

Global and Local Hollywood – by Ben Goldsmith, Susan Ward and Tom O’Regan

August 21, 2010 in [POV](#), [POV Volume 2](#), [POV Volume 2 – Issue 2 + 3](#) by [nick potamitis](#)

This is an edited extract from the first chapter of Ben Goldsmith, Susan Ward and Tom O’Regan’s book [Local Hollywood: Global Film Production and the Gold Coast](#), St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2010.

“Today we are living in a remarkable era of cross-pollination in international pictures... Films are made everywhere, set everywhere and tell stories about people everywhere.”

(David Linde, Co-chairman, Universal Studios, 2007 Berlinale)

David Linde was talking here of the contemporary phenomenon we now call Global Hollywood (Miller et al 2001). One of the characteristics of Global Hollywood is that not only are films in general being made and set in places around the world, many films are made in several locations, with finance, actors and crew drawn from many countries. Take *Babel* (2006) with its filming locations and interconnecting stories stretching from Tokyo to Tijuana, from San Diego to Casablanca and *Tazarine* in Morocco, with its ensemble cast including Brad Pitt and Cate Blanchett alongside Mexican, Moroccan, English and Japanese actors, and its Mexican director (Alejandro González Iñárritu) and scriptwriter (Guillermo Arriaga). Or consider the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001, 2002, 2003). A New Zealand director, Peter Jackson, used German finance and actors from around the world to create Middle Earth and Mordor in a variety of New Zealand locations. And this scenario is not limited to high budget blockbuster films. Australian director Peter Weir’s US\$30 million film *The Way Back* (2010) about seven men who escape from a Siberian gulag and travel overland through the Himalayas to India during the Second World War, stars Irish actor Colin Farrell (playing a Russian), American Ed Harris (playing an American), Briton Jim Sturgess (playing a Pole) and Swede Gustaf Skarsgard (playing a Latvian). The film was shot in India, Morocco and at the former Bulgarian national film studio now known as Nu Boyana, with post-production undertaken in Australia. Finance for the film came in part from a fund managed by National Geographic Films and Abu Dhabi’s Imagination.

Productions such as these—whether wholly shot on location or more usually made at several locations—point to the ways in which a variety of places and people from around the world are actively shaping Hollywood productions. While much production still goes on in Los Angeles and Los Angeles is still the principal “design centre” where productions are facilitated, coordinated and sometimes financed, Hollywood itself is now thoroughly enmeshed in an emerging system of globally dispersed film and television production. It is now as much shaped by contributions from people, places and companies outside Los Angeles as it is by those domiciled there in a truly remarkable cross-pollination.

The Character of Globally Dispersed Production

Places

Many places now participate regularly in the production of film and television programs. Indeed one marker of the globalisation of Hollywood over the last two decades has been the establishment of many satellite production centres (Scott 2005; Wasko and Erickson, 2008; Elmer and Gasher, 2005), or 'Local Hollywoods' (Goldsmith, Ward and O'Regan 2010). Over the past twenty years several places with no previous history of production, or a very limited history, and sometimes only partially developed film infrastructures, have emerged as significant centres for film and television production. These are places like Vancouver, Wilmington, Orlando, the Gold Coast, Wellington, Alicante, and Cape Town.

Several cities which have been important production centres for their respective national film and television industries are now participating in Hollywood production in dynamic new ways. These include Toronto, Montreal, Sydney, Melbourne, Dublin, Budapest and Johannesburg. We have seen older regional centres like Berlin, Prague, Hong Kong and Tokyo, which previously commanded not only their own national territory but those of adjacent countries, re-emerge as centres of international production. And we have seen old participants in the 'international cinema' like London's studios, Pinewood and Shepperton, and Rome's Cinécitta redeveloped and repositioned as important locations in the emerging system of globally dispersed production. These are all locations to which production travels because infrastructure is already in place, with facilities and people geared to the regular, ongoing production of Hollywood-standard film and television projects (Goldsmith and O'Regan 2005). Competition between these places for Hollywood and other film and television business is intense. But their competition is not just with each other.

