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## NZ film on demand: searching for national cinema online

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines how the concept of New Zealand cinema is both constructed and complicated by video on demand (VOD) websites available in New Zealand. New Zealand cinema is markedly transnational in its economic organization and cultural constitution. Nevertheless, the concept of the nation continues to play an important role in the operations of the New Zealand Film Commission. This article considers how VOD sites available within New Zealand contribute to this set of relations, examining the degree to which the organization of these sites' catalogues emphasize films' national and/or transnational characteristics. This has implications for the importance that audiences may attach to New Zealand as a way of understanding cinema and themselves. It also has implications for the visibility of films that explore the national-cultural specificities of New Zealand. This article will consequently gauge the effects of any such emphasis upon, or elision of, the nation as a way of categorizing cinema, while also contextualizing this in relation to the power relations (between industries and cultures) constituted through VOD distribution.

### Introduction

This article examines how the concept of New Zealand cinema is both constructed and complicated by video on demand (VOD) websites available in New Zealand. Ramon Lobato highlights the role of distribution in determining the films 'which have the potential to become part of shared imaginaries, discourses and dreams' (2012, 2). This gatekeeping function also includes framing 'the way texts are experienced and understood by audiences' (Lobato 2012, 15). Distribution consequently helps to determine the relevance of New Zealand as way for audiences to understand cinema (and themselves) via *what* is circulated and *how* this is presented. How then might VOD sites contribute to this process? While there has been a growth of work in this area (Iordanova and Cunningham 2012; Dixon 2013; Tryon 2013; Holt and Sanson 2014), there is as yet no analysis of the New Zealand VOD landscape, and limited work internationally on the role of specific VOD sites in framing users' engagement with, and understanding of, texts. In particular, Stefano Baschiera notes that 'little attention has been given to the organisation of online catalogues as a form of gatekeeping' (2014, 3). In response to the absence of such work, he notes some general tendencies in the organization of Netflix UK and Amazon Instant Video. Looking at the way in which content is tagged, he finds a lack of emphasis on geographical classification, but highlights that films are cross-listed across a number of other different categories and genres. This, he argues, facilitates users' introduction to films from beyond Hollywood to an unprecedented degree (2014, 4). This article examines the extent to which such 'geographical indeterminacy' (Baschiera 2014, 4)

is characteristic of the catalogues of New Zealand's VOD sites. Moreover, it considers how any such elision of, or emphasis upon, the nation mediates the trans/national cultural and economic relations in which the production and consumption of film in New Zealand are situated.

For Roger Horrocks, New Zealand identity/cinema is complexly positioned in relation to the concept of Māori-Pakeha biculturalism, the country's ties to the South Pacific, Asia and Australia, and the historically dominant influences of Britain and the US (1999, 131, 132). Such relations consequently render New Zealand a 'floating signifier', and national identity 'becomes a question rather than an answer – or a question with (at any given time) a particular range of competing answers' (Horrocks 1999, 134). More recent work has celebrated the way in which New Zealand films have self-consciously explored these hybrid relations (Williams 2008; Cameron 2010; Smith 2012). Echoing Horrocks' notion of the nation as a 'floating signifier', Allan Cameron argues that his examples reveal 'a palimpsestic vision of nationhood in which we are confronted not by essences...but by codes (identities hybridized, ironized or deferred)' (Cameron 2010, 70). Jo Smith shows how the film *Boy* (2010), in this vein, 'uses universal themes and global cultural references to revisit orthodox representations of Indigenous experience with a renewed sense of energy and engagement', most memorably in its fusion of a Māori haka with the iconography of Michael Jackson's *Thriller* video (2012, 70). Such films thus resonate with national specificity without resorting to homogenizing discourses of nationalism, to use Paul Willemsen's distinction (Willemsen 2006, 33, 34). How much relative emphasis is there, though, on these nationally specific and transnational elements in the categorization of such films on New Zealand's VOD sites? Such emphasis can work to cement or weaken bonds between films (and audiences) within and beyond New Zealand, with potential implications not only for our cultural understanding of ourselves and others but also for the operations of the film industry.

