Another kind of Spaghetti Western: Italo Zingarelli and the production of Trinità


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Another Kind of Spaghetti Western: Italo Zingarelli and The Production of The TRINITÀ FILMS

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The purpose of this article is to engage, from an industrial perspective, with Italian cinema’s concept of filone (a near equivalent of genre) by analysing the production and distribution of two of the most popular and successful Italian films at the box office: Lo chiamavano Trinità (They Call Me Trinity, Enzo Barboni, 1970) and its sequel Continuavano a chiamarlo Trinità (Trinity is Still My Name, Enzo Barboni, 1971). Produced by Italo Zingarelli’s West Film, the two films represented, on the one hand, a departure from consolidated Spaghetti Western violent tropes in order to offer a family friendly form of entertainment. On the other hand, they represented the pinnacle of the bottom-up/low budget production strategy characteristic of the heyday of the Italian genre factory. The article argues that a contextualisation of the two films within the Spaghetti Western filone, alongside an analysis of Zingarelli’s work as producer and distributor, is revealing of the ambition of Italian producers of the period and the role played by regional distribution in the development of filoni and a cinema of imitation.

The Italian Western – better known as Spaghetti Western – is undoubtedly the most globally recognised Italian generic production, characterised by the impressive quantity of films produced; the longevity of the genre (from 1963 to 1978), its international distribution and enduring critical reception, its profound influence, and lasting legacy. While few Italian westerns predate the release of Sergio Leone’s Per un pugno di dollari (For a Fistful of Dollars, 1964), it is only after the
box office success of this film that production in the genre took off, reaching its peak in 1968 with 77 films produced, which represents a third of the entire Italian film industry output at that time.¹

Inevitably, spaghetti westerns have also attracted a significant amount of international scholarly attention. Starting with Christopher Frayling’s monograph *Spaghetti Westerns. Cowboys and Europeans from Karl May to Sergio Leone*, published in 1981, the genre has been analysed using a wide array of approaches: from a cultural studies perspective to investigate its socio-political implications, to an industrial analysis in order to grasp the context of its production and its screening and impact on audiences.² Spaghetti westerns have also been studied from an authorship approach, focusing on key directors, but also music composers and actors.³ The analysis of Spaghetti Western as a genre do not fail to point out its quality as a perfect representative of European popular cinema and its global influences on other cinemas.⁴

This article proposes to examine the genre by analysing the production and distribution history of the film that, for many, represents the inevitable decline of the Spaghetti Western or, at least, its final permutation: *Lo chiamavano Trinità* (*They Called Me Trinity*, Enzo Barboni, 1970).⁵ In fact, while the box office success of the film generated an immediate reinvigoration of the genre at its moment of decline – and the development of phenomena of imitation within it – ultimately it challenged some of the core features of the Spaghetti Western through a comedic approach to the genre, though without being straightforwardly parodic. As early examples of comedy spaghetti westerns, *Lo chiamavano Trinità* and its sequel *Continuavano a chiamarlo Trinità* (*Trinity is Still My Name*, Enzo Barboni, 1971) managed to re-use recurring elements of the genre while transforming it in something new and, more importantly, into something hugely popular, but deeply linked to the stardom of the two main actors.

In an influential contribution to the studies of Spaghetti Western, Wagstaff defines box office success as:

A. A film that is a commercial success makes a profit:
   1. it cost a lot and makes a lot (decent profit);
   2. it cost little and makes little but enough (small profit);
   3. it cost little and makes a lot (windfall profit).

B. A film that is a box office success:
   1. makes a lot in comparison with other films, regardless of its cost and how profitable it has been - in other words, it is purely a measure of where the film was shown and how many people bought the tickets.⁶

Following this definition, on the one hand, we can clearly see how both *Trinità* films can be categorised as A3 and B1. As we shall discuss later, they both were straightforward box office successes while costing little money in a period of the genre’s downfall in terms of production.⁷ On the other hand, such box office success generated a harsh reaction from the ‘auteurs’ of the genre who saw it as a threat to the genre’s identity, together with the creation of Spencer’s and Hill’s stardom, which was later transferred to new generic contexts.⁸ According to Alberto Pezzotta, while *Lo chiamavano Trinità* for a period managed to revitalise the genre, thanks to the subsequent creation of copies and imitations, the shift of the popular couple and their comedic formula away from western settings contributed to the final demise of the genre.⁹
Despite the important role that Lo chiamavano Trinità and its sequel played in Italian popular cinema and in the Spaghetti Western, an aspect which scholars engaging with the genre did not fail to mention, they are generally quickly dismissed. Few analyses focus on the films and these are mainly interested in the filmic text. More importantly, Lo chiamavano Trinità has been constantly overlooked from a production perspective. While critical engagements with the films usually focus on Bud Spencer and Terence Hill’s star status and the role played by the director, Enzo Barboni, in the success of the film, the figure of Italo Zingarelli, the producer, has enjoyed little critical and scholarly recognition. Zingarelli’s production company West Film is a case study well deserving of attention, not only because it managed to produce one of the biggest box office successes in Italian cinema history, but also because its history epitomises the mode of production of popular cinema of the period (namely, the 1960s), specifically, a bottom-up approach, with limited capital and studio facilities. I suggest, that by examining Lo chiamavano Trinità, we can grasp the role that spaghetti westerns played within the peculiar ‘dynamics of genrefication’ characteristic of Italian cinema, while also tracking the kind of global distribution that spaghetti westerns managed to achieve.

Spaghetti westerns and the Italian genre factory

The production of spaghetti westerns perfectly summarises a series of key features which characterised the Italian genre factory after WWII, at least starting with Le fatiche di Ercole (Hercules, Pietro Francisci) in 1958. The complexity, variety, and idiosyncrasies of the Italian film industry context – and of its key players and stakeholders – are manifested in the rapid development of the genre. I am thinking, for instance, of the proliferation of small and short-lived production companies (involved only in the making of few titles) that were able to coexist alongside producers with large amounts of capital who collaborated with Hollywood studios and distributors. Overall, while the production formula of popular cinema was established in the 1950s, it is arguably with the Spaghetti Western that it attained its more symptomatic manifestation thanks to the profitability and popularity that the genre obtained in both domestic and international markets.