In addition there are those increasing numbers of places to which film makers bring the necessary infrastructure of film production so as to enable them to access locations, source particular expertise or access a particular tax benefit. In some of these places, when the project leaves, the infrastructure goes too. In others, the infrastructure expands as production becomes a regular feature of the landscape, and an industry forms and grows. In this way new production centres develop. This is what happened in one of the most important satellite production centres, Wilmington, when veteran Italian film producer Dino DeLaurentiis brought the feature *Firestarter* (1984) to the region. Initially there were no plans for film and television production in Wilmington beyond this project. These plans evolved when the producer and the state governor collaborated to facilitate the development of permanent facilities thus enabling Wilmington to become a site of continuous production and eventually to become one of the most important locations in North America. Of course, Hollywood production has always travelled, even as the industry in Hollywood the place has continued to grow (Hozic 2001, Scott 2005) but today's levels of peripatetic filmmaking are much higher than in any previous period.

People and Providers

The global catalogue of locations for film and television production has developed in parallel with an increasing trend for global casting. Screen actors, directors, producers, writers, cinematographers, costume, set and sound designers, composers and editors from around the world are now involved in international production. And these are not only Hollywood productions as international collaboration is becoming a regular part of British, French, Korean and Chinese film production, to name just a few. The film *Cold Mountain* (2003) provides a useful barometer of these changes because it was a story about the American Civil War, produced by an American company (Miramax). As the cultural historian Donald Sassoon observed in an interview about this film:

The director Anthony Minghella is the British-born child of Italian immigrants. The lead male star is Jude Law, born in Lewisham [in south London]; the lead female role is Honolulu-born Nicole Kidman, brought up in Australia by her Australian parents. Maddy, the witch-like creature who rescued Jude Law is Eileen Atkins, an English actress born in Clapton, North London. The sultry Sara, nearly raped by soldiers, and rescued by Jude Law, is the Israeli actress Natalie Portman. Rene Zellweger (Ruby) is Texan all right, but the actor playing her father is the Irish actor Brendan Gleeson. The music was composed by Gabriel Yared, naturalized French and born in Beirut. The extras impersonating the civil war soldiers were conscripts of the Romanian Army (and all the war scenes were shot in Romania). (Fouskas, 2006)

For Sassoon the setting and style may be called ‘Hollywood’, but this “is a style developed out of a global vision by global players with a global appeal” (Fouskas 2006).

For their part film service providers such as post-production houses, digital visual effects companies, and animatronics firms are exhibiting similar patterns of global involvement. For example, the Sydney-based digital visual effects company, Animal Logic, now routinely works across several film industries—variously as a digital visual effects and special effects firm on Zhang Yimou’s Chinese-Hong Kong film *Shi Mian Mai Fu* (House of Flying Daggers 2004), Phil Noyce’s Hollywood remake of a Graham Greene novel that was set and filmed in Vietnam *The Quiet American* (2002), the Matrix cycle of feature films (1999, 2003, 2003), *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2005) as well as a range of Australian films from Baz Luhrmann’s high budget features *Australia* (2008) and *Moulin Rouge* (2000) to George Miller’s animation *Happy Feet* (2006), to critically acclaimed smaller features such as *Little Fish* (2005) with Cate Blanchett, Hugo Weaving and Sam Neill in the lead roles. Animal Logic’s competitors, and often its collaborators, are not just other Australian post-production houses but post-production houses around the world as an increasingly global market for film services has accompanied the rise of global locations and talent markets.

Such patterns of international cast, crew and film service company involvements are most fully developed and can even be considered the norm in major Hollywood productions, but they are also becoming routine in a great variety of film and television productions at all budget levels and in all styles. In the process, formerly locally-defined film and television environments are being thoroughly internationalized. Of course Hollywood has always drawn on creative talent from around the world, as it did for example in the 1930s and 1940s when filmmakers fleeing fascism and war in Europe and a large British expatriate community played leading roles in some of the most important films of the era. But what is different about this contemporary internationalization is the global scale of these creative involvements, the accompanying decentralization of production through split location production. It is no longer always necessary for creative talent and companies to relocate to Los Angeles in order to creatively shape Hollywood production.