New Zealand's film production industry is underpinned by transnational economic relations, from the government tax incentives and production grants available to large foreign-funded productions based in New Zealand, such as *King Kong* (2005), *Avatar* (2009) and *The Hobbit* Trilogy (2012, 2013, 2014) (Dunleavy and Joyce 2011, 223–225), to more modest co-productions between foreign investors and the government-funded New Zealand Film Commission (NZFC), such as the films discussed by Cameron (2010, 62–64).<sup>1</sup> This has prompted calls for an expanded definition of New Zealand cinema that is inclusive of 'foreign films that utilize New Zealand's film industry and production facilities' and that even includes the 'presence of New Zealand actors, directors, and film practitioners overseas' (Conrich and Murray 2008, 8). Such work parallels that within Australia calling for a more 'outward-looking' definition of the country's film industry, conceived less as a territory than 'a space of relations' (Goldsmith 2010, 212).<sup>2</sup> It is important, however, to recognize the way in which national boundaries are still mobilized within this space of relations. For example, the requirement of New Zealand content is fundamental to the funding that the NZFC directly provides for film development, production and post-production, based upon criteria pertaining to a film's subject-matter, locations, personnel, finance and facilities (NZFC 2015b). Questions regarding the degree of emphasis upon films' nationality and/or transnationality on New Zealand's VOD sites thus have important implications for the commercial and cultural aims of the Commission. For example, to what extent might such emphasis aid or hinder the Commission's cultivation of a market for nationally specific content?

Any attempt to answer the question above needs to be situated in the context of the 'imbalances of power' that continue to mark transnational cinematic relations (Higbee and Lim in Khoo, Smaill and Yue 2013, 13). As Ella Shohat and Robert Stam argue, 'discernible patterns of domination channel the "fluidities" even of a multipolar world' (Shohat and Stam 1994, 31). At a production level, such inequities are evident in the package of additional incentives that the New Zealand Government felt pressured to offer Warner Brothers to secure the production of the *Hobbit* films following an industrial dispute (Dunleavy and Joyce 2011, 225, 226). At the level of distribution and exhibition, such inequities are evident in the historical dominance of Hollywood content on New Zealand's (now largely Australian owned) cinema screens (Dunleavy and Joyce 2011, 24, 225, 226; Huffer 2011; Lealand 2013). Existing work on online distribution has emphasized its role in providing greater opportunities for the global circulation of non-Hollywood film, via sites catering to an international community of cinephiles, such as MUBI, and

those aimed at diasporic audiences (especially Indian, Chinese and Nigerian) (Cunningham and Silver 2013, 3, 33; Iordanova 2012, 11; Lobato 2012, 65). However, the 'King Kongs' of online distribution, as Stuart Cunningham and Jon Silver describe them, are still the US corporations of Google (YouTube), Apple (iTunes), Netflix, Amazon, and, to a lesser degree in terms of feature-length films, Yahoo!, Facebook and Hulu (Cunningham and Silver 2013, 3, 4). Furthermore, Hollywood content has dominated these sites (Cunningham and Silver 2013, 3, 83) and dominates the catalogues of a number of national/regional players such as Glowria (France) and FilmisNow (Italy) in order to 'attract a critical mass of customers and then hold them' (Cunningham and Silver 2013, 38, 39). If these global economic and cultural relations can be understood more as a 'patchwork quilt' than a 'one way street' (Cunningham and Silver 2013, 33),<sup>3</sup> imbalances still remain. It is thus necessary to consider the degree to which the construction of the cultural identity of films made in New Zealand (and by New Zealanders) through online distribution is connected to the maintenance of, or resistance to, these patterns of cultural and economic domination. For example, to what extent is it necessary to define films through their national identity in order to ensure the visibility of nationally specific content?