Before proceeding with the overview of Zingarelli’s activity as producer of popular cinema, it is important to briefly summarise the key features of the Italian genre factory, in particular in relation to the Spaghetti Western. First of all, we need to quickly consider the question of filone as production formula. The term comes from the word for a vein of a mineral, such as filone d’oro or ‘gold vein’, and implies the need to mine a successful trend as quickly and ‘deeply’ as possible before it runs out. From a production perspective, this meant reusing a successful narrative formula, including characters, genres, storyline etc. until the audience lose interest in it and decide to move on to new things. This is evident if we look at the credits of Italian popular films from the 1950s to the end of the 1970s, and notice how the same team of screenwriters, directors, and producers were employed in a wide array of genres and subgenres following new generic trends dictated by the box office. Their main quality was, therefore, the flexibility to
adapt their work to the market’s demand, with the goal to make in quick succession low-budget films following established (and successful) foreign models. Giacomo Manzoli and Roy Menarini, among others, have addressed the key role that the cinema of imitation played in the generic development of Italian popular cinema. From the 007 film series to Spielberg’s Jaws (1975) it is difficult to find a successful genre film which was not copied or parodied in Italy and that, consequently, was not the originator of a filone and its derivatives, known as sottofiloni. The flexibility and peculiar genrefication quality of the filone is probably best understood by looking at the notion of sottofilone.

The term refers to narrative and iconographic features present in a key film belonging to a filone and then imitated and recycled in a quick succession of similar films. Such features can be textual (plotlines, settings, characters), occasionally paratextual (titles, posters, trailers, title sequences) and, more prominently intertextual (genre hybridisation, intermediality). For instance, in the Spaghetti Western we can find a sottofilone quickly following into Per un pugno di dollari footsteps. Films such as Per un dollaro bucato (Blood for a Silver Dollar, Gianni Ferio, 1965) and Per pochi dollari ancora (For a Few Extra Dollars, Giorgio Ferroni, 1966) follow Leone’s work not only from a narrative and stylistic perspective, but also in their title sequences, trailers, and, of course, titles. Other significant and easily recognisable Spaghetti Western sottofilone is that of the ‘Mexican revolution’ (or Zapata Western) which began with the success of Quién sabe? (A Bullet for the General, Damiano Damiani, 1966) and was also characterised by recurring actors, influence of Spanish language, and, notably, for convey political messages approaching the 1968 unrests.

The list of sottofiloni generated within Spaghetti Western also features recurring characters like Ringo and Django (or their imitations) and, in particular, a high degree of genre hybridisation and intermediality. I am thinking for instance of the long lasting sottofilone of comedy and parodic western (Per qualche dollaro in meno/For a Few Dollars Less, Mario Mattoli, 1966), and other forms of hybridisations such as Little Rita nel Far West (Ferdinando Baldi, 1968) which showcases, in a comedy/western form, a series of musical performances from Italian popular singers of the time.

While the notion of genre from an industrial perspective aimed at planning and stability, creating and satisfying audience expectations, the sottofilone is a quick reaction to a market demand, mainly a regional one. As such, it is fluid and ephemeral, relying more on the artisanal ability of improvisation than on industrial planning. Different from Rick Altman’s genre cycles (with which it shares some characteristics), the sottofilone lacks the ambition of genrefication because its short life expectancy.

What the notion of sottofilone reveals is the importance played by the processes of recycling and imitating. While the filone usually originates by the imitation of foreign models, the sottofilone begins with the success of such imitation, in the attempt to grasp and recreate its key features.

The limited funds and ephemeral nature of the majority of production companies involved in the production of genre films – with their constant need for quick production cycles in order to save money and to exploit the demand for a different
generic trend – increasingly dictated a ‘modular’ production formula based on a package unit system.\textsuperscript{22} With this production formula, in order to make a film, the producer had to ‘borrow’ and organise the resources (for instance, equipment and studios facilities), while at the same time trying to spread as wide as possible the financial risk. Simply put, if the film was made with the lowest financial commitment possible, it was easier for the production to make a profit. Moreover, if the producers had other films in their portfolios, they could easily access loans from \textit{Banca Nazionale del Lavoro} based on the credit to be collected from distributors and exhibitors during the exploitation cycle of those titles. Overall, one of the strengths of spaghetti westerns compared to other Italian generic productions – and something crucial that contributed to its longevity – was the capacity to develop the already mentioned \textit{sottofiloni}, i.e. variations on the main \textit{filone} able to generate in turn further imitations. For instance, as previously mentioned, \textit{Per un pugno di dollari} generated a series of imitators attempting to be new versions of that film rather than to form part of the genre, or the ‘original’ foreign model.

The second key feature of the Italian genre factory consisted in a production system relying strongly on state interventions through loans and on advances from distribution proceeds. Such secured minimum ‘was paid by the independent regional agents to the producers directly or through a “central” distributor. In essence it was a sum that was supposed to match the probable minimum return of the film in their particular area’.\textsuperscript{23}

With lower risks for the producers and the possibility of working with very low budget thanks to cheap labour and the ability to reuse settings and props, these conditions generated a plethora of small production companies – often involved in the making of only one low budget film. In addition, it led to a system deeply shaped by the needs of the distribution circuits, which arguably can be considered among the reasons for the very concept of \textit{filone}. If the audience was drawn to a particular film in the first run circuit, exhibitors and distributors wanted to be sure to be able to offer more of the same for the cinemagoers in second and third runs.\textsuperscript{24}

Writing about horror cinema, Francesco Pitassio points out how:

The founding characteristics of popular cinema do not stem from the formative objective of the production system but, more specifically, from its distribution. This allows a widespread flow of products and clichés, tangible objects and subdued technologies. The ‘secured minimum’, in this sense, provides a distributor with an extraordinary contractual power over any operational choices, thus facilitating the metamorphosis of the genre into a more flexible trend. This also determines priorities, privileging the effect over its predisposition, the result over its building.\textsuperscript{25}

Therefore, a focus on distribution is undoubtedly key to the understanding of the peculiar nature of Italian generic productions, alongside the other features underlined by Manzoli and Guglielmo Pescatore pertaining to the use of local low budget technologies and the ability to redeplo existing aesthetic formulas.\textsuperscript{26}

Arguably, the role played by the distribution is even more challenging (and for our purposes more rewarding) to grasp than the reusing of genre-based aesthetics.
In fact, the system of the secured minimum worked from a regional to an international level, revealing in this way the potential reach of the film as well as the ambition of the production and of the generic system overall. On some occasions, and in particular with the Spaghetti Western, films made to satisfy the demands of regional distributors and exhibitors ended up being sold to a global audience, while it also happened that producers could collect minimum guarantees both from regional and international distributors, further minimising the risk of financial loss.

