice and feedback, and at festivals they might informally ask what programmers or curators thought of earlier versions or unfinished prints. This, in turn, might influence the production process in various ways, but it is not the same as a beneficiary relationship with developing countries, nor an imposition on the director.

Tamara L. Falicov provides a different angle to the discussion with her case study of Cine en Construcción, a fund by the San Sebastián Film Festival and the Toulouse Latin American Film Festival, specifically founded to help Latin American directors with the completion of their films. She argues that the result of this "cultural collaboration between a Global South country and a European one" is a 'globalized art-house aesthetic'.[52] In order to create films according to this aesthetic and receive this type of funding, filmmakers are faced with several challenges such as "issues of narratives that need to strike a balance between themes that are global, or universal in nature (though […] the global is a stand in for advanced industrialized countries' tastes) and

[48] Ibid., p. 266
[49] For a detailed explanation of this concept, see Shohat and Stam 1994, pp. 182-188
[50] Higson 1989, p. 37
[51] Ross 2011, p. 267
[52] Falicov 2013, p. 268

those that are local or specific to a region or country."[53] Central to her discussion is the film *7 Cajas/7 Boxes* (Juan Carlos Maneglia and Tana Schémbori, 2012), a genre film which combines the global, recognizable genre format with a 'local flavour'.[54] The film was a huge success in Paraguay, breaking all the box office records. Drawing on comments made by director Tana Schémbori, Falicov argues that in a country such as Paraguay, which lacks a national film industry, "financing abroad, such as 'Cine en Construcción' is a lifeline that other countries do not have the same urgency to obtain."[55] While she sees this as a valuable contribution and recognizes that many films would not have been realized without transnational funding, the money does not always come without strings attached. The financing that made the realization of *7 Cajas* possible was the 'Industry Award' the film won at the 2011 edition of Cine en Construcción in San Sabestián. This is a 25,000 Euro award meant for the post-production of the film. According to one of the jury members responsible for the decision, one of the other films in competition for the same prize already had presold distribution rights, which for the jury members effectively disqualified it from winning the industry award, because they would have less to gain themselves by selecting that title.[5657] Although Falicov stresses that this claim is unsubstantiated, it is worrisome and illustrative of the many factors that come into play when these awards and the various types of funding are distributed. Falicov dismisses the idea that these practices should be interpreted as a form of imperial guilt or neocolonial domination as some scholars have argued, and assesses them as businesslike decisions and transactions where both parties have something to gain instead. As she concludes: "it raises deeper, ongoing questions about the nature of unequal transnational collaborations […] and how the resulting aesthetic might shape the kinds of films potentially destined for global audiences."[58]

In "Difference, Aesthetics and the Curatorial Crisis of Film Festivals" (2012), Roya Rastegar takes these arguments a step further. She argues:

[53] Ibid., p. 260
[54] Ibid., p. 261
[55] Ibid., p. 267
[56] *Infancia Clandestina*/*Clandestine Childhood* (Benjamín Ávila, 2011) was the film with presold distribution rights.
[57] Falicov 2013, p. 265
[58] Ibid., 268

> Grand claims by European or North American film festivals of discovering the national cinemas or filmmaking movements of developing countries further function to frame films from the global south (whether through their selection or funding) as representative of a coherent national consciousness. [...] Films about communities and cultures in the developing world made for consumption by western audiences reveal the fantasies of such audiences rather than represent their filmmakers or national contexts.[59]

Her argument is built on the idea that these 'film festival films' are specifically made for 'consumption' by the film festival audience. The line between what would be an 'authentic cultural representation' - if such a concept is even possible to define - and a film purposely made by internationally recognized aesthetic and narrative standards in order to successfully be selected for a festival is impossible to draw exactly. However, the claim that a film does not represent these artists' social or cultural backgrounds or contexts, but mostly caters to (or reveals the fantasies of) western audiences, seems equally problematic. This oversimplifies or even disregards the personal investment of directors in their film and shows a lack of respect towards everyone involved in the production. If directors were able to create subversive films - films which are still praised today - within the tightly controlled Classical Hollywood environment in the 1940s and 1950s[60], surely today's filmmakers are able to do so within an only partly controlled system that allows them more, if not complete, freedom. A freedom many other directors could not even begin to hope for. Of course, this is not to say that the problems Ross and Rastegar discuss do not exist, but by taking such an approach as a point of departure when discussing non-western cinema (regardless of where the money comes from), they limit the potential analysis that can be done on all these different expressions. It seems to me that it is the films themselves or the funding are not the only issue here, but the framework in which they are so often placed and discussed is at least equally troublesome. With the framework discussed in the previous chapter in mind, Rastegar touches upon a crucial element of the problem when she discusses the festival model within which these films are presented:

[59] Rastegar 2012, p. 313

[60] One thinks here of directors such as Otto Preminger, Josef von Sternberg, Douglas Sirk, Elia Kazan, Max Ophüls, Billy Wilder, etc., whose films touched upon issues such as drug addiction, sexual abuse, infidelity and racial prejudices, which were challenging the Motion Picture Production Code's moral guidelines. Aesthetically, many of their films deviated from Hollywood standards of the time as well, and their ability to create subversive films within a studio environment played a role in the formulation of the auteur theory when French film critics started analyzing and praising their works within this context in *Cahiers du cinéma*, arguing that some filmmakers challenged the limitations of the industry they were working in and therefore should be recognized as auteurs.