Story Settings and Locations

The global reach of contemporary Hollywood is reflected in the settings of films just as, in an earlier period, the importance to Hollywood of its British public generated a notable cycle of Hollywood ‘British’ films made in Britain and the US between 1939 and 1945 (Glancy, 1999). Some of this is, obviously, the continuation of an old story as in the Bond franchise films where each film in the cycle consumes a variety of settings and locations across several countries. Here the settings and production venues themselves become akin to a kind of

quasi-touristic product placement that has been termed ‘location placement’, and as the value of the exposure of a place on film for future tourism has become widely recognized, more and more places and their location interests are actively competing to host production as a vehicle to showcase themselves to potential holidaymakers. Contemporary action films in particular make use of new story settings with all their associated local colour and specificity. The criminal gang in *Ocean’s 12* (2004) shifts location from Las Vegas (the setting of the prequel *Ocean’s 11* 2001) to Amsterdam, Rome, Paris and Lake Como in pursuit of their next heist. Consider too the range of settings (and locations) over the cycle of Bourne films—*The Bourne Identity* (2002), *The Bourne Supremacy* (2004), *The Bourne Ultimatum* (2007)—with the last being set in Moscow, Virginia, Turin, Paris, London, New York, Madrid, and Tangier. Indeed it is almost as if the “multiple story setting” film has been given a new lease of life in the contemporary action film with its spectacular chases and stunts, and its visual and special effects. But a similar variety of settings both real and imaginary—albeit with less extreme shifts in setting within the one film—can be found across films in different genres.

With this globalization of story settings has come a significant increase in and demand for locations to stand in for somewhere else. While settings and locations mostly match in *The Bourne Ultimatum*, there is also a mismatch when Berlin locations stand in for Moscow streetscapes and a London restaurant for a New York one. Now, as ever, story setting is no guarantee of actual location. With more places hosting production, setting sometimes dovetails with the locations of production, but more often it does not. Brazilian and Argentine locations stand in for the Peruvian Amazon in *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (2008). Locations now advertise themselves through the range of settings they can stand in for. Louisiana sells itself on the basis of its capacity to play “anywhere USA” (Louisiana Film Commission 2009). For the Gold Coast it is its coupling of studio with rainforest, hinterland, rivers, seas and city beach. Toronto plays New York and Washington. Prague, for its part, has capitalized upon what producer, Anne Pivcevic identifies as its “huge range of unspoilt architectural styles and landscape”; the fact that Prague escaped bombing in the Second World War enables the city to stand in for a huge variety of European cities in the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries. Prague has, for example, played London in the two seasons of *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1999, 2000), in Roman Polanski’s remake of *Oliver Twist* (2005) and in *Shanghai Knights* (2003). But it can serve equally well for a more contemporary setting when as in *GI Joe: the Rise of Cobra* (2009) the Barrandov Studios and built environment of Prague served alongside Californian and French locations as the story moved from medieval France, to the near future in North Africa to Paris to the Arctic to a US supercarrier.... Whereas once Hollywood and only a handful of other places seemed capable of “playing anywhere”, now there is a huge range of locations specializing in standing in for somewhere else.

But this increasing internationalization of story settings and locations for production is not just Hollywood responding with stories which take into account its international reach in cinema box office, DVD sales and rentals, and varieties of television markets around the world. It is also a consequence of the partnerships and collaborations which are increasingly defining film production slates as the needs and circumstances of the collaborators who provide portions of the production finance also need to be taken into account.

