

<b>Institution:</b> De Montfort University		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 34		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Building Transnational Audiences for Indian Cinema Through Festival Co-curation		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> November 2016–2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Dr Monia Acciari	Associate Prof in Film and Television History	14 November 2016–present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> January 2017–present		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Acciari's work has had cultural impact on the South Asian communities in Leicester by mounting community screenings and attracting the UK Asian Film Festival annually since 2017. Held at the Phoenix Cinema, the Festival boosted audiences for Indian films across its regular programme, too. This impact on local and national film organisations extended to an exhibition, 'Restoring India', resulting in a major archival loan to DMU by London's Cinema Museum. International educational impact has come from a new Film Festivals course Acciari facilitated at the English and Foreign Languages University (EFL-U), Hyderabad, India, where she established the Kinaara Student Film Festival.</p>		
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>While Film Festival Studies is now well established, little attention has been paid to the emergence of Indian film festivals within the South Asian subcontinent and their spread elsewhere [R1]. Acciari's historical research charted this emerging, diasporic identity of Indian film festival culture [R2, R3]. Her work has advanced two important strands: (1) the study of film festival programming built on community-based methods and (2) the recognition of South Asian film festivals as spatial, temporal and transnational 'archives' of Indian culture that shape and express national identity [R2]. Acciari's approach uses local screenings as a tool to investigate the film tastes of the community. This method makes festival programming a collaborative process that is tailored to attract an audience demographic previously under-represented; in this sense it is co-creative. She demonstrates how Indian film curatorship, via community screenings and film festivals, is not merely guided by aesthetic paradigms [R4], but also by sociopolitical and cultural forces rooted in social aspirations, migration, new settlement and the tension between tradition and modernity [R3].</p> <p>Acciari's research revealed that film curatorship, in partnership with sponsors and audiences, is: (1) a community-driven method to cater for diverse audiences and expand film tastes and knowledge [R3, R1] and (2) a social practice to establish film festivals as liberal spaces to debate socially challenging themes [R2]. Festivals are a means for audiences to explore and interrogate identities [R4]. They may be considered aspirational for audiences since curated film programmes can, for example, unsettle normalised social discourses of gender and sexuality, and open minds to new ideas.</p> <p>Expanding on the notion of foreignness in Indian cinema [R4] allowed the appraisal of Indian film circulation abroad as affected by translational practices. Acciari's OWRI/AHRC funded project explored how Bollywood cinema benefits from an infrastructure that supports appropriate subtitling for international distribution, while independent productions lack the same support. Subtitling independent productions is often an overlooked, low-cost practice that affects the quality and range of the films disseminated at festivals, inevitably jeopardising their endeavour to be means</p>		

for cultural transformation (<https://www.creativeml.ox.ac.uk/blog/exploring-multilingualism/creative-multilingualism-owri-funded-projects>).

In 2017, Acciari curated the exhibition 'Restoring India' at the Leicester Heritage Centre to commemorate the 70th anniversary of partition. Its success facilitated the long-term loan of the Indian cinema collection from the Cinema Museum in London, now held at DMU. The collection is crucial to investigating archives as resources to reimagine Indian film culture through revisionist history. The practices of curating Indian cinema at festivals and through archives [R1] – in India and across the diaspora – are essential to understanding its cultural value for socially aspirational practices that engage and contest implicit sociopolitical and historical positions [R2].

The development of a community-driven curatorial method resulted in an international workshop with Dr Hrishikesh Ingle on Film Festivals in South Asia that took place in October 2017 at EFL-U. This workshop produced a co-edited journal special issue that charted how Indian cinema festivals, internationally, have become loci to showcase distinctive intellectual, spatial and temporal connotations of a changing nation [R3, R6].

### 3. References to the research

The key papers reporting the research were published in international research journals recognised as having particularly high standards of peer review. R2 and R3 were republished in high-profile Routledge collections. *Studies in South Asian Film and Media* (Intellect), who published Acciari's article [R1] in a special issue she co-edited [R6], is one of the most prominent new journals in the field and states on its website, 'This peer-reviewed publication is committed to looking at the media and cinemas of the Indian subcontinent in their social, political, economic, historical, and increasingly globalized and diasporic contexts' (<https://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/intellect/safm/latest>). As a result of scholarly attention to R3, Acciari devised a network project funded by OWRI/AHRC: 'Multilingual Euro-Bollywood: An 'Imaginative-Language' Workshop'.