> The nationalist model for organizing festivals has proliferated out of opposition, erasing difference in order to gather audiences around fantasies of belonging, and perpetuating a trail of exclusions. Rather than growing or expanding film culture, this dynamic inscribes a segregated and static model for organizing film spaces around nationalistic frameworks that reify identity formations.[61]

As we have seen, this 'nationalistic framework' is part of the hegemonic framework in which these films are discussed, which limits the analysis that is done on them. With this in mind it is easier to understand where Ross' assertion that there is a focus on a 'developing country' identity comes from. The main shortcoming of Ross' essay however, is the fact that she limits her case study to a few, arbitrarily chosen examples. One of the two films she discusses is *Días de Santiago/Days of Santiago* (Josué Méndez, 2004). Ross remarks: "the images and narratives concur with the perception in much of the western world that 'developing' countries are characterized by poverty, crime and violence."[62] Even though she later acknowledges that "the films that emerge from this fund are diverse and do not always display a 'third-world' or 'developing-nation' aesthetic and content"[63], she chooses to analyze two films that do fit this mold in order to illustrate her point.[64] In her essay she does not mention the titles of any of the films that do not display this type of aesthetics and content. Although making various categorizations when discussing these films is almost inescapable in itself, selectively choosing the few case studies that support some all-encompassing theory or category is not constructive for the debate.

Rastegar's criticizes this approach tot non-western cinema, which she labels "anglo-western impulses to construct representations of third-world and developing countries."[65] However, she is positive about the possibilities offered by the film festival space as well. Drawing from her own experience as a programmer, she theorizes about some of the potential roles programmers can play:

[61] Ibid., p. 312
[62] Ross 2011, p. 265
[63] Ibid., p. 267
[64] Besides *Dias de Santiago*, the other film she discusses is *Pizza, Birra, Faso/Pizza, Beer, and Cigarettes* (Adrián Caetano and Bruno Stagnaro, 1998).
[65] Rastegar 2012, p. 312

> "Rather than subscribe to expert curatorial approaches guided by anglo-western structures of taste and aesthetic reasoning, they can foster models of valuation based on the possibilities of difference and multiplicity within cinematic storytelling. My investment in the curatorial work of festivals – as a scholar and a practitioner – dwells in the possibility that cinema can become an entry point for strangers and familiars alike to engage with differences in perspective, experience, identity and position that might otherwise be reviled or ignored off screen."[66]

This includes, for example, the selection of a film which might not "move them personally but instead speaks to communities outside their own networks."[67] This is something my own experience in film programming is currently teaching me as well.[68] Certainly, this depends in part on the type of festival. Many festivals' goal is merely to showcase a year's output of 'quality cinema' - those films that will, hopefully, end up in the canon someday. However, other festivals have more specific or nuanced aims. In the case of many smaller festivals, this can be catering to a specific audience (e.g. LGBT+ communities or a certain diaspora), focusing on specific genres, or providing a space for political debates and different perspectives. Some bigger festivals such as Rotterdam have always claimed to focus on the discovery of new talent, rather than showcasing the best films of the year. This aim is underscored by the selection criteria of their main competition, for which only debut and sophomore features are eligible.[69] Curating can be much more than merely selecting good or beautiful films, it concerns providing a space for underrepresented voices and a platform for discussion and interaction between various perspectives as well.

2.3 *Contextual approaches*

As we have seen, the scope of research has been limited by this hegemonic framework, which includes discussing film within both national and third world contexts. The question remains what alternative frameworks we can use to discuss the different cinematic expression regardless

[66] Ibid., p. 315
[67] Ibid., p. 315
[68] I have been a part of the IFFR's Short Film selection committee since 2017, for which I have mainly been watching and selecting narrative works from Asia.
[69] Arguably, the increased number of annual festivals and an increased importance attached to having international and world premieres (i.e. the constant need for new discoveries, rather than films that have already been shown at other festivals), has only made festivals funds become more important for festivals such as Rotterdam, both to distinguish themselves from other big festivals and in order to remain relevant.

of their country of origin. There are models in existence that provide us with different frameworks to approach and discuss (non-western) films in order to analyze them and try to determine their 'merit' - in the broadest sense of the word. One of the more well-known approaches is offered by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, who came up with a different division of what film should aim to achieve in their famous manifesto "Towards a Third Cinema".[70] Although their point of departure is a counter-cinema against the dominant forms of cinema produced in the first and second world, they argue that third cinema can be made anywhere in the world, and likewise first cinema can be made in third world countries as well. Rather than the geographical or national space in which a film is created, they shift the focus to the intention behind the film, which then becomes the essential characteristic of the work. While this theory still has its share of support, it has not nearly been as influential in discourse surrounding world cinema as it might have been. In my own experience, hardly anyone discusses subversive or challenging forms of cinema in terms of 'third cinema' at film festivals. Some scholars have tried to makes a case for the legitimacy of Third Cinema Theory however, such as Anthony R. Guneratne in *Rethinking Third Cinema*. One of his arguments is that "Eurocentric critical prejudices"[71] and "Eurocentric critical perspectives"[72] have kept the concept from getting the recognition it deserves in western studies of non-western cinema. There are many occasions where Third Cinema Theory can form an effective point of reference to depart from when we come across films that do not fit the preconceived, western frameworks we are used to work with. Many non-western films can be interpreted and analyzed as forms of resistance against both national and international forms of domination. This can be in terms of the people portrayed, or in terms of the conventional forms of style and structure used in both Hollywood and art-house films, or in a variety of other ways. Regarding the Thai cinema that I will discuss in the next chapter, even the name of Weerasethakul's own production company invokes strong associations with resistance and subversion; *Kick the Machine*.