Financing

It is now customary for production financing to be drawn not only from several sources in different countries but also to be associated with a range of financial instruments from the

hedge funds and other managed investment schemes which provided as much as \$11 billion between 2004 and 2007 to part-finance a slate of films with a Hollywood studio, to traditional bank loans, from pre-sales to international distributors (which involves selling the right to distribute a film in different territories before the film is produced) to tax incentives encouraging both co-financing and production in particular places as a condition of the funding arrangement. This internationalism in every facet of production is now intrinsic to the development of film and television properties not only within the English language but increasingly beyond it. While US investors are still important to Hollywood, their commitments are often coupled with financing from international sources using a combination of instruments. Two contemporary examples illustrate this point. Of the \$825 million in production finance raised in 2009 by Stephen Spielberg's DreamWorks, \$325 million came from the Indian entertainment company Reliance Big Entertainment, with Disney as distribution partner, "and a loan syndicated by JP Morgan" (Szalai and Bond, 2009). Sometimes several international investors are involved. Oliver Stone's *Alexander* (2004) was partly financed with "European, Japanese and Korean pre-sales organized by the British subsidiary of a German group" (Lange, 2005: 4). Sometimes investors in particular national territories have been particularly important: Hollywood relied on Japanese finance in the 1980s and German finance in the 1990s. In 2009, according to *The Hollywood Reporter* Hollywood was relying on "a hodgepodge of entities from India, Singapore, Switzerland and the Middle East" (Szalai and Bond, 2009). In these cases international investors are involved in directly financing Hollywood films from pre-production consequently taking on more of the risk associated with production in return for a share in any of any profits they generate. International financing of films is of course not new; Hollywood was an important source of production finance for European films in the 1950s and 1960s when currency controls limiting the repatriation of European box office profits encouraged Hollywood majors to make Italian, French and English films which they could then export for profits (Guback, 1969). What is new today is the extent to which companies and investors from around the world—and not just the USA—are now involved in financing Hollywood productions from pre-production—and therefore having a say as a junior partner in what gets made.

But financing of Hollywood productions today does not only come from film distributors or "rich Europeans seeking tax advantages". It also comes from governments around the world who are increasingly providing a key part of the budget of films through various incentives and tax credit schemes to encourage production in their state or nation. Such incentives are now a global phenomenon; they are seen by industry players such as Andrew Smith, Group Corporate Affairs Director at Pinewood studios in the UK to be "essential for any territory to compete these days" (Roxborough 2009). And a web of incentives now covers most states of the US, much of Europe and increasingly some Asian countries, and has spawned consultants to help producers navigate through what has become a complex subsidy landscape. Places, investors, companies and governments inside and outside the US, are increasingly involved in the development of film and TV production.

Hollywood and Globalizing Processes

Global Hollywood now involves more than Hollywood the place in Los Angeles, it involves a range of places; it involves not only creative personnel and companies domiciled in Los Angeles but also people and companies from around the world as working on Hollywood productions increasingly does not require living there. And it involves not only American finance but also the investment of many international "junior partners". This cross-pollination now extends beyond film and television productions shot in English although the

phenomenon first happened—and on a global scale—in English and in film making which audiences at least identify as Hollywood film. Given the mixed up and various contributions evident in all phases of production Hollywood is now clearly enmeshed in a myriad of “relations” and “networks” of finance, people, companies and places. This is a Hollywood where at times the very “design” of productions might happen somewhere else and where varying degrees of coordination and control by Hollywood majors are manifest.

The geographical dispersal of production began in the United States with production migrating for economic and aesthetic reasons from Hollywood to locations around the US, then to Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver in Canada, and to older production centres like London, Rome and Berlin as well as to new destinations like the Gold Coast. Over the last twenty years, production has ebbed and flowed around the world, impelled by currency exchange rates, tax breaks and government assistance packages as much as by story demands and the availability of locations and facilities.

The many “locational tournaments” (Dicken 2007: 238) we see enacted in manufacturing industries from automobile to microchip manufacture have their counterpart in the film and television industry where places now vie with each other to secure film and television projects. In all cases places, their governments and their companies have become organized to compete against other places with their own assemblages of local interests to secure not only some inputs into production but to secure as many of the inputs as possible whether for the location of plants or for the filming and postproduction of short-term film and television projects. All have an interest in increasing the range of their inputs into the finished product. In the manufacturing location tournament, however, the project is securing the manufacturing plant for the location; in film and television production the tournament is securing (parts of) a film and television project—often with a short, defined life-span—to use studio infrastructure, locations and various service providers alike. The same general process of location tournaments requires calibrated thinking and orientation towards the particularity of each bid, or “project”.

