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The resilience of popular national cinemas in Europe (Part Two)

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ABSTRACT

This the second of two articles looking at the persistence of popular national cinemas in contemporary Europe. Drawing on research undertaken for the MeCETES project, the first article (Part One) examined admissions data for domestic productions in the period 2005–2015, demonstrating that most European countries enjoy a small number of considerable national successes each year. This second article (Part Two), provides further evidence that the national has not withered away in the era of globalisation, and revisits the concept of national cinema in this context. The majority of the national successes in European countries were small-scale films, with themes, characters or subject-matter that resonated in the country of production, and few of them travelled successfully across borders. Among strategies deployed to create attractive and repeatable consumer products, the most common was genre: most domestically successful national productions were comedies set in the present. Clearly, popular national cinema is still a meaningful presence across Europe, but it provides a different version of the nation to those presented under the auspices of nation-branding. These are two variants of national cinema in the era of the neo-liberal global economy.

KEYWORDS

European cinema; national; transnational; popular; contemporary

Introduction

This is the second of two articles in this issue of *Transnational Screens* looking at the persistence of popular national cinemas in contemporary Europe. Drawing on research undertaken for the MeCETES project (2013–2016), the first article examined admissions data for domestic productions in the period 2005–2015, demonstrating that most European countries enjoy a small number of considerable national successes each year. This second article (Part Two), provides further evidence that the national has not withered away in the era of globalisation, and revisits the concepts of national and transnational cinema in this context. The majority of the national successes in European countries were small-scale films, with themes, characters or subject-matter that resonated in the country of production, and few of them travelled successfully across borders. The development and exploitation of particular genre conventions was central to the process of creating such successes, and the first section of this article looks at some

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of the key genres used. More detail is available about all of the films discussed here in the previous article (Part One), especially in Table 3, at the end of that article. Consequently, only basic film details are provided here.

The second section below compares these comparatively inexportable national genre productions with those European films that *do* travel well.[1] The third section revisits the concept of national cinema (Higson 1989). I argue that the popular national cinemas described in this article provide a different version of the nation to those presented under the auspices of nation-branding as it has emerged in the first quarter of the 21st century. They are also different from, but often run parallel with, developments at the level of national governments designed to exploit the economic potential of film in the context of creative industries policy. This generally involves creating infrastructure, facilities, a highly skilled workforce and tax breaks to attract inward investment. These are, in effect, three variants of national cinema in the era of the neo-liberal global economy.

Elsaesser (2005, 489) argues that one version of 'popular European cinema historically came to an end in the late 1960s, when almost all film industries collapsed and the audiences (but also the themes and genres) of this national cinema moved to and re-located on television'. But the evidence of Part One of this article is that, despite this industrial collapse in Western Europe, and the later collapse of the communist economies in Eastern Europe, a version of popular national cinema is still a meaningful presence across Europe.

Europe has changed radically since the fall of the Soviet empire, with the gradual enlargement of the European Union (EU), in the context of an intensified process of globalisation. At the same time, cinema has taken on an increasingly transnational complexion. Responding to these circumstances, scholarship about European cinema has taken two parallel paths since the 1990s. On the one hand, scholars have increasingly engaged with the transnational and post-national circumstances of contemporary and historical European cinema. Such scholarship has increasingly acknowledged the hybridity of so-called national cinemas and the gradual globalisation of film culture. This of course is precisely the cultural and intellectual context in which the *Transitional Screens* journal operates. In engaging with transnationalism in all its forms, there is however a danger that we overlook just how much cinema still works within a national framework. As Hill (2016) puts it, much that has been written over the last couple of decades about national and transnational cinema has 'under-estimate[d] the persistence of the "national" in the face of globalisation and transnational flows'.