Although Third Cinema has been largely ignored in the academic world, it has not been without its legacy among artists. Māori Filmmaker Barry Barclay (1944-2008) proposed a Fourth Cinema theory, concerned with indigenous filmmaking, which fell outside of the third world and

[70] Solanas and Getino 1969, pp. 107-132
[71] Guneratne 2003, p. 9
[72] Ibid., p. 10

third cinema perspectives and is arguably even more neglected when it comes to international exposure and canonization. More recently, Nguyen Trinh Thi (1973), known for her interdisciplinary work that deals with complex, underrepresent and interrelated histories, combined many years of archival research in her newest project *Fifth Cinema* (2018). She proposes a cinema that is concerned with people who are borderless or in between borders, who do not fit within the concept of the nation-state.[73] Artists continue to interact with and update the concept of a third cinema, adding new elements and exploring new approaches.

Third Cinema Theory is an alternative and useful approach, but it is not without its limits. It is situated in a specific timeframe and had a direct, political function. Furthermore, it is more aimed at artists, suggesting how they can approach and use cinema, than at potential viewers. The approach I want to make a case for here certainly sympathizes (and shares aspects) with this theory, but is a more specific, contextual approach, which has been informed by my own background in Area Studies. And although I discuss cinema funded with international money here, this approach does not have to be limited to transnational productions. I propose we reduce the importance attached to the national context and try to focus on smaller cultural and local contexts instead, which can open the way for a myriad of different angles to analyze films. In critiquing Jameson's assertion that we should read texts as national allegories, Aijaz Ahmad suggests that we should "start thinking of the process of allegorisation not in nationalistic terms, but simply as a relation between private and public, personal and communal".[74] He adds that allegorisation is not limited to the third world and later argues that "texts are produced in highly differentiated, usually very over-determined contexts of competing ideological and cultural clusters, so that any particular text of any complexity shall always have to be placed within the cluster that gives it its energy and form".[75] I believe this is true for any text (in the broadest sense of the term), and although this can be a research-heavy and time consuming process, I suggest it

[73] A statement on her website reads: "I make this film as a citizen – of Vietnam, and of the world – as a filmmaker, an artist, a woman, a mother. There are multiple identities. I'm interested in merging my identities with those of Barry Barclay's, to be able to see things with broader senses and perspectives. I'm speaking from the point of view that any one of us can potentially be the oppressed; and the oppressor. I make films that engage with local and national identity, history and memories, but at the same time address something that is universal. I seek to find the underlying rules that govern our lives, worlds and realities. The way we look at things."
(https://nguyentrinhthi.wordpress.com/2018/09/10/fourth-cinema-2018/, accessed 10th of April, 2019)
[74] Ahmad 1987, p. 15
[75] Ibid., p. 23

is these contexts and clusters that scholars should try to unpack if they aim to expand the analysis of films from cultures they are not part of themselves. With this approach in mind, the next chapter will contribute to the earlier discourse on film festival funds and non-western cinema by taking a look at several Thai films and directors closely associated with the Fund. Perhaps somewhat too obvious a point of departure will be Weerasethakul's *Dokfa nai meuman*/*Mysterious Object at Noon* (2000), which was the first Thai film of what has become a large variety of films that have been realized with the help of transnational funding. In their own way, these films tackle issues that range from very local to the national to the global or international. Some of these films are rooted strongly within local traditions of story-telling and genres and are aimed at local audiences which grew up with these traditions. Some of the films do not even seem suited for the international film festival audience, but end up there regardless. As Rastegar already asked: "What spaces will be left for films like these to be exhibited, watched, written about, bought, distributed, analyzed and studied? How will these cultural expressions find a place in the archives?"[76]

[76] Rastegar 2013, p. 911

Chapter 3: Framing Thai cinema

We have seen how strong this idea of a 'national cinema' is and how it influences the way films are presented, framed and analyzed. In this chapter I will provide an alternative approach to a number of recent films which for a variety of purposes have been labeled, screened and promoted as 'Thai cinema'. I will briefly discuss the rise to prominence of these films and the role the HBF has played in this, before I focus on the work of two directors whose status and approach to film may seem very different at first sight. I believe a closer look at both their works will prove insightful in tackling some of the problems I have discussed in the previous chapter and in offering alternatives to our approach of non-western cinema as well. Both the work of Raksasad and Weerasethakul is tied more to a specific region than to their nation, although the ubiquity of nationalist frameworks leaves no other option than (critically) addressing the nation as well.