### VOD in New Zealand

The legal paid VOD landscape in New Zealand is characterized by a range of global, regional and local players. The first of these categories consists of familiar US companies combining global reach with geo-blocked paid content, including a number of those 'King Kongs' of the online world outlined by Cunningham and Silver (2013) (Apple (iTunes); Netflix (Netflix NZ); Google (Google Play, YouTube Movies); Video On-Demand). Global players also include the international art-house site MUBI and a variety of VOD sites specializing in non-US content for diasporic audiences, such as the Indian-focused Eros Now and Spuul. These sites are complemented by VOD services only available in Australia and New Zealand (Quickflix (NZ); EzyFlix), and an extension of an Australasian rental store chain that is nonetheless only available in New Zealand (Video Ezy On-Demand).<sup>4</sup> More locally specific sites include two run by New Zealand's largest satellite pay-television provider Sky TV, with one accessible to all (Neon) and one only accessible to Sky TV subscribers but that offers paid rentals (Sky Go),<sup>5</sup> and a site run by New Zealand's largest Internet Service Provider (ISP) and second-largest mobile operator Spark (Lightbox), though the latter does not offer films. The NZFC also has its own site providing access to content that it has funded, with this content fully available in New Zealand but also partially available in the UK and Australia (NZ Film On Demand). These various sites operate according to a model of subscription (Netflix NZ; MUBI; Neon; Lightbox) or pay-per-view for rentals/streaming and/or purchase/downloads (iTunes; Google Play; YouTube; EzyFlix; Video Ezy on Demand; NZ Film On Demand), or both (Quickflix NZ; Vimeo On Demand; Sky Go). Many of these are quite recent arrivals, with Quickflix NZ arriving in 2012, EzyFlix and Google Play arriving in 2013, Video Ezy On Demand, New Zealand Film on Demand, and Lightbox arriving in 2014, and Netflix NZ and Neon arriving in 2015. Moreover, two of these sites closed during the writing of this article, with EzyFlix and Video Ezy On Demand disappearing in August 2015. Online distribution in New Zealand is thus currently in what Cunningham and Silver (via McGahan) describe as the 'shakeout stage' of an industry's lifecycle (2013, 3, 15), as larger companies increasingly enter the marketplace and smaller companies are acquired or fold. Mapping the range of ways in which content is catalogued across these sites can help us to understand what is lost or gained when the oligopoly that is likely to characterize the industry's mature stage emerges (Cunningham and Silver 2013, 3).

These sites are complemented by users' access to paid VOD sites blocked in NZ, such as Netflix US, via the use of a Virtual Private Network (VPN). This was formalized through a number of smaller New Zealand ISPs providing 'global mode' to their customers, starting with Slingshot in 2013 (Keall 2013). Facing a lawsuit from Sky TV, TVNZ, MediaWorks TV (owner of TV channels TV3 and Four) and Lightbox, the ISPs agreed, however, to make the 'global mode' unavailable from 1 September 2015 (Drinnan 2015). This does nothing, though, to prevent users from setting up a VPN themselves. New Zealanders can, of course, also stream or download movies for free via a range of globally available semi-legal or illegal sites, from video-hosting sites including YouTube, to linking sites such as Putlocker, directing users to

pirated content stored on third-party servers, to torrent sites such as Kickass Torrents and cyberlockers such as Mega.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, films can be accessed for free for a prescribed period from some of the local free-to-air television catch-up sites (TVNZ On Demand; Maori TV On Demand) though this content is fairly minimal, and in fact there are no films on the other catch-up sites (3Now On Demand; Four On Demand; Choice TV).

It is impossible to exhaustively analyse all of these distribution channels. As Ramon Lobato and Mark David Ryan point out, 'analytical omniscience is the first casualty in an age of distributive abundance' (2011, 194). The following analysis consequently takes as its primary focus the organization of the film catalogues of all of the legal paid VOD services explicitly operating in New Zealand and that provided New Zealand content during the writing of this study<sup>7</sup> (iTunes, Netflix NZ, Google Play, YouTube Movies, Vimeo On Demand, NZ Film On Demand, Quickflix NZ, Video Ezy On Demand, EzyFlix, Neon, SkyGo). 'New Zealand content' is here understood as content defined as such by the sites or, when no such tagging exists, content that has been directly funded by the NZFC. This study also considers the circulation of New Zealand content through a small selection of semi-legal linking sites as a point of contrast (Zumvo, Putlocker, Wolowtube, Movieberry), but holds off from full analysis of the world of semi-legal and illegal online distribution as this warrants more detailed consideration in itself