It is now part of the statecraft of governments at all levels—from local and regional, to state, provincial and national governments—to compete against each other in locational tournaments. This process has led to the development of a highly organized “location interest” orientation on the part of groups of actors in places. Government and private sector actors increasingly assemble and coordinate a range of interests from infrastructure, plant and equipment providers, to service firms and labour providers as part of a coordinated package to pitch for projects in the case of film, or for particular infrastructure in the case of manufacturing, and to ensure the necessary cooperation and systems are in place after the plant has been built or the productions have arrived. If this means that places are now more in competition with each other in ‘locational tournaments’ to secure ‘footloose’ global manufacturing, services, IT infrastructure and film and television projects, it has also meant that the inputs into the manufacture of everything from computers to cars, from film and television to the delivery of financial services, are now increasingly interchangeable and interoperable. This both permits the smooth sourcing of services and inputs from a number of places in different national territories just as it pushes the development of ‘common approaches’ in the development of the pitch for production inputs. In the process of participating in and pitching for productions different national operations in a sector have become more ‘on the same page’ with each other, thereby further pushing a process of rendering people and places more readily interchangeable and interoperable.

In practice the phenomenon of ‘Local Hollywood’ is much harder to describe generally than is the ‘Global Hollywood’ of the Hollywood Majors. While there is one Hollywood there are many ‘local Hollywoods’. By definition a Local Hollywood is a multitude of local problematics (local affairs and situations) tied up with histories, politics and cultural dynamics that are specific to a city, a place and a region, and a country. This is because nation states are “both containers of distinctive business practices and cultures—within which firms are embedded—and also regulators of business activity” with national boundaries constituting “one of the most important ways in which location-specific factors are packaged” (Dicken 2007: 234). Each Local Hollywood is going to be necessarily informed by persisting national characteristics from policy and regulatory enablers to patterns of investment in exhibition, distribution and production. Each will have different sets of local ‘endowments’ organizing the terms under which a Local Hollywood can shape its participation in global film and television production. Each will require producers and productions to conform to and operate within the norms, laws and rules of these national territories. For this reason Local Hollywood can only be grasped through a series of local histories, it can be best described in case studies which attend to and theorize the agency of local actors in building and co-creating such globally dispersed production systems.

References

- Dicken, P (2007) *Global Shift: Mapping the Changing Contours of the World Economy*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Elmer, G. and M Gasher (2005) *Contracting Out Hollywood: Runaway Productions and Foreign Location Shooting*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Fouskas, V. (2006) “The Culture of the Europeans: An Interview with Donald Sassoon”, *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, vol 88 no. 3, pp. 271-8.
- Glancy, HM (1999) *When Hollywood Loved Britain: The Hollywood ‘British’ Film, 1939-45*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Goldsmith, B, and T O’Regan (2005) *The Film Studio: Film Production in a Global Economy*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Goldsmith, B, S Ward and T O’Regan (2010) *Local Hollywood: Global Film Production and the Gold Coast*, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press.
- Guback, T (1969) *The International Film Industry*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Hozic, A (2001) *Hollyworld: Space, Power and Fantasy in the American Economy*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Lange, A (2005) “Alexander’s Nationality” in *Focus 2005: World Film Market Trends*, report, European Audiovisual Observatory, Strasbourg, 23 May, pp. 4-6.
- Miller, T, N Govil, J McMurria, and R Maxwell (2001) *Global Hollywood*, London: BFI.
- Roxborough, S (2009) “Made in Europe” *Hollywood Reporter*, 24 September.

Scott, AJ (2005) *On Hollywood: The Place, The Industry* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Szalai, G, and P Bond (2009) "Money Not Easy for Filmmakers" *Hollywood Reporter* 27 August.

Wasko, J, and M Erickson (eds) (2008) *Cross-Border Cultural Production: Economic Runaway or Globalization?* Amherst, NJ: Cambria Press.

© Ben Goldsmith, Susan Ward and Tom O'Regan