3.1 *HBF and the increasing prominence of Thai cinema*

In 1998 a young Thai architect and his team approached the HBF in an attempt to realize their experimental road-movie through Thailand, in which a chain story would be narrated by the various people they would meet on their journey. When the employees of the HBF decided that the Betacams provided by Apichatpong Weerasethakul were worth the risk of financial support, they could hardly have imagined how big of a name he would become in the years that would follow. In retrospect, we can only speculate whether the film would have been made through different routes if the fund had not supported the film, and whether the yearly offer of Thai cinema on display at the festival circuit might have looked somewhat different if the film would never have been realized. Then again, *Dokfa nai meuman* is just one of the beginnings we could trace the proliferation of Thai cinema at the festival circuit back to. Some critics would argue that it really started in 2001, with Wisit Sasanatieng's *Fah talai jone*/*Tears of the Black Tiger* (2000) stirring debates in Cannes after its premiere and successfully touring both the festival and the art-house theatre circuit afterwards, while others might look back a little bit further and take Nonzee Nimibutr's first two films (coincidentally written by Sasanatieng) *2499 Antapan Krong Muang*/*Dang Bireley and the Young Gangsters* (1997) and *Nang Nak* (1999) as the starting

point. Although these titles have by now faded largely into obscurity, they were a success both at the Thai box office and at the festival circuit afterwards when released.[77] Wherever we locate the start, the result of these international successes would remain under the radar for years, only of interest to small groups of cinephile audiences, and would not be debated as such by scholars or the festival industry at large until 2010, when *Loong Boonmee raleuk chat* /*Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010) won the Palme d'Or in Cannes. For many, it was the most unlikely and unsuspected winner of this century. The prize launched Weerasethakul to international stardom and created a sudden interest in 'Thai cinema', whatever that exactly may be, for which Weerasethakul suddenly became the international representative.

Following in *Dokfa nai meuman*'s footsteps, Thai director Pen-Ek Ratanaruang's fourth feature length film, *Ruang rak noi nid mahasan*/*Last Life in the Universe* (2003) would be the second Thai film to receive support from the HBF. Completely different from *Dokfa nai meuman* in many aspects, Ratanaruang's film was a pan-Asian product. The project brought together the Australian (although Asia-based) cinematographer Christopher Doyle (by then a household name after his successes with Hong-Kong director Wong Kar-Wai), Japan's rising star Asano Tadanobu and featured a small cameo from highly prolific director Miike Takashi as well. All of whom had not worked with Ratanaruang before. It made for a rather unique project, and it meant Ratanaruang's definite break-through to international acclaim (although he has not been able to rise up to expectations since and his presence on the festival circuit has slowly diminished over the years). Ratanaruang's half-joking remark that his earlier film *Monrak Transistor*/*Transistor Love Story* (2001), which features classical Thai pop songs and is an adaptation of a popular Thai novel, was a Thai remake of Woody Allen's *Radio Days* (1987), can be seen as exemplary of his attitude and approach towards cinema.[78] Cinema's genres, subjects and history - including Europe's, Hollywood's and one's own 'national' cinema - are available for everyone to freely interpret, play around and interact with. The only obstacle is securing the money to do so. In a similar vein his later film *Ploy* (2007) was a contemporary take on Billy Wilder's *The Seven Year Itch* (1955). Ratanaruang is not unique in his obvious display of affection for both his own, cultural background as for the Hollywood cinema he partly grew up with. Other directors have

[77] Rithdee 2011, p. 16
[78] Ibid., p. 17

used their love for genre films and film history in order to create interesting, hybrid films as well. The earlier mentioned *Fah talai jone* (2000) for example, is a mixture of both traditional Thai elements and classical Hollywood *western* elements.

The third project that would receive support from the fund was the film *Hi-So* in 2003, by the then unknown Aditya Assarat. The film would only be finished much later and did not leave a large impression on the festival circuit after its premiere in Berlin in 2010. This is in contrast to Assarat's earlier finished *Wonderful Town* (2007), which won the Tiger Award in Rotterdam upon its release and was applauded on the festival circuit afterwards. With its focus on post-catastrophe life in the countryside after the 2004 tsunami, Assarat was praised for his portrayal of life in poor and damaged rural areas. The success led him to start his own production company *Pop Pictures*, which is now an annual supplier of festival films such as *Tee rak/Eternity* (2010) and *36* (2012), which have travelled the festival circuit and have often been shown at festivals such as Rotterdam as well. The fourth film to get support from the HBF would, again, be a completely different project: *Long tor tai/The Coffin* (2008). Originally conceived as a film about living people crawling around in coffins, but after failing to find additional support, director Ekachai Uekrongtham was convinced by his producer Pantham Thongsang to turn it into a commercial horror film, rather than an international 'art' movie.[79] Subsequently he found financial support in Singapore and Hong Kong and the film became a box office success across Asia and toured the festival circuit as well; making it one of those 'exceptions' that manage to reach both festival and local audiences, just as Nimibutr's films did a decade earlier. I would argue that this is not necessarily an exception that confirms some subjective and unclear rule, but rather one of many different types of cinema we can find when we delve into these obscured festival and fund histories. After all, the number of films screened at festivals which do not get canonized afterwards is far greater than the number that does. These titles underscore the diverse nature of these films that are often believed to represent what critics, scholars, programmers or magazines like to brand a 'national' cinema, and they are just a few examples. From 2005 onwards, the HBF would support at least one Thai film annually. Partly because of their support, Thailand gradually became a regular 'customer' on the international film circuit. As these first four projects already show, there seems to be little use in trying to fit these productions into one