Finally, and connected to the previous point, the third feature is the transnational nature of the Italian genre production, as perfectly exemplified by the spaghetti westerns. Not only did they rely on coproduction agreements (usually with Spain) in order to reach wider markets and to access international state support, but they also featured international actors, English pen names for unambiguously Italian directors, actors, and screenwriters, American settings, and international locations.

With a few exceptions (mainly comedy, melodrama and musicarelli) Italian popular cinema was a cinema that sought to conceal its national origins, while at the same time being highly representative of Italian national production (for instance, through domestic media coverage). The Spaghetti Western again highly exemplifies this aspect. It pretended to be American in order to attract a national audience infatuated with Hollywood genre movies, while at the same time it proudly proclaimed the success of this national production on TV newsreels and in the ambitious attempt to conquer an international market. The made-up western villages built in Spain and on the outskirts of Rome further emphasised the transnational aspect of the production and the peculiarity of a genre which was both notably foreign and notably national at the same time.

Italo Zingarelli: filmmaking and the genre factory

Italo Zingarelli’s profile as a producer is quite interesting in the Italian landscape of the 1960s. On the one hand, his career typifies some of the established paths for a producer with little financial resources working on Italian popular cinema. The activities of his production companies, in fact, seem to follow closely the model of Italian genre factory as described above. The focus of the production moves from filone to filone, relying on the secured minimum, co-production agreements and loans, in order to have a portfolio of films mainly aimed at regional distribution circuits.

On the other hand, however, his career as specialist in popular cinema presents some peculiarities – like his work as screenwriter and director – as well as a series of distinctive endeavours. For instance, in order to better exploit the potential of the films produced, Zingarelli, alongside his production company, formed the distribution company Delta distribuzioni srl and the West edizioni musicali. The latter, a music company, was formed in order to better manage the rights of film soundtracks, which for popular cinema were increasingly expensive because of the choice to use established and easily recognisable composers such as Ennio Morricone. Zingarelli also constantly showed a certain degree of eclecticism.
during his career as producer, director, and distributor. He was mainly involved in low-medium budget generic productions, but alongside ambitious films and critical successes such as Bernardo Bertolucci’s Il Conformista (The Conformist, 1970) and Ettore Scola’s C’eravamo tanto amati (We All Loved Each Other So Much, 1974), Zingarelli also produced, wrote and directed very different films, such as Una prostituta al servizio del pubblico e in regola con le leggi dello stato (A Prostitute Serving the Public and in Compliance with the Laws of the State, 1971) and Io sto con gli ippopotami (I’m for the Hippopotamus, 1979), showing again an ability to move across different cinematic registers. However, the biggest peculiarity of Zingarelli’s work as a producer of popular cinema lies in his responsibility for two of the most remunerative Italian films of the period: Lo chiamavano Trinità and, in particular, Continuavano a chiamarlo Trinità.

As it is often the case with the protagonists of Italian popular cinema, Zingarelli’s first steps in the film industry have an anecdotal quality. Being a successful boxer in his youth, he was noticed while training in a gym in Rome by the production team of Quo vadis (Mervyn LeRoy, 1951) in need of extras and stunt performers with an athletic physique. On the sets of early-1950s genre productions, Zingarelli started the kind of networking fundamental to the establishing oneself in the industry and began to consider it as a potential career. After various experiences with short-lived production companies, the first real breakthrough came with Film Columbus. Founded in 1960 together with Anteo Antoniucci, Anacleto Fontini (director of De Paolis’ studio facilities), Roberto Palaggi, and Geraldo Galdieri, this venture gave him the opportunity to develop some key contacts in Spain, and in particular with Natividad Zaro. The latter was a screenwriter and producer who involved Zingarelli in the Spanish-Italian co-production of the peplum Il gladiatore invincibile (The Invincible Gladiator, 1961), the first film where he was credited as part of the production team. As a perfect example of the Italian genre factory formula, this film most likely provided Zingarelli with a model for future productions.

It is also noteworthy that the experience at Film Columbus was responsible for the working relationship between Zingarelli and Palaggi which will continue for the rest of their careers, in the film industry and other businesses. In 1961, they formed Tiger Film srl (Zingarelli 80% Palaggi 20%) which was to be active from 1966 to 1973 and involved in the production of a handful of films, often in parallel with West Film. Among these films it is worth mentioning Un esercito di 5 uomini (The 5 Men Army, Don Taylor, 1969), a western written by Dario Argento which marked Zingarelli’s first collaboration with Bud Spencer. The film, produced in collaboration with Metro Goldwyn Mayer, also features Enzo Barboni as director of photography and was shot in the De Paolis studio facilities, representing, to some extent, a blueprint for Lo chiamavano Trinità. More interestingly, the film was also supposed to be Zingarelli’s debut behind the camera. However, MGM decided to add Don Taylor in that role following a request from the American actors to be directed by an American director. The West Film srl was formed in 1964 and was active from 1964 to 1972 with the production and coproduction of 24 films, including Lo chiamavano Trinità and Continuavano a chiamarlo Trinità (Figure 1).
West Film and the production of Italian popular cinema

A quick look at the production catalogue of the films produced by West Film can offer a suitable snapshot of the activities of a small production company specialising in popular cinema in the 1960s. In particular, I would suggest considering these activities by looking at four interconnected aspects.