The other scholarly path has provided a necessary counterbalance, looking as it does at the cultural specificity of different European national cinemas from a comparative perspective. This path was opened up by Dyer and Vincendeau (1992a) collection, *Popular European Cinema*, and the effort to map what they call 'indigenous popular film', in a context in which, as they note, 'the popular cinema of any given European country is not always acknowledged even in the general national histories of film in that country' (Dyer and Vincendeau 1992b, 1). On the basis of historical evidence, they argue that this is in part because 'highly popular European films seldom travel well beyond their national boundaries' (1). That remains the case in the twenty-first century, as I demonstrated in Part One of this article (in this issue). For more work in this tradition, see Eleftheriotis (2001), Bergfelder (2005), Hjort and Petrie (2007a), and Ostrowska, Pitassio, and Varga (2017).

Genre and popular cinema

As with other popular cinemas, genre is one of the key strategies deployed to create attractive and repeatable consumer products. The majority of domestically successful national productions in Europe in the period 2005–2015 were comedies set in the present-day – especially comedy drama, romantic comedy and sex comedy. More generally, such contemporary popular genre films draw on well-established national cultural traditions. The larger national cinemas have also been able to create series or franchises, such as the *Taxi* series in France (1998–2018, Besson), the *Torrente* series in Spain (1998–2014, Segura) and the *Natale a . . . cinepanettoni* series in Italy (1983–2011, Parenti et al.). Those larger producing nations are joined by smaller producing nations with fewer resources in creating sequels to standout popular successes. The most successful sequels in the big five Western European countries included *Ocho apellidos vascos/catalanes* (Spain, 2013, 2015, Martínez Lázaro); *Benvenuti al Sud/Nord* (Italy, 2010, 2012, Miniero); *Fack ju Göhte* 1 and 2 (Germany, 2013, 2015, Dagtekin); and *The Inbetweeners Movie* 1 and 2 (UK, 2011, Palmer; 2014, Beesley and Morris). Successful sequels in smaller producing nations included *Gooische Vrouwen* 1 and 2 (Netherlands, 2011, 2014, Koopman); and *Listy do M*. 1, 2 and 3 (Poland, 2011, Okorn; 2015, Dejczer; 2017, Konecki). A rare non-comedy trilogy triumphed in Sweden, *Män som hatar kvinnor* (2009, Arden Oplev), *Flickan som lekte med elden* (2009, Alfredson) and *Luftslottet som sprängdes* (2009, Alfredson). These were adaptations of the best-selling, award-winning *Millenium* crime novels by Stieg Larsson.

The use of stars, formats, shooting styles and characters familiar from national television is another typical strategy, exemplified by Checco Zalone in Italy, Dani Rovira in Spain and the *Gooische Vrouwen* and *Inbetweeners* films. The involvement of television production companies is typical too, including in some of the most successful productions in France, Italy, Spain, Sweden and Denmark.

The key genre for domestic successes across Europe is comedy in one form or another (Bergfelder 2015, 36ff.). Indeed, 60% of the national films appearing in the charts of the top ten most successful films in each market were comedies, usually with some combination of drama and/or romance conventions.[2] Very few of those comedies were co-productions, with the vast majority being solely domestic productions set in the present day. Alongside the comedies were various contemporary dramas, often with some elements of biography or thriller; family films; and the occasional historical drama playing out some locally resonant moment from national history. There was however little in the way of science fiction, horror, musicals or epics.

It is often noted that national comedies prove inexportable (Jeancolas 1992; Higson 1995, 163–164; Bergfelder 2005, 325–326). Indeed, all but one of the 22 films that secured more than 4 m domestic admissions in 2005–2015, but failed to secure more than 1 m non-national admissions, were comedies of one sort or another. In other words, while they did exceptionally well at home, they did not travel well abroad. Those comedies included *Les Bronzés 3: amis pour la vie* (France, 2006, Leconte), *Fack ju Göhte* (Germany), *Sole a catinelle* (Italy, 2013, Nunziante), *Ocho apellidos vascos* (Spain) and *The Inbetweeners Movie* (UK). It is worth noting, however, that thirteen of the 53 European films that *did* travel well abroad, securing more than 4 m non-national admissions, were also comedies of one sort or another. This wide-ranging group includes