[79] See https://iffr.com/en/2009/films/the-coffin (accessed 6th of September, 2018)

type or category of movie, let alone labeling them as representing 'Thai cinema' or contemporary Thai consciousness. It would take considerable effort to mold them into one model to 'explain', describe or understand modern Thai cinema or Thai society, or to place them into earlier discussed models such as that of replicating hierarchal first-third world structures and catering to western fantasies. Instead of looking at these films with 'our' framework and references in mind, I would like to offer an alternative perspective: Thailand is a country with a film industry rooted in the assessment of film as a 'low' form of entertainment, where the industry has traditionally looked down upon 'art-house' or independent filmmakers, and where it is hard for those few filmmakers who want to create something different from the mainstream Hollywood or Thai cinema they grew up on to find any financial support. Aditya Assarat argues that if you want to make anything apart from horror or comedy, you should not count on local funding or support. In the same interview, he explains that his new film will be the first one aiming at an international audience, in which he will try to challenge stereotypes surrounding relationships between Europeans and Asians. He concludes that without the HBF, he would probably not have been able to finish his last film or continue to make films.[80] A number of the directors whose work I discuss here are (active) members of the *Free Thai Cinema* movement as well. They openly protest against cuts and bans imposed by the government and have actively been part of panels discussing topics such as creative freedom and censorship.[81] If, at any stage of the production process, they would have felt the HBF or other financial backers would be meddling or influencing the content of their work in any way, one would hope they speak up and openly protest within this transnational context as well. To further consider the limitations such generalizations and frameworks bring with them, I would like to discuss the work of two HBF and IFFR regulars within this context. These are Apichatpong Weerasethakul, in particular his film *Sud pralad/Tropical Malady (2004),* and Uruphong Raksasad, who has not nearly gained as much attention as any of the other directors I have discussed here so far. He has been a guest at

80 See "De impact van het Hubert Bals Fund op Aditya Assarat" https://iffr.com/nl/blog/de-impact-van-het-hubert-bals-fund-op-aditya-assarat (accessed 6th of September, 2018)

81 For some accounts on their struggles with censorship, see for instance http://thaifilmjournal.blogspot.com/2013/05/free-thai-cinema-movement-returns-with.html and https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/movies/critical-of-thailands-censorship-visionary-filmmaker-apichatpong-weerasethakul-is-looking-to-latin-america-20160321-gnmzhs.html (both accessed 10th of September, 2018)

the IFFR several times with both his shorts and feature length semi-documentaries, some of which have been supported by HBF.

3.2 *Cultural specific elements: history, borders and local experiences*

I got a chance to see Raksasad's film *Pleng khong kao*/*The Songs of Rice* (2014) at the 2014 edition of the IFFR. The film shows the annual production cycle of rice in rural Thailand, mainly consisting of its plantation, harvest and consumption. After portraying the manual labor on the plantation fields, the film shifts its focus in the second half and shows the consumption of the rice and the festivities that accompany the completion of a (successful) harvest, which includes music, dance and fireworks. At first glance, the film might seem reminiscent of a television report or a travelogue, reporting festivities in a foreign country. But without an explaining voice-over to guide us, or a (western) mediator to explain what we see, those associations fall short. Rather, the film casually seems to document life in rural Thailand. In the Q&A afterwards, Raksasad explained that he wanted the camera to follow the rhythm of country life, joining the locals in their daily life and dancing around with them when they celebrated the harvest. More than just being a witness, he wanted the camera to join in both the labor and the celebration. Instead of a detached, fly-on-the-wall style, the film interacts with its subject as if it is a part of their life, and invites (or perhaps challenges) the audience to undergo their rhythmic experience. The result is more of a lyrical celebration than an informative documentary, and it is shot in various parts of the country to create a rhythm that feels natural, rather than faithfully covering the cycle of rice production. The titular association with music could not have been more fitting. We could easily categorize this film under the moniker of poverty-porn, since ultimately - when 'we' experience a film such as this one at a film festival - much of the crowd seems to consist of a middle-class, relatively wealthy, western audience watching the poor families of a far-away country working, sometimes even struggling, to make a living. At the same time, because of the lack of a voice-over and clear explanation and with its focus on rhythm, the film could also fit the criteria of a 'poetic documentary', which De Valck and Soeteman explain is a type of film that film festivals such as IDFA eagerly select and award.[82] The ease with which one can put all these labels on the film shows how conveniently such a film can be used and interpreted to fit

[82] De Valck and Soeteman 2010, p. 291, p. 300

any of the various clichés, frameworks or categories that we choose to apply, while simultaneously none of those labels or categories tells us anything about the film itself. Nor do they tell us anything about its place within Thai cinema, within (South-East) Asian cinema, within world cinema, within (film) history or simply within Raksasad's oeuvre. The same is true for its potential success on the festival circuit or its merits as a work of art. If anything, such a framework or pre-determined label only limits the analytical work that can be done on the film.