A showcase of filoni

As the company name reveals, the spaghetti western can be seen as the dominant genre, with films such as Sfida a Rio Bravo (Gunmen of Rio Grande, Tulio De Micheli, 1964), L’uomo dalla pistola d’oro (Doc, Hands of Steel, Alfonso Balcázar, 1965), Johnny Yuma (Romolo Guerrieri, 1966) Odio per odio (Hate for Hate, Domenico Paolella, 1967), La lunga notte di Tombstone, Jaime, Jesús Balcázar, 1968) among others displaying the kind of characteristic low-budget productions which were the backbone of the genre. Films were made with the contribution of screenwriters (Dario Argento, Adriano Bolzoni, Fernando di Leo), composers (Angelo Francesco Lavagnino, Nora Orlandi), and actors (Mark Damon, Guy Madison, Tomas Milian, Fernando Sancho), whose names recurred in the credits of spaghetti westerns and of Italian popular cinema of the time.

While the Spaghetti Western is the dominant genre, the West Film catalogue also featured comedies/parodies (Indovina chi viene a merenda? Marcello Circioliini, 1969), adventure films (Rose rosse per Angelica, Steno, 1966; La corsa del secolo/The Hotshots, Alex Joffé, 1968), spy stories (Con la morte alle spalle/Electra One Alfonso
Balcázar, 1967), erotic thrillers (La rivoluzione sessuale Riccardo Ghione, 1968; La stagione dei sensi, Massimo Franciosa, 1969), crime films or poliziotteschi (Il clan degli uomini violenti/La horse, Pierre Granier-Deferre, 1970; Inchiesta su un delitto della polizia/Law Breakers, Marcel Carné, 1971), dramas, like I giovani lupi (Young Wolves, Marcel Carné 1968), musicarelle (Cuore matto … matto da legare, Mario Amendola, 1967; Riderà (Cuore matto), Bruno Corbucci, 1967). Basically, the catalogue was a showcase of the filoni characteristic of the period. While the peplum is missing from the list as its cycle was already over by 1964, it is important to remember again that Zingarelli began his career by producing that genre.

The western comedy Ciccio perdona … io no! (Ciccio Forgives, I don’t, Marcello Ciorciolini, 1968) is quite representative of the variety of the catalogue of a small production company specialised in popular cinema. While West Film was concerned with making spaghetti westerns, it did not refrain from exploiting the success of the genre by also making a parody of it, taking part in the sottofilone western comedies. In fact, the title directly recalls Giuseppe Colizzi’s Dio perdona.io no! (God Forgives. I don’t!, 1967), the film which represented the debut of the couple Bud Spencer and Terence Hill. Of course, the comedy-western sottofilone gave the opportunity to the production company to recycle setting and props, while at the same time creating a variety of their offer with a genre always popular in the national circuit.35

The West Film portfolio gives an idea of the diversity of the popular cinema of the period, as well as the role played by filoni and sottofiloni in the catalogue. For instance, it is possible to grasp how films with different censorship ratings were present in the catalogue at the same time and were made during the same years. Alongside PG comedies, in fact, there were several films deemed unsuitable to minors, like the giallo film Alla ricerca del piacere (Amuck!, Silvio Amadio, 1972) which endured several cuts by the censors.36 Most importantly, such diversity of the portfolio was helpful for a production company of the size of West Film (with its social capital of 40 million liras) because it meant a potential long exploitation of each film in national circuits and, consequently, helped in applications for state-backed loans.37 If we look at a request of a loan from Banca Nazionale del Lavoro (a common practice for all of the cinema of the period) for the already mentioned parody Indovina chi viene a merenda?, it is possible to grasp the crucial role played in the credits by regional distributors and exhibitors which were listed as guarantors for a part of the loan (100 million liras in a total of 130 million liras). It is interesting, therefore, to notice how the distributors were not only fundamental for the production of the film with the mechanism of the secured minimum, but also how the potential for remuneration coming from the screening of other films in the catalogue was important to support the biggest issue facing small production companies: the lack of liquidity.38

Transnational productions

Unsurprisingly the majority of West Film productions were made through co-production agreements, often as a minority partner (Sfida a Rio Bravo, for instance).
Even when the collaboration was not made as a coproduction, several spaghetti westerns made by West Film relied on Spanish partners, in particular for location shooting and studio facilities (Jonny Yuma, for instance, is an entirely Italian production but was partially shot in Almeria). While the majority of Zingarelli’s productions were shot in the De Paolis studios in Rome, the networking that he developed in Spain during the first stages of his career was fundamental for the production of westerns. That was not only the case for their location shooting, but also for more comprehensive collaborations, such as that with the production company PC Balcázar and its studio facilities in Barcelona.

Among the several westerns produced by West, Odio per Odio is quite exemplary. In this case, West was the minority co-producer investing 40% of the capital. PC Balcázar financial contribution was for 148,050,000 liras, while West contributed for 98,700,000, paying mainly for four main actors’ salaries (15 million) and for the screenplay (4 million, plus 1 million for the subject). The cost of the ‘international actor’ Johnny Ireland was split at 60% for the Spanish group and 40% for West, stressing again the importance of a recognisable name for this kind of production.39

Reliance on ‘popular’ stars

Producers of popular cinema have usually to rely on the presence of easily recognisable ‘stars’ of the genre in order to attract the much-needed interest (and funding) of distribution companies at the early stage of the film’s development. While some spaghetti westerns managed to create their own stardom (both in the protagonists and in the secondary characters), the majority of the films belonging to the genre and following the filone had to rely on actors already familiar to the public. Beyond spaghetti westerns, comedies and musicarello mainly relied on the popular ‘star power’ of their protagonists. West Film was not different from other small production companies in this regard and sought to have for short periods of time the exclusive rights of working with a bankable name. For instance, Zingarelli in 1967 had the singer Little Tony under contract for three musicarello films, and the popular comedy duo Ciccio Ingrassia and Franco Franchi, who specialised in film parodies.40 This latter collaboration was quite prolific, albeit for a very short period of time; after Ciccio perdonas io no!, the pair was under an exclusive contract for the year 1969, when they made three films: Indovina chi viene a merenda, Franco, Ciccio e il pirata Barbanera (Mario Amendola, 1969), and Franco e Ciccio… ladro e guardia (Marcello Ciorciolini, 1969). The collaboration with Franco and Ciccio not only shows Zingarelli’s familiarity with an established comedy duo and its dynamics – an experience that was surely helpful to grasp the potential of Trinità –, but also the ability to exploit collaborations with genre cinema stars by making films around them in a condensed period of time. In fact, in these examples of package unit system, the stars first came and then it was a matter of attracting the interest of screenwriters and directors who wanted to work with them.
Distribution