Intouchables (France, 2011, Nakache and Toledano), *Mr Bean's Holiday* (UK, 2007, Bendelack), *Paddington* (UK, 2014, King), *Qu'est-ce qu'on a fait au Bon Dieu?* (France, 2014, de Chauveron), *Volver* (Spain, 2006, Almodovar) and *The Artist* (France, 2011, Hazanavicius). But these well-travelled European productions were just as likely to be action-adventure films, like the James Bond franchise (UK/USA, 1962–2021, Campbell, Forster, Mendes et al.) and the *Taken* trilogy (France, 2008–14, Morel, Megaton); family-adventure films like the Harry Potter franchise (UK/USA, 2001–2011, Yates, Newell et al.); or more modest dramas such as *The King's Speech* (UK/US, 2010, Hooper), *Slumdog Millionaire* (UK, 2008, Boyle), *Lucy* (France, 2014, Besson), *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* (Germany, 2006, Twyker), *Lo imposible* (Spain, 2012, Antonio Bayona) and *The Iron Lady* (UK, 2011, Lloyd).

The key point here is that it is not impossible for comedies to travel, especially if they have quality middlebrow credentials and the sort of production values and marketing clout that go with budgets of $10 m or more, but it is very difficult for smaller comedies to travel. That is to say, lower-budgeted comedies with poor production values by international standards, telling nationally specific stories with nationally specific characters and stars and nationally resonant themes, often proved unsuited to foreign distribution. At the same time, it should be noted that they were rarely designed with foreign distribution in mind.

Several of the most successful Western European comedies played precisely on this issue of cultural specificity and difference, using 'comic conventions to broach problems of difference and conflict' (Buse and Toribio 2015). In so doing, several broke box-office records in their domestic markets. In France, *Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis* (2008, Boon), *Intouchables* and *Qu'est-ce qu'on a fait au Bon Dieu?* all explored the comedy of internal cultural differences, playing on perceptions of unappealing or unfathomable otherness in the form of regional or ethnic stereotypes. The Italian films *Sole a catinelle, Che bella giornata* (2011, Nunziante), *Benvenuti al Sud* and *Benvenuti al Nord* also worked in this vein – indeed, *Benvenuti al Sud* was a direct remake of *Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis*. Spain developed its own version of these narratives in *Ocho apellidos vascos* and its sequel, *Ocho apellidos catalanes*. All of these films play on 'the deployment, mockery, reversal and reiteration of stereotypes' (Moine 2018). Most of them are about a regionally-specific male character having to undertake an intercultural journey to another far away part of his own country. He perceives this other place as utterly different, distasteful in terms of its customs and incomprehensible in terms of its language. However, he eventually discovers through direct encounter that the people there are actually charming and welcoming. While many of the national comedies produced across Europe used these sorts of stereotypical assumptions, characterisations and situations, they did not all do so with such subtlety or irony.

There is a further point worth noting here, about the relationship between the national and the transnational. On the one hand, the individual comedies discussed here were all developed around explicitly national dramas, journeys and encounters, and are steeped in particular sets of stereotypes likely to be familiar only to national audiences. On the other hand, the narrative format has become a transnational commodity, adapted to and for different national circumstances. Several of the comedies produced in Western Europe that proved immensely popular in their home markets also in various ways acknowledged the circumstances of post-colonialism, migration and social and cultural

hybridity. *Intouchables*, for instance, has a Black French character (Driss) as its protagonist, played by a Black French actor (Omar Sy), while its writer-directors were of French-Maghrebi descent (Olivier Nakache and Eric Toledano). The director/co-writer /actor of *Bienvenue . . .*, Dany Boon, and his co-star, Kad Merad, were also of French-Maghrebi descent, while the writer-director of *Fack ju Göhte*, Bora Dağtekin, was Turkish-German, and the star, Elyas M'Barek, Austrian-Tunisian. The presence of such key players in the production process adds to the sense that some of the popular national comedies tell stories that question the process of stigmatising those perceived as socially or culturally 'other'.