So, if we want to open up the type of research and analytical work we can do on films like these, what are our options? Although looking at the films themselves without any predetermined (i.e. western) framework in mind is perhaps a monolithic task, and an utopian wish, at least we can make an attempt to consider other frameworks. If we dispose of these 'western' points of reference, Raksasad's film gives room to several other, interesting readings. If we take a look at the subject matter of the film, Thai film critic Kong Rithdee provides us with an interesting point of departure. He suggests that Raksasad's films can be seen as a return to a focus on farmers and life in the countryside, two elements that used to play a prominent role in Thai cinema but have disappeared in the late 1970s.[83] This specific part of Thai film history offers plenty of interesting angles we can take when discussing the film. If, however, we want to take a different approach and look at the film's structure or formal qualities, rather than place it within predetermined western documentary categories such as the poetic documentary, we can also start to draw similarities to Thai forms of storytelling. A traditional art form such as the *nirat* (travel poem) would be an interesting point of reference in the way the narrative unfolds. If anything, rather than catering to western fantasies about South-East Asia, *Pleng khong kao* seems to be catering to - or even celebrating - Thai fantasies, or at least Raksasad's own, about Thailand's past, its countryside, the (traditional) role of farmers in society, and even of Thailand's own film history. Or, from a different perspective, we might say that the film challenges Thai fantasies about its own present. As Rithdee argued in regard to *Sawan baan na*/*Agrarian Utopia* (2009), an earlier film by Raksasad: "His farmers aren't the stuff of nostalgia, and he dusted them off from the attic not because they're old, but because it's almost a crime for contemporary Thai cinema to have forgotten them for so long."[84] Reading Rithdee's essay, it seems much more interesting and

[83] Rithdee 2011, p. 18
[84] Ibid., p. 18

useful to place the film within the context of Thai film history and, in extension, the context of the changing role farmers occupy within Thai society in modern history, than within a global 'art' film or documentary context. However, such an (Area Studies-influenced) approach to film criticism is unusual, as it both requires specific knowledge few western film scholars or critics have and research few of them seem willing to do. The question how we should approach, assess and categorize such a film does not come with a definite answer. This particular film combines both HBF support (western money) and support by the local cultural agency, the film is not necessarily made for an international audience, although it fits most of the criteria 'international art films' are usually subject to, nor is it made for a local audience, since it does not fit within genre-movies that are usually successful at the Thai box office. It does not have the selling points some other Asian films have for the western market (e.g. forbidden topics that lead to censorship or a ban in their own country), nor does it challenge aesthetic conventions. The film is made by a humble and shy director who is happy for any audience to see his film at all. It is a film that has to battle for both its small spot at local cinemas and for its place in the festival circuit. These are the sort of films Peranson is afraid will disappear, the films Rastegar worries do not find their place within archives, let alone canons. At the same time, this film is also supported and produced with the help of a festival fund, it is part of the business-models of the festival industry as well, and, rather sadly maybe, it seems at present the only way such films are able to exist or survive, apart from the few exceptions made by directors who are willing to either spend all of their own money on projects or who are prepared to face debts afterwards.

If we turn to Weerasethakul's work, at least we do not have to worry about its future place in the archives anymore. However, his films do share an interest in nature and tradition with Raksasad's work, and are hard to fit into western frameworks as well. Weerasethakul's films defy traditional structures and categories; they play with the medium and its conventions. The credits can appear somewhere halfway in the movie, the narrative can start over again or repeat itself, handwritten notes appear onscreen, etc. Furthermore, his films are filled with traces of local history and traditions, ranging from old soap operas and horror films to traditional belief in ghosts and elements of Buddhist mythology. As James Quandt has fittingly put it in his introduction to a collection of essays on Weerasethakul's cinema: "[It] presents a challenge for

the *farang* (foreigner) with a fetish for categories."[85] Exemplary in this regard is Tim Burton's praise for the film when he awarded it with the Palme d'Or: "I liked it because it is a movie that you normally don't see, not western, with fantasy elements done in a way I have never seen before. It is a beautiful strange dream. It has a quiet reflective nature, full of surprises."[86] This speech, and the terms used by western scholars and critics to describe his work in general ('strange', 'dreamlike', 'mysterious', 'mirages', or - in reference to his first film - 'mysterious objects') are even somewhat reminiscent of earlier western perceptions and fantasies about Asia, regarded as 'the other' or 'the Orient', as unexplainable and filled with mystery and excitement. However, many of these elements are deeply rooted in aspects such as local history, language or minority struggles, but they can be untangled by interested or open-minded audiences. The oft-used categorizations and frameworks might help us understand its position and success within the film (festival) world, but they clearly do not suffice to classify and explain the film itself and its place within both Thai history and film culture. And although the current approaches certainly have their value, I would argue the focus and perspective of much writing has been too one-sided so far, leaving us with space for different readings.

The differences between the international and the original, Thai title of distribution for his films is interesting in itself and exemplifies how difficult his films can be to frame for non-Thai audiences. The international distribution title for his 2004 film *Sud pralad* is *Tropical Malady*, which touches upon Weerasethakul's idea that the Thai military is comparable to a disease which is hurting his country. The original Thai title *Sud pralad*, which literally translates as 'Strange Beast', has a double meaning for Thai audiences. It refers both to the creature Keng encounters in the second part of the film and to the use of this term as a homosexual slang for penis in Thailand in the 1980s.[87] A literal translation of the title would have lost this connotation for non-Thai audiences. The criticism that this work is made for a foreign audience and not many people in Thailand have seen these films is inadequate in framing and discussing the role and merit of these films as well, as this contrast would be true for nearly any non-commercial film from any country. Raise the same question (how many of you have heard of Weerasethakul's films) within any group of random students in the Netherlands, and probably only a small percentage will raise