[R1] Acciari, M. (2014) 'Film festival and the rhythm of social inclusivity: the fluid spaces of London Indian Film Festival and Florence Indian Film Festival', *Cinergie*, 3(2): 14–25; <https://cinergie.unibo.it/article/download/6993/6727>

Journal article that underwent double-blind peer-review process.

[R2] Acciari, M. (2019) 'The permanency of film festivals: archiving the changing India', *Studies in South Asian Film and Media*, 10(1): 41–57; [https://doi.org/10.1386/safm\\_00004\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/safm_00004_1)

Journal article that underwent double-blind peer-review process.

[R3] Acciari, M. (2017) 'Film festivals as cosmopolitan assemblage: a case study in diasporic cocreation', *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media*, 14: 111–125; <http://www.alphavillejournal.com/Issue14/ArticleAcciari.pdf>

Journal article that underwent double-blind peer review, and was reprinted in the edited book: Devasundaram, A.I. (ed.) (2018) *Indian Cinema Beyond Bollywood*, Abingdon: Routledge, pp 100–116; ISBN 9780815368601

[R4] Acciari, M. (2017–2019), delivery of five public events (film festivals) in UK and India: UK Asian Film Festival (Leicester 2017, 2018 and 2019); Kinaara Student Film Festival, Hyderabad, India (8–10 November 2019); UK Asian Film Festival (Leicester 2020)\* This festival was due to take place at the beginning of April 2020. However, it could not take place due to Covid-19.

[R5] Acciari, M. (2017) 'Bollywood's variation on the *firanginess* theme: song-and-dance sequences as heterotopic offbeats', *South Asian Popular Culture*, 15(2/3): 173–187; <https://doi.org/10.1080/14746689.2017.1407532>

This journal article emerged from a colloquium to which Acciari was invited as one of nine speakers at Sonoma State University in April 2017. This article underwent a double-blind peer-review process. The article was republished in the edited book: Gehlawat, A. and

Dudrah, R. (eds) (2020) *The Evolution of Song and Dance in Hindi Cinema*, New York: Routledge, pp 76–90; ISBN 9780367335601

- [R6] Acciari, M. and Ingle, H. (eds) (2019) 'Film festivals in South Asia', *Studies in South Asian Film and Media*, 10(1); [https://www.academia.edu/43660694/Editorial\\_Monia\\_and\\_Hrishikesh](https://www.academia.edu/43660694/Editorial_Monia_and_Hrishikesh)

Edited journal. The journal includes [R1], the editorial, which was co-authored with Hrishikesh Ingle, and two original interviews, one is co-authored with Gauri Nori and the second is co-authored with Hrishikesh Ingle. The special issue underwent the double-blind peer-review process.

#### 4. Details of the impact

Acciari's research on film festival curatorship and community participation was applied to activities resulting in three kinds of impact.

##### (1) CULTURAL IMPACT ON THE SOUTH ASIAN COMMUNITIES IN LEICESTER

Acciari's three public screenings in the Belgrave Community Centre attracted audiences of 196 people. The Indian films shown, *Queen*, *Bey Yaar* and *English Vinglish*, revived memories of cinemas long-since closed, and introduced contemporary Indian films [C1, C2]. Typically, audiences commented: 'very relevant, thought provoking, look forward to more' [C1]. A prominent Leicester city councillor stated: 'With the community screenings Dr Acciari reawakened the cinemagoing culture of the South Asian community in Leicester, celebrating diversity and contributing to their inclusion within the city' [C3]. Subsequently, in 2017, Acciari facilitated the establishment of the UK Asian Film Festival in the city as an annual event. The UKAFF was praised by the Leicester magazine *Anara* for championing: 'films that explore important topics relevant to the current social and political climate, while giving unique insights and perspectives from the subcontinent' [C4]. A three-day event in 2017 featured 7 films; the following year UKAFF programmed 8 films across two weeks, with a consistent attendance exceeding 400 participants. Following the success of the first festival, 96.88% of respondents wanted to see more South Asian film screenings [C1]. Data showed the festival attracted audiences reflecting Leicester's diversity: 60 British Asian, 20 Indian, 10 Pakistani and 1 Bangladeshi (2017); 60 British Asian, 18 Indian, 15 Pakistani, 2 Bangladeshi (2018).