In terms of historical films, some of the most popular national films in Eastern European countries were historical dramas, including in Latvia (*Rigas sargi* [2007, Grauba] and *Sapnu komanda 1935* [2012, Grauba]), Lithuania (*Tadas Blinda. Pradzia* [2011, Ulvydas]), Estonia (*1944* [2015, Nüganen]), Poland (*Katyń* [2007, Wajda]) and Hungary (*Szabadság/Szerelem* [2006, Goda] and *Sorstalanság* [2005, Koltai]). Like other Eastern European historical dramas, these films self-consciously work over and reclaim key moments in what is perceived as the national history or adapt national folklore or literature as a means of asserting a new sense of self-identity in a post-communist world (Imre 2012). Unlike the comedies, several of these films were co-productions; even so, they were generally made for the home market and rarely travelled outside their main country of production. Neither of the two Latvian historical dramas was distributed further than Lithuania, for instance. Even *Katyń*, directed by the veteran Polish auteur, Andrzej Wajda, sold only 200,000 tickets outside Poland.

Some of the Eastern European historical dramas were relatively costly as national productions, and highly successful with national audiences. But they were often also highly localised epics, with overtly patriotic and/or nationalistic storylines, and impoverished production values by international standards. Historical dramas were much less likely to appear in the lists of the most successful national productions in Western Europe, although the Norwegian-led co-production, *Kon-Tiki* (2012, Sandberg) was one of the few period films to do any business in export markets. *Flammen og Citronen* (2008, Madsen), one of the most popular Danish films at the domestic box-office, was more typical in that it sold less than 100,000 tickets in export markets, despite being a co-production with Germany.

Just occasionally, such local popular successes travelled as art-house films. One example is the Romanian film *4 luni, 3 saptamani si 2 zile* (2007, Mungiu), set in the 1980s, which was the second most successful film at the Romanian box-office in 2007, but circulated elsewhere in Europe as an art-house film, selling more than 1 m more tickets. *Das Leben der Anderen* (Germany, 2006, von Donnersmarck), also set in the 1980s, sold a healthy 2.4 m tickets in Germany, making it the 11th most successful film in Germany in 2006, but again it circulated in most other European countries as an art-house film, selling another 5 m tickets. Pedro Almodóvar was one of the very few directors whose films could be sold across European art-houses on the strength of his name and his brand of cinema. His 2006 film, *Volver*, was the eighth most successful film in Spain that year, and one of the most successful art-house films across Europe between 2005 and 2015, securing 7 m non-national admissions. Its success in the domestic market was not however matched by his other productions in the period, no doubt in part because they lacked the star power of Penelope Cruz, who appeared in *Volver*.

For the most part, though, the national productions that proved most successful with domestic audiences work with the sorts of genres, story-types and styles that both European middlebrow audiences and European cosmopolitan audiences shun. They thus also tend to lack the features that might enable them to perform at festivals or win critical acclaim. If cosmopolitanism suggests a non-provincial openness towards different cultures, then comedies dealing with locally-specific characters, themes and settings should in principle be as appealing as more serious dramas such as *4 Luni* . . . But the cosmopolitan taste formation of the European art-house niche also seeks out what it considers 'cultured' and 'sophisticated', which it rarely finds in the often fast-paced and raucous vulgarity and uncomplicated fun of popular national comedies. Nor do many of these films parade the markers of quality and prestige that might enable them to travel as middlebrow productions – with *Intouchables* and perhaps *Mr Bean's Holiday* being the exceptions that prove the rule.

The well-travelled European film vs. the inexportable national production

My co-investigators and I went into the MeCETES project with a strong sense of European transnationalism and cosmopolitan openness, but we found limited evidence of successful intra-European film trade. Of course, national audiences across Europe regularly watched those films that are the most intensely marketed and widely distributed across Europe. That primarily means Hollywood studio films and UK-led productions backed by Hollywood studios, and the distribution infrastructure that goes with such studio involvement. Those UK-led blockbusters, especially the Potter and Bond franchises, are among the few European productions designed for the export market.