Probably one of the most interesting aspects of the work of Zingarelli as a producer was the attention he gave to distribution. That is true not only for the reliance on minimum guarantees to finance the films, but also for his direct involvement in the distribution process, starting with West Film acting on few occasions as agent for the distribution of some films (in particular for rights outside Italy) and, of course, the foundation of the Delta film distribuzione srl. It is noteworthy in this regard that West Film, in its capacity as minority co-producer of Odio per odio, secured responsibility for its distribution to foreign markets (for a 10% commission), evidence of their readiness to consider the exploitation of the film far beyond Italian territories.\(^4\) The majority of genre films produced by the West Film (in particular spaghetti westerns) managed to secure an international distribution, and even the comedies with Ciccio and Franco – a genre which seldom crossed national borders – were sold to the circuits of Italian language cinemas in US.\(^2\)

The decision to produce and distribute his films, on the other hand, shows how important it was for Zingarelli to be directly involved with the different levels of the film exploitation chain (an approach similar to bigger production companies). On that other hand, however, it meant that for many films the secured minimum came from the Delta distribuzione, sharing in this way the investment risk among different companies which eventually were all under Zingarelli’s control and responsibility. Distribution rights for films constantly moved between the two Zingarelli’s production companies (Tiger and West Film) and the Delta film distribuzione srl, which continued to operate with a capital of 50 million liras, until in 1972 it became Delta film Spa (therefore responding to shareholders) with an increase of its capital to 90 million liras, evidence of Zingarelli’s consistent interest in the film distribution sector, despite increasing competition and centralisation.\(^3\)

**Trinità: the gamechanger**

The conception and production of Lo chiamavano Trinità is indicative of the importance of networking and connections between people (friends, collaborators, acquaintances) for the genre factory. The ‘artisanal’ quality of the low budget films, the intense joint efforts which allowed a seamless move from one genre to the other in a short period of time and, finally, the ‘hands-on’ approach required of the producers and the few administrators involved in running a small production company were among the aspects that epitomised the strength of the Italian genre formula, but also what made it incapable of building a truly comprehensive industrial mode of genre production. In fact, such formula relied mainly on reactions to the market demands than to an attempt to develop a durable and sustainable mode of production (Figure 2).

Once again, as often with popular cinema, the origin of Lo chiamavano Trinità is an anecdotal tale, repeated in interviews and news articles. Enzo Barboni was already a well-known figure in the production of spaghetti western and genre cinema.\(^4\) He worked as a cinematographer on comedies (like Totó Diabolicus, Steno,
1962), the peplum (for instance, Romolo e Remo/Duel of the Titans, Sergio Corbucci, 1961), horror (Amanti d’oltretomba/Nightmare Castle, Mario Caiano, 1965) and, of course, several westerns (among others, Django, Corbucci, 1966 and I crudely/The Cruel ones, Corbucci, 1967). Barboni collaborated with Zingarelli as director of photography for Un esercito di 5 uomini and as a cinematographer for Franco e Ciccio… ladro e guardia. Barboni made his debut as a director with a spaghetti western: Ciakmull, L’uomo della vendetta (The Unholy Four, 1970). In the same year, he carried around Rome the first draft of the script of Trinità, in order to present it to all the producers who specialised in the genre. The rejections quickly piled up. The main reason was that there were no deaths in the script. The end of the 1960s saw a clear turning-point in the production of spaghetti westerns and, in reaction, producers and writers tended to push one of the characteristic of the genre, namely, its violence, to the extremes.45 Therefore, while the screenwriters were trying to find new ways to fit a higher body count into their films, Barboni was pitching a spaghetti western with no killing.46 Moreover, I would argue that the screenplay did not clearly follow any sottofilone. Of course, it did feature comedic elements, but they were not clearly marked and there were no established comedians already attached to the project. Interestingly, the comments of the representative of the minister of tourism evaluating the script already reveals what were the main qualities of the film: a peculiar protagonist, the use of humour, and the lack of violence.47

Zingarelli, whose productions showed a balance between comedies and westerns, grasped the potential of the screenplay as a new development of the genre itself, and agreed to have Barboni as director of the film. This project with Barboni and Bud Spencer brought back together part of the team involved in the production of Un esercito di 5 uomini, and ideally drew on a series of earlier ventures, including a film like Odio per odio and the comedies with Ciccio and Franco.
The estimated budget for the *Lo chiamavano Trinità* was 300 million liras (i.e., an average budget for a spaghetti western), made up of 180 million liras of secured minimum from Delta distribuzione and 120 million liras provided by West Film. As with previous formulas employed by Zingarelli, *Lo chiamavano Trinità* was shot between the De Paolis studios in Rome with 10 days of shooting in Spain (Andalusia), mainly for the external shots and the use of existing sets. Overall, the state contribution to the film came to 13% of the total receipts, in line with the law of 4 November 1965 on cinema (n. 1213, art 7), paid every three months during the first five years of the title cinematic exploitation.