[85] Quandt 2009, p. 14
[86] Badt 2010
[87] Anderson 2009, p. 158

their hands as well. Shift the country of focus and ask the same group of Dutch students how many of them have heard of or seen Nanouk Leopold's films and you might see even fewer hands raised. In order to understand Raksasad's films and their role within Thai (film) history and Thai culture better, looking at the inside reception and cultural role of his subject matter proved useful. Unsurprisingly, the same applies for Weerasethakul's films. Deeply insightful in this aspect is Benedict Anderson's account on local reception of Weerasethakul's work. While some western critics proudly confess to be deeply moved or touched by the film, even though they do not understand it, the responses from local, up-country people in Thailand and other South-East Asian countries were different. Talking about the film with a friend of his who grew up on the fringes of the jungle of Borneo, Anderson relates the following response:

> "He had often gone hunting in the jungle, also at night, with his grandfather, his friends, and even alone, and could immediately identify all the animal and bird sounds on the film's soundtrack. "The jungle is where you really have to listen all the time, and keep as quiet as possible. Yes, it can be frightening, but it is like a strange and wonderful world all of its own. You keep wanting to go back. You know you are testing yourself, and learning about yourself too." [88]

Later, he continues to talk about the mythical were-tiger creature (which can only be a male, is good in nature and is a creature which he believes to have existed in the past). Finally, he concludes: "I can't believe that anyone making a film today could get inside the world in which I grew up, and present it with such perfection. I've never seen anything like it."[89] Looking at *Sud pralad* and its unconventional structure through western eyes, such a statement may seem difficult to believe.

I am aware that the approaches I have discussed above still take the Thai nation as a point of reference or departure in framing these films. This is not a surprise as the nation remains incredible influential construction, influencing the people involved with all these films on a daily basis. However, both directors' work shed a different light upon the idea of Thailand as (one homogenous) nation-state as well. Most of Weerasethakul's work is located North East Thailand (Isan) and most of Raksasad's work is located in the Northern Thailand. Both regions have a

[88] Ibid., p. 163
[89] Ibid., p. 164

complex relationship with Thailand as a whole (which is usually represented in the form of Bangkok) and some knowledge of local history is useful here. One of the most influential elements in the transition from Siam to the nation of Thailand as we know it today was the creation and regulation of one, homogenous, national identity. A key element in the creation of a national identity is a national language. And although this essay does not allow me the space to delve into this fully, I think some essential facts here can shed a different light on many of the dialogues, characters and 'strange' occurrences in Weerasethakul's work. Many of the people living in these regions speak dialects that are not directly related to central Thai. If we take Isan as an example, the majority of people living in the region are ethnically Lao and their first language is a dialect of Lao. This dialect has been branded by the Thai government as 'Isan Thai', a made-up label constructed in order to serve the myth of national homogeneity. And the language is just one factor in which the identity of the people living in Isan has been changed by those in power living in Bangkok. As Martin B. Platt argues in his study on Isan literature, between 1868 and 1910 "the ethnic identity of the inhabitants of Northeastern Siam was simply erased and replaced with a geographical identity defined with respect to Bangkok and the whole country."[90] In Weerasethakul's oeuvre, actress Jenjira Pongpas plays a part in nearly all of his films. She is partly of Lao descent herself, but throughout his work, the characters she portrays display prejudice and even xenophobic behavior towards people from Laos. In this case, a little bit of background (the fact that many people living in Isan are ethnically Lao and the fact that the actress herself is of Lao descent) not only adds extra layers to the film, it also helps explain and contextualize some of the behavior and dialogues we see on screen. The two goddesses who appear in Weerasethakul's latest film *Rak ti Khon Kaen/Cemetery of Splendor* (2015) also claim they are of Laotian descent, before they proceed to tell their story. Even a bit of extra historical and cultural knowledge makes this scene a lot less 'mysterious' and already sheds a different light on the characters and narratives portrayed in his work, and on the idea of Weerasethakul as a representative of 'Thai Cinema' (again, whatever that term may encompass).[91]

Although stylistically their films might seem incomparable, perhaps the difference in content between Weerasethakul's film and Raksasad's work is not as big as one would assume it to be at

[90] Platt 2013, p. 15
[91] For a more in-depth discussion of Isan's history vis-à-vis Thailand, I suggest the reader to consult the first chapter of Platt's book.

first sight. One option here might be that for western, educated audiences (who might be interested in, but not too familiar with more than the basic aspects of Thai history and culture) the difference between the recognizable, local, 'poetic' films made by Raksasad and the (post-)modern, subversive and transnational films by Weerasethakul seems greater than it actually is for the filmmakers themselves or for a Thai audience. Since it is measured according to a different set of standards, references and a different historical framework, it is difficult to tell. Their films, as well as those by many other directors for which I do not have the space here to discuss them, actively search for the borders of Thailand, and question what their nation is, what their history is, and how people are influenced by and living with the consequences of this history on a day to day basis. The main difference might be where they search for their locale, their history, which borders they choose to question, and which people they choose to observe, portray and provide with a voice. What they do have in common is an interest in questions that are ultimately influenced by a very specific version of history, that which has informed and resulted in present day Thailand. This is a history most non-Thai people who view the work are unfamiliar with and, even if they have (some) knowledge of it, is still a history that is outside of their own experience(s).