To those productions can be added various other relatively big-budget French, German and Spanish productions shot in the English language, such as the *Taken* trilogy, *Lucy*, *Perfume* and *Lo imposible*. More modestly budgeted, feel-good, middlebrow UK films with quality production values, such as *The King's Speech* and *Slumdog Millionaire*, were also designed for and successful in export markets. So too were many of the *auteur*/art-house productions of the period, such as *Volver* or *Amour* (France, 2012, Haneke). However, those latter films circulated within a different version of the export market, embracing the international festival circuit and national art-house circuits. I have explored the various ways in which some European films did travel within the European market in a separate article (Higson 2018; see also Jones 2016, 2020; Bergfelder 2015). But for the most part, national audiences across Europe did not watch much in the way of other non-national European productions, with the exception of the breakout French hit, *Intouchables*; German films in Austria and Czech films in Slovakia; and a small amount of cross-border trade between the Scandinavian/Nordic countries.

There are then a small number of European film productions that *do* travel successfully within Europe, and they are more likely to be co-productions, rather than solely national productions. They are evidence of what Bergfelder (2015) calls 'a transnational European film culture', but it is a very limited culture. Thus the middlebrow, straddling as it does the modernist aesthetics, or at least the niche cultural values, of the art-house film and the traditions of popular genres, is able to travel, but the nationally popular fails

to if it is too obviously low-brow (Bergfelder 2015, 45). If it does travel, it is only to the geographically, linguistically and culturally most proximate markets, or as a format (as in the case of the comedy of internal cultural differences).

There is a long history of low-brow European genre films, especially comedies, that have not travelled beyond their countries of production. From the perspective of scholars such as Jeancolas (1992), Straubhaar (1991), Hoskins and Mirus (1988), Hjort (2010) and Bondebjerg and Redvall (2015), such films prove inexportable because of their culturally specific frames of reference and lack of perceived cultural proximity to or transnational affinity with potential export markets. To such arguments we might add the problem of low budgets, impoverished production values, the disinterest of foreign distributors and the lack of investment in marketing (Bergfelder 2005, 325). For many of the European national film industries, this is exacerbated by the circumstances of small nationhood and equally small language communities. This makes domestic production very challenging, since the home market is so small, but it also makes the export business just as challenging, given the costs of translation.

In this context, perhaps the most remarkable feature of European cinema revealed by the MeCETES project was the resilience of the form of national cinema discussed in Parts One and Two of this article, and the commitment of national audiences to watching such national productions. Most of the films described in these two articles were designed for and presented to mainstream national audiences in their home market. Given that they often deal with popular national tropes, and with the historical development of the nation or its contemporary formation, they can be perceived as relatively parochial, inward-looking films. Some of the Central and Eastern European popular successes seek to reaffirm or reassert national traditions and iconic moments in national history, which may have been obscured during the communist era. Many of the films discussed here play on established stereotypes and familiar versions of national identity. To that extent, they are typical of a type of popular national cinema that produces films for almost exclusively national, non-cosmopolitan audiences.

In suggesting that the outlook of at least some of these films may be seen as parochial, I mean this in a non-pejorative sense. Thus such films are often deliberately modest and narrow in their cultural and geographical scope. They may in that sense be contrasted with the perceived universalism of films aimed at a global rather than a local market, whether that market is made up of mainstream or primarily cosmopolitan audiences. I would also note that to *play* on established stereotypes is not necessarily to *confirm* them. Indeed, the Western European comedies of internal cultural differences in various ways use irony, parody, and cross-cultural dialogue and exchange to explore the limits and diversities of national cultural formations.

In revisiting the concept of national cinema, Christie (2013, 25) writes of:

> a renewed appetite for the local, the specific, and the "original" in many areas of consumption, encouraging us also to value cultural works that trace origins, show the local surviving against modern odds, or take us to exotically unfamiliar lands and cultures.