The production data reveal a quite average spaghetti western, without any particular element standing out. Even the choice of the two actors playing the main characters seems in line with the expectation of the genre. Spencer and Hill were already known figures in the spaghetti western, both individually (Hill was considered a ‘new Franco Nero’) and as a couple, thanks to their roles in Colizzi’s trilogy: *Dio perdon...io no!, I 4 dell’Ave Maria* (Ace High, 1968) and *La collina degli stivali* (Boot Hill, 1969). Therefore, they could, on the one hand, have been considered an already established filmic duo with recognisable dynamics (their contrasting physicality, interactions based on ‘strength versus wit’ etc.). On the other hand, their previous experience and association within the spaghetti westerns is arguably what made their comedic style original in respect of other films within the western comedy *sottofilone*. One could argue that, because they belonged ‘iconically’ to the genre, the comedic tones of *Lo chiamavano Trinità* never moved completely to the point of parody or farce but managed to develop in a way that seemed new and integral within the iconography of spaghetti western. While the genre hybridisation with comedy usually meant recognised comedians playing in a parodic manner – through their characterisation and physicality – with the dominant *filone* of the period (for example, Ciccio and Franco, but also Totò, Renato Rascel etc.), *Lo chiamavano Trinità* takes all of the features of spaghetti westerns in order to make a comedy: setting and locations, but also director, producer and actors. Only one year after *La collina degli stivali*, similar ingredients led to a very different result in terms of box office and popularity.

*Lo chiamavano Trinità* began its Italian theatrical run on 22 December 1970 in Pescara (Michetti film theatre), moving from the provincial cities to the *capozona* (the 16 main Italian cities representing the biggest markets). This move from the ‘periphery’ to the centre was not unusual. Genre films regularly followed this itinerary since their limited promotional budgets had a hard time competing with the better-funded productions. Films such as those with Franco and Ciccio, for example, relied more on the potential interest of regional distributors generated by provincial revenues, than they did on press coverage and critical reviews. By February 1971, *Lo chiamavano Trinità* had already covered its costs, making the majority of its revenue in provincial cities. Interestingly, at the beginning of its distribution cycle, another film by Zingarelli’s West Film seemed to have more success than *Lo chiamavano Trinità* in the *capozona* of the cities: *Una prostituta al servizio del...* The film, written and directed by Zingarelli, featured Giancarlo Giannini and Giovanna Ralli as protagonists, and the performance by the latter attracted critical attention and led to the award of the prestigious prize of the *Grolla d’oro*. The film,
with clear social and artistic ambitions, was a very different product from *Lo chiamavano Trinità*; it had overall a good return at the box office and was the kind of product ideally aimed at the *capozona* cities. However, by August 1971 *Lo chiamavano Trinità* had grossed almost twice as much as *Una prostituta al servizio del ...* in the *capozona*, confirming its earlier success in the provincial markets.\(^5^2\)

*Lo chiamavano Trinità* not only shows the distribution itinerary of a medium-size production of spaghetti westerns in the moment of the genre’s crisis, but also the role that the foreign markets played in assuring a return on investment for the producer of genre cinema. Looking at the international distribution contracts of *Lo chiamavano Trinità*, three features should be noted. First of all, the distribution rights were sold all over the world and, for some territories, the agreement was reached before the film had its first screening, revealing a network already present for international distribution.\(^5^3\) For instance, the distribution rights for seven years in the territories of the Federal Republic of Germany and Austria were sold to Adria Film in Munich in November 1970, for 50,000 USD, the equivalent of approximately 31 million liras of the time, amounting to 10 per cent of the estimated production costs. Other key markets appear to be (unsurprisingly) the rights sold to a French distributor, covering France, Belgium Luxembourg, Marocco and French French Oceania, Haiti, South Vietnam, Antilles, and a selection of African Territories for 25 million lira for 10 years, plus a percentage of the gross after a certain threshold. Overall, the film was widely sold and covered territories such as Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq, Japan, Syria, Egypt, Iran, Switzerland, Japan, Australia, South America, etc. A large portion of the international rights was acquired by Joseph E. Levine’s Avco Embassy Pictures, which included North America territories and part of South America and Asia. \(^5^4\) In fact, in July 1971, once the success of the film was assured, the rights were sold for 135000 dollars (84 million liras) to Avco Embassy Pictures for several global territories, including Argentina, India, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand and Australia.

Secondly, although the rights already covered an average of 5 to 10 years, we can see several requests for extensions for given rights, showing how deep the exploitation of popular cinema was. In fact, this is far from being an isolated case. If we consider the agreement with Delta distribuzione, we can see how a film like *Alla ricerca del piacere* (1972) achieved its distribution in UK and US only in 1978. Despite this level of reach, for *Lo chiamavano Trinità* and other films sold by Delta distribuzione in the same period to foreign markets we can seldom see a request of a share of future returns. The theatrical rights were sold for a long period of time and for a sum payable at the delivery of the negative print. On the one hand, this shows how the foreign market was considered by the West Film as a ‘bonus’, something to cash in on as quickly as possible in order to cover for potential loss and to have liquidity to finance the next film in the fast production cycle.\(^5^5\) It also shows how the lack of negotiating power (and local agencies) in several territories led them to rely just on the payment of a lump sum. On the other hand, such an outcome also reveals some of the limitations of the Italian genre factory and the difficulty it faced in developing a stable and durable system to plan for the long run.

The national and international success of *Lo chiamavano Trinità* was even more significant because it was unexpected and really marked a challenge to the
Spaghetti Western canon. It can be argued that Zingarelli introduced the idea of ‘family film’, following at the same time in the footsteps of one of the most popular *filoni* of the 1960s. The cartoonish violence of *Lo chiamavano Trinità* and the absence of corpses in a spaghetti western were considered a heresy, but at the same time it meant that children could join their parents in the cinema theatre, in a period when Italy was also facing the rise in erotic films and a new attention towards censorship. Thus, for its producer, a film like *Lo chiamavano Trinità* was meant to evade the risk of censorship, which was particularly damaging for the foreign markets, as it meant an immediate loss of revenue. *Lo chiamavano Trinità* also made widely recognisable stars of Spencer and Hill, who from that moment were forever associated with a particular kind of family film and part of a narrative formula that worked across genres and countries, a formula that was soon to be imitated without the same box office success.\(^{56}\)

Zingarelli did not leave the audience’s – and regional distributors’ – demands for films in the line of this new *sottofilone* unanswered for long. In February 1971, when *Lo chiamavano Trinità* had just begun to show significant returns from the *capozona*, Spencer and Hill were already signing a new contract for the sequel. *Continuavano a chiamarlo Trinità* was shot later in the year, with a bigger budget (450 million liras) and a secured minimum of 200 million lira provided this time by ‘regional distributors’.\(^{57}\) The premiere of the film took place in Italo Zingarelli’s birthplace, Lugo di Romagna, so underlining not only the direct link between the producer and what was his most successful production to date, but also building again on the Italian provinces, whose audiences had contributed so greatly to the film’s success.

*Continuavano a chiamarlo Trinità* was, as one could imagine, not as innovative as its predecessor. The same formula was followed without any significant deviation; however, it became one of the most remunerative Italian films at the first run box office with more than six billion liras. The star status reached in a few months by the Spencer/Hill duo was the main driver of its success, coming almost immediately to embody a *sottofilone* which, in the following decade, was to become a genre in itself. The box office success of *Lo chiamavano Trinità* and the new star power of the pair led also to a change of attitude towards international distribution, with an increased proportion of the contracts featuring a percentage on the theatrical run. That was the case, for instance, with the US distribution. While the agreement with Avco Embassy Pictures for international territories including UK and Japan featured a secured minimum of 120,000 dollars and a percentage on the sales, the agreement for the territories of US and Canada was on the basis of 25% of the returns for the first 750,000 dollars in gross revenue and 35% beyond that threshold, virtually making Avco a partner in the exploitation of the film in North America.

The incredible success of the film, however, underlined also another structural issue of the Italian genre factory: the difficulty for a small-to-medium-size company to develop in scale and ambition. Zingarelli’s collaboration with Spencer and Hill led to two more films years apart: *Più forte ragazzi!* (1972) and *Io sto con gli ippopotami* (1979). The latter, in particular, written, produced and directed by Zingarelli and shot in South Africa, is quite revealing of how the production
landscape quickly changed as, with the exception of West edizioni musicali, none of the companies Zingarelli founded in the mid 1960s are credited.\textsuperscript{58}

During the 1970s, West Film and Tiger Film were at the centre of a series of changes and mergers, first with the institution of the Cinetirrena spa (1973–1975), which was then incorporated into the Metropolitan spa, with the film rights shifting between these companies, Delta and also Deantir. The last step was Trinidad film (again funded by Zingarelli and Palaggi), which made four films at the end of the 1980s and start of the 1990s. They were all relatively small realisations, examples of genre cinema and with short runs. In the 1980s Zingarelli made a new attempt to compete in the increasingly centralised distribution sector through the formation of the D.L.F distribuzione, a partnership with Cerri, Clementelli, Lucisano, in order to spread the risks (and costs) of distribution. However, it is again with Delta distribuzione that in 1990 Zingarelli managed to achieve a new success with the distribution of Milos Forman’s \textit{Valmont} (1989).

\textbf{Conclusion}

Among all the histories of spaghetti westerns, that of the small medium production company is the most difficult to tell. It is a history that must take into account several players and variables, many of which were only an ephemeral but crucial presence in the cinematic context of the period. It must be a history of exhibitors and independent regional distributors; of loans and promissory notes; of established formulas and unexpected intuitions; of liquid borders between genres. This essay’s initial look at Zingarelli’s work in this context reveals the complexity of the production landscape of the period, as well as the entrepreneurial opportunities offered by the cinema industry.

Zingarelli managed to follow into the footsteps of production companies with higher levels of capital also in regard to the ambition of a direct control of the distribution. In the 1973, he decided to invest in property by acquiring (again with Palaggi) a vineyard specialised in Chianti (Rocca delle Macie).\textsuperscript{59} As he revealed in various interviews, the goal was to have a parallel activity alongside the cinematic productions and to apply the same production techniques used in popular cinema to the production of wine (particularly in terms of marketing).\textsuperscript{60} The endeavour turned out to be a success with the company reaching an international status and, more importantly, an enduring legacy, as it is still active and family-run, making it the longest-lasting of Zingarelli’s companies.

Overall, the \textit{filone} approach of small production companies involved in the Italian genre factory meant a constant need of cashflow and the ability to move quickly between genres. However, this also meant a constant dependence on the distribution apparatus, as a means of finding a way to satisfy the demands of exhibitors and audiences at national and international level, and therefore to create a collaboration network capable of connecting artisanal production to a global industry. However, this system showed also the difficulty of creating a more established industrial framework for production, even after achieving impressive box office success. For instance, once the stardom of a popular actor extended beyond national borders, it became difficult for small and medium production companies
to continue to rely on it. The strengths of the genre factory were also its core weaknesses, making it a fragile ecosystem that was to be smashed by the advent of Italian private broadcasters. Their unregulated development, in fact, quickly hit theatrical distribution, starting an irreversible crisis and compromising in particular the regional circuits which were at the core of the sustainability of the industry and of the *filone* production formula.

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**Notes**

3. In this article, with ‘Spaghetti Western’ (capitalised) refers to the genre, while the term ‘spaghetti westerns’ (without capitals) refers to the films.
5. See, for instance, Alberto Pezzotta *Western all’italiana*.

8. From different perspectives, both Sergio Corbucci and Sergio Leone were particularly critical in respect to *Trinità*, considering it a mere parody of the genre. Corbucci blamed Baroni’s films not only for the end of the national and international popularity of the genre, but also, consequently, for the crisis of Italian cinema tout court. In fact, he argued that spaghetti westerns were the backbone of the Italian production, and their demise had a ripple effect on the industry. Corbucci and Leone’s declarations are collected in Franca Faldini and Goffredo Fofi, eds., *L’avventurosa storia del cinema italiano raccontata dai suoi protagonisti. 1960-1969* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1979), 313–14.


11. See the film analysis made by Pezzotta in *Il western italiano*, 156–65.


17. The idea to define filone as a formula comes from Wagstaff, *For a Forkful …*


20. For an analysis of this film, and of genre hybridisation, see Giacomo Manzoli, *Da Ercole a Fantozzi*, 132–33. For an overview on the intermedial influences on the Spaghetti Western, see Pezzotta, *Il western italiano*, 76–84.
21. An investigation of the notion of genre in the Italian context and its relationship with the *filone* is beyond the scope of this essay. For a comprehensive analysis of this matter see Paolo Noto, *Dal bozzetto ai generi* and Alexia Kannas, ‘All the Colours of the Dark: Film Genre and the Italian Giallo’, *Journal of Itailain Cinema & Media Studies* 5, no. 2, 173–90.


24. For a definition of first, second, and third run cinema circuits, see Wagstaff, *op.cit.*


29. Those were usually at the end of their career but they were faces who were recognisable by the audience and able to add an element of Hollywoodian authenticity to the film. In some circumstances, and mainly in the context of the spaghetti western, it could happen that the foreign actors were young and mostly unknown. Some of these went on to become stars thanks to their association with the genre (see Clint Eastwood). On the role of foreign actors in spaghetti westerns see Rocco Moccagatta, ‘Attori classici hollywoodiani e cinema popolare italiano: continuità e discontinuità di una marca di genere’, in *Comunicazioni sociali*, XXIV, NS, 2.

30. *Musicarello* was a genre based on the ‘youth music’ of the 1960s and cashing on the popularity of a singer or even only a song. On the key features of this genre, see Claudio Bisoni, ‘Cinema a 45 giri’ in *L’arte del risparmio*, ed. Giacomo Manzoli and Guglielmo Pescatore, 53–61.

31. Moreover, it is noteworthy that Spaghetti Western can be considered as having been born in Germany thanks to the success of German/French/Jugoslavian co-production *Der Shatz im Silbersee* (*Treasure of the Silver Lake*, Harald Reinl, 1962), see Giacomo Manzoli, *Da Ercole a Fantozzi.*, 121–2.

32. Ennio Morricone was the author of the soundtrack for *Un esercito di cinque uomini* (1969) produced by Zingarelli’s Tiger Film. The salary paid to Morricone was quite significant (just over 3 million Lira [Fondo Zingarelli]) and Zingarelli decided to find a way to have better control of the investment for the soundtracks of his films.

33. Noteworthy was the production of *Più forte ragazzi!* (*All the Way, Boys!* Giuseppe Colizzi, 1972), the first no-western film with the Bud Spencer, Terence Hill couple.

34. Details of this change (and the big disappointment it caused) are expressed by Zingarelli in a letter to Natividad Zaro, *Fondo Zingarelli*. The film is also revealing of the ephemeral nature of the Italian-ness of the Spaghetti Western.
In fact, in foreign markets such as US and Germany, MGM results as the sole production company behind the film.

35. From the already mentioned letter to Natividad Zaro, we can grasp how Zingarelli was optimistic about the box office potential of *Ciccio perdona...io no!* and how this would help with other productions. It is noteworthy that Franco Franchi and Ciccio Ingrassia’s comedy westerns were already an established formula thanks to films such as *Per un pugno nell’occhio* (Michele Lupo, 1965), *I due figli di Ringo* (Giorgio Simonelli, 1967); *Il bello il brutto e il cretino* (Gianni Grimaldi, 1967); *Due Rrringos nel Texas* (Marino Girolami, 1968).


37. Information about West Film social capital comes from the *Fondo Zingarelli*.

38. While distributors could rely on their close relationship with the exhibition sector for a flow of cash, producers’ assets were less fluid, as they had to wait to count the profits and the first takings had to be used to repay the loans.

39. *Fondo Zingarelli*.

40. Eventually, only two of the films were made with Little Tony, based on the singer’s biggest hits, *Riderà* and *Cuore matto*.

41. *Fondo Zingarelli*.

42. That is the case of *Franco e ciccio e il pirata Barbanera* to which exhibition rights to the Italian language circuit were sold for a period of five years for $1,800 (*Fondo Zingarelli*).

43. *Fondo Zingarelli*.

44. His pen name was E.B. Clucher, the surname being his mother’s maiden name.

45. Among other, see Pezzotta *Il western italiano*.

46. This story has been repeated on different occasions, see, for instance, Barboni’s tale in Franca Faldini and Goffredo Fofi, eds., *L’avventurosa storia del cinema italiano…*, 314–15.

47. *Archivio centrale dello Stato. Ministero del turismo e dello spettacolo – fascicolo co5984*.


49. *Fondo Zingarelli*.

50. This trajectory for the distribution of *Lo chiamavano Trinità* has been noted and analysed by Giacomo Manzoli and Paolo Noto in their paper ‘Bud Spencer and Terence Hill: divi intergenerazionali’ presented at the workshop *Cinema e sessualità nell’Italia del dopoguerra* – Università degli studi e-Campus February 20, 2019.


52. Ibid., 31, August 28, 1971, 11.

53. The information pertaining the distribution comes from the contracts archived in the *Fondo Zingarelli*.

54. Copy of the agreement for North America and UK is unfortunately not available in the *Fondo Zingarelli* archive.

55. Overall, as Zingarelli revealed in an interview, the profitable life-span for a film was considered to be one year, Giancarlo del Re ‘Quando il produttore di Trinità arrivò a 3 milioni di bottiglie’ *Il Messaggero*, March 23, 1987.

56. According to Barboni, such ‘recipe’ for box office success was ‘30% of poverty, 10% of goodness, 10% of pure love, 30% of comedy, 10% of chasings, 10% of
fist fight with no harm, no blood, no sex, no death, no dirty words, no legs and breasts’ in Vittorio Lojacono, ‘Ho scoperto la ricetta dei film miliardari’, La Domenica del Corriere, Milan, 76, Vol 21, 256 May 1974, 72. My translation.

57. Archivio centrale dello Stato. Ministero del turismo e dello spettacolo – fascicolo cf6146.

58. The film was co-produced by two short-lived production companies (Denver Film Production and Zadar Film) with the collaboration of Metropolitan spa (a new company by Zingarelli). The distribution was by Deantir and Metropolitan.

59. The relationship between properties and cinema producer is an aspect addressed by Barbara Corsi in relation to Franco Cristaldi. See Barbara Corsi Un ettaro di cielo, 39 di terreno. Le società di Franco Cristaldi fra produzione cinematografica e affari immobiliari, Tesi di Dottorato in Beni culturali e territorio - XXIX cycle, Università degli Studi di Roma ‘Tor Vergata’.


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