Conclusion

The objective of this thesis has been twofold. Firstly, I have tried to show both the shortcomings of several of the frameworks that are used when discussing non-western cinema in the western world and where some of these shortcomings stem from; most significantly a hegemonic vision on what constitutes film and film history, accompanied by the framing and presenting of cinema in national frameworks at international festivals. By discussing several recent Thai films which have been partly made possible by the financial help of the HBF, I have tried to show that fitting these films within pre-existing frameworks used by western scholars and critics is not necessarily useful. While this may tell us something about their position and status within the international film festival circuit, it often hardly suffices to tell us anything about the films themselves and the contexts that shaped them. The films I have briefly discussed here do not only underscore the diversity of films produced under the HBF's support, but also the difficulty of analyzing and assessing them based on our pre-existing frameworks, which do not provide adequate room to asses and analyze all these different expressions. Secondly, by trying to approach these films from a different angle and framing them within local contexts, touching upon the history the directors grew up in which finds its way into their work, I have tried to provide an alternative approach to films made in different contexts than one's own. I have only looked at a select number of films from one country, but the same approach could be applied to, for example, Filipino cinema funded by the HBF over the past decade as well, which is a perhaps an even more diverse selection and would be even more difficult to squeeze within pre-existing frameworks than is the case with recent Thai cinema. The same could be done with the cinema from various African countries as well, although my experience and knowledge of the respective histories of borders, languages, colonial influences, etc. is too limited to properly develop such an argument and to do justice to the films and filmmakers themselves. Furthermore, this approach certainly does not have to be limited to films produced within one country, it could apply to films made within and dealing with a much bigger (e.g. a diaspora) or smaller (e.g. a community, province, area) unity than a nation-state. The question whether the annual production from one country constitutes a 'national' cinema or not and should be seen, discussed and valued as such is certainly interesting and will remain a topic of discussion, but merely placing them within this limited framework does not do justice to the value and diversity of these

films. If one director is paying homage to local traditions, the next one blends these with global traditions, the third one might be merely mimicking European art-house traditions of the 1960s and another does something completely different and unique. If prejudices and pre-set categories or frameworks prevent us from valuing these differences, it is our loss. After all, labeling something after the first catchy phrase some sales-agent or someone at some newspaper, magazine or studio can come up with, should always be relativized and questioned, rather than be taken as a fixed category. Bill Nichols' open-ended approach still seems a useful approach when evaluating the festival's role as a producer. Furthermore, the role the nation-state and nationalism play in the reception and production of other art-forms seems a topic underexplored so far, worthy of more attention.

Of course, to merely applaud the HBF and the films they produce is equally as limited and can be damaging as well, perhaps even more so that harsh criticism. It has not been my intention to claim that there are no neo-colonial, hierarchical relationships at play here at all, or that there is no power difference between first world benefactors and third world beneficiaries. We should remain open, critical and careful, and hope that both filmmakers and the people working for the HBF retain those qualities as well. Scholars such as Peranson, Ross and Chan are certainly right to address the complex issues and to be wary of European funds' international presence. Especially the vertical hierarchies in the Cine en Construcción project and the consequent pressure exerted on the final product identified by Falicov is troublesome, and worthy of critical investigation and more thorough research. However, as some of her examples already show, the strings are usually attached to the distribution and profit aspects of the film, and influence on the film's content and form (length, style, etc.) seems marginal. Certainly both the HBF's policy and the films themselves seem to be testimony of this. Since the number of films produced in this manner is large, their topics numerous and the circumstances under which they came into being different, it is unthinkable (and undesirable) to create one model within which all these productions – or even most of them - would fit. The only solution would be to discuss such structures on a film-to-film basis, without making broad generalizations about one country's or region's output. However, if we assess the production of these films a re-creation of old first world/third world hierarchical structures (exemplified by claims such as those made by Ross

("third-world countries are producing cultural artefacts for their first-world benefactors"[92]) and Rastegar ("'film festival films' are specifically made for 'consumption' of the film festival audience"[93]) as discussed in the second chapter), I think we are not only oversimplifying the production process, but we might be trying to give ourselves - as 'influential' and perhaps power-obsessed people - a little too much credit as well (and, by extension, some directors far too little). Although western funds might influence a part of the global film production, to say that these films are made for 'our' consumption is not only to overestimate our influence, but rings of orientalism. I want to stress the importance of keeping a critical eye towards 'our' activities and (financial) presence in less wealthy countries, and it is important to analyze the impact and results of 'our' meddling, but to simply try and fit the production of a wide variety of films within pre-existing models and old, established frameworks, is to oversimplify what is happening in the complex world of film production, financing, evaluation, curation, selection and circulation. In line with Chan's call for more dialogue over how to engage in the discourse surrounding the film festival field and how to address this 'cultural matrix' between economy, film aesthetics and national imaginaries, I hope this thesis has shown that it might be even more difficult than thought to capture what is currently happening in the world of film production and circulation within pre-existing models of thinking. There is a necessity of considering different perspectives on globalization, national identities, histories and even art in general, instead of depending solely on western sources, frameworks and perspectives. Possibly, my account here has been a somewhat too positive perspective on transnational funding, but I hope it will have its value as a counterweight to the all too simplistic criticism rooted in traditional hierarchical thinking, and as re-establishment of the complexity of the current, ever-changing situation. At the very least, I hope this thesis stirs further debate and lets some scholars think beyond their pre-determined black and white boxes.

[92] Ross 2011, p. 267
[93] Rastegar 2012, p. 313

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