##### (2) IMPACT ON LOCAL AND NATIONAL FILM ORGANISATIONS

Acciari's involvement in developing curatorial partnerships with UKAFF promoters Tongues on Fire (ToF), Phizzical and the Phoenix Cinema, has had an impact on the audience profiles of these organisations. Phizzical and ToF said that the Festival 'strengthened our mission of ensuring access to diverse content and widening our audience' [C5], and 'The curatorship of a selection of films from South Asia, for the Leicester Audience, allowed us to reach communities otherwise forgotten by the local programming' [C6]. The Phoenix said: 'By working with Phizzical, Dr Monia Acciari and Tongues on Fire', the UKAFF has influenced the cinema to strengthen 'our ethos ... to build a more diverse audience,' among Leicester's South Asian communities [C7]. Thereafter, Phizzical began a steady collaboration with the Phoenix Cinema by hosting regular programmes of Indian films [C6, C5, C8] outside the festival season. The UKAFF's success prompted the cinema 'to increase the quality and quantity of South Asian cinema related events' in its calendar [C2], according to its programmer. Since 2017, Phoenix has increased the number of dedicated South Asian film events from two (between 2015 and 2017) to six (between 2017 and 2020) [C7].

The revitalisation of South Asian cinema in Leicester led Acciari to mount a short pop-up exhibition of the Cinema Museum's Indian cinema marketing memorabilia at DMU's Leicester Heritage Centre, attended by 22 people, in 2018. The impact was significant beyond the numbers in two ways. First, it triggered interest in the artefacts; one attendee wrote: 'I would like to know more about the Glass Picture. Very Nice' [C1]. Second, the Cinema Museum agreed to loan its entire collection to DMU to increase its regional footprint. They reported: 'This collaboration allows the collection to be developed into additional and larger exhibitions; it allows the collection to travel further afield than just London; it allows the Museum to reach out to a wider diversity of audience' [C8].

**(3) INTERNATIONAL EDUCATIONAL IMPACT**

The practical module on Film Festival Studies that Acciari was invited to develop at EFL-U in Hyderabad, India, between July and November 2019, delivered a new free event called Kinaara Student Film Festival, attended by over 70 participants, both students and the general public [C1]. A student stated to the local media that: 'Kinaara attempts to take a step forward and disturb the calm of ignorant waters'. Kinaara aided the students to become curators of a programme of films that included socially challenging subjects. Another student stated: 'Our objective in organizing this festival was to provide a voice to those in the margins, and a platform for discussion and enlightenment, to include and explore identities and stories that normally would not be in the spotlight.' As a result of the practical experience gained on the module, an assessed portfolio enabled one student to find a position within a regional film festival [C9]. The module inspired the Department of Film Studies in enhancing employment opportunities for students [C10] by 'including practice-based courses on film curatorship and live events at EFL-U to update our current provision' [C10].

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

- [C1] Feedback Forms Report and Ethnicity Stats.
- [C2] [www.buildingaudiences.org.uk](http://www.buildingaudiences.org.uk); website set up at the beginning of the project which collects visual evidences of the events that took place in the UK and India.
- [C3] Testimonial by Leicester City Councillor Rita Patel.
- [C4] <https://www.anarapublishing.com/anara-publishing-leicester-asian-film-festival/>; online article on the success of the UK Asian Film Festival in Leicester.
- [C5] Testimonial from Phizzical.
- [C6] Testimonial from Tongues on Fire.
- [C7] Phoenix Cinema: testimonial and list of South Asian curated events following the first UKAFF in 2017.
- [C8] Testimonial from the Cinema Museum.
- [C9] Testimonial from EFL-U students.
- [C10] Testimonial from Dr Hariprasad Athanickal, the English and Foreign Languages University.