While Christie no doubt has a rather different type of film in mind, many of the popular national films that I described in Part One of this article play with such ideas. Thus the historical dramas from Central and Eastern Europe seek to re-trace national origins. The

comedies of internal cultural differences renew the perception of the local, the exotic and the unfamiliar. And all of them in some way embody the local surviving against the modern odds of global consumer culture.

Reconfiguring national cinema

To return to Elsaesser (2005, 485), he argues that the 'very idea of [European cinema] has slipped between the declining relevance of "national cinemas," and the emerging importance of "world cinema"'. As a result, he concludes that European cinema should now be conceived within the frame of world cinema. But clearly national cinema does remain relevant within Europe. Likewise, the popular national successes discussed here rarely belong to the new global networks of world cinema, since world cinema generally implies either a festival-friendly cosmopolitan cinema, or a cult genre cinema – not the popular comedy, or the nationalist historical drama. One might say that in the age of globalisation and of global Hollywood, it is quite extraordinary that such local, parochial and inward-looking versions of the national still persist, and that audiences are still committed to engaging with them.

Except of course that the reassertion of the national is in fact one of the most vigorous responses to globalisation. This is what we see in the populism of Donald Trump's 'Make American Great Again', Boris Johnson's Brexit bombast, and Viktor Orbán's illiberal Hungarian nativism. This is not to suggest that the films described here exhibit the same conservative populist politics – and clearly in many instances that is far from the case. But it is to recognise that one of the responses to the processes of globalisation is the reinvigoration of both popular and populist versions of nationalism.

There is another way in which the forces of globalisation have counterintuitively reinvigorated the idea of national distinctiveness, in the guise of nation branding. As Kaneva (2011, 118) argues, nation branding is a means of 'reconstituting nationhood through marketing and branding paradigms'; or as Aronczyk (2013, 1) puts it, one of the means by which 'the nation has been made to matter in a twenty-first-century context of global integration'. Nation branding is about accepting the neoliberal logic of the global free market and seeking to create the nation as a brand that can be traded in that market. As such, it is about 'enhancing a nation's competitive advantage in a global marketplace' (Kaneva 2011, 120). The marketing of nation brands in this way involves harnessing soft power to promote the nation as a distinctive and attractive destination for tourists, students, skilled workers, investors and businesses – including the film business (Higson 2021).

The popular national cinemas of contemporary Europe described in Parts One and Two of this article seem far removed from this carefully branded commercial nationalism (Volcic and Andrejevic 2016). This is not least because they are addressed to domestic audiences, not to export markets. The exception here is the occasional big-budget, English-language production that emerges from one of the big Western European creative economies. But the majority of the films discussed here are not designed to mark out the attractiveness of the nation to global audiences, whether mainstream or cosmopolitan.

As Iordanova (2007) notes, however, there is often a parallel film industry within the nations discussed here, which is most definitely geared to servicing the global film business and attracting key players. In many countries, the role of the state is

now conceived in neo-liberal terms not as a subsidiser of national fare but as an enabler of inward investment, creating competitive advantage through the building of internationally attractive production facilities and the provision of a highly skilled workforce. This is very much the case in the UK, but the Czech Republic, Hungary and Romania were also built up as international film production centres as a means of boosting the local economy. To this end, parochial European national cinemas also participate in the transnational and indeed global networks of media content production, and are imbricated in what Miller et al. (2005, 50–110) call the New International Division of Cultural Labour. As Imre (2012, 2–4) and Hjort and Petrie (2007b, 9) note, it is the foreign investment from such ventures that now supports some aspects of the local film production sector rather than national subsidy. Even in this context, however, popular national film cultures have managed to survive in Europe.

While contemporary European cinema is often perceived as *trans*national, almost by definition, the national is clearly still a significant aspect of cinema in Europe. National production infrastructures, national audiences, national markets and in some instances national public funding are still strong enough to protect national interests and national languages, and to promote national content, at least on an occasional basis. As Hill (2016) notes, 'discourses of the "national" . . . continue to structure and inform how films of various kinds are categorised, funded, promoted and made sense of by a range of social actors ranging from politicians and civil servants to filmmakers, critics and audiences'.

Hill (2016) notes in particular the ways in which ideas of the national persist in contemporary film policy developed at governmental level, even policies designed to attract inward investment from global players. While inward investment policies are about enhancing the economic power of the creative industries, the expression of cultural identity in national films is also very much at stake in the debates about nation-branding and soft power. The national popular filmmaking that I have described in Parts One and Two of this article can also be seen as cultural assertions of the national in small-scale, domestic filmmaking.

Perhaps we need to think in terms of a new configuration of national cinema, in which self-conscious representations of the national are simply one among several ways of attracting audiences, whether at home or abroad. On the one hand, there is the modest, parochial version of the national, which is at the heart of many of the films discussed above, designed above all for domestic consumption. But of course such films must always compete for audiences with other films, and especially Hollywood films. The modest scale and financial weakness of the domestic production and distribution business in most European countries means that competition for audiences with Hollywood is rarely sustainable at scale.

On the other hand, there is the more flagrant display of national production prowess at stake in the big-budget, English-language films made occasionally in the larger Western European countries. To some extent, such films function to demonstrate the attractiveness of the national infrastructure that is also available across Europe as studio facilities for inward investment productions from Hollywood and elsewhere. This is just one aspect of the neo-liberal nation branding project, which must also be accommodated within this new configuration of national cinema.

Does this new configuration of national cinema, alongside the various versions of the transnational, the post-national and world cinemas, mean that old definitions of national cinema need to be consigned to the dustbin of history? The shapes that national cinemas take and the ways in which they are sustained and/or re-negotiated in the age of globalisation and transnationalism have certainly changed. But the basic tenets of national cinema remain in place, if we define national cinema in terms of, on the one hand, the domestic production sector and the full gamut of films that it produces; and on the other hand, the tastes and proclivities of the audiences in a particular country (Higson 1989).

That is what I have done in Parts One and Two of this article, working through the idea of national cinema as the process of audiences in a particular country watching films produced in that country. The evidence is that such national fare, especially when it engages with some of the concerns, desires, aspirations and circumstances of those ordinary cinemagoers, still has some purchase and significance at a local level, even in the age of globalisation. At the same time, however, my definition of the national in these two articles has allowed for the transnational. Some of the films I have described as national popular successes are actually co-productions, with the nationality of the film ascribed to the majority producing partner. These sorts of transnational arrangements are vital aspects of the big-budget, UK-US co-productions such as the James Bond and Harry Potter films. At a different level, as noted in Part One of this article, there is evidence of successful transnational production and distribution between the various Scandinavian countries.

I noted in Part One of this article in this issue that one of the reasons why so many of national popular films failed to travel outside their domestic markets was because of the failure to attract co-production partners at the development stage. But as those films were conceived and made as national productions, with nationally-specific themes, settings, stories and characters, they did not need to travel abroad to achieve the goal of appealing to and telling stories for domestic audiences. Co-production would therefore have been a distraction. That has not necessarily meant that such films express very entrenched ideas of the national, as the dynamically hybrid stories, characters and creative teams of the comedies of internal cultural differences demonstrate.

As Hill (2016) notes, the national and the transnational are often intertwined in contemporary film policy and practice. The way we discuss national cinema in the twenty-first century need to take account of these complexities. And in such discussions, we must take account of the popular and the low-brow as well as the canonical and the cosmopolitan. We must pay attention to the range of films that different audiences within each nation actually watch. Finally, we must acknowledge that globalisation does not necessarily mean the complete erosion of the local.

Notes

1. All data cited in this article is derived from the MeCETES database. The provenance of this database is discussed in Part One of this article in this issue.
2. In ‘correct’ English usage, the reference should be to ‘unexportable’ films, but the term ‘inexportable’ has been used since Jeancolas (1992).

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Notes on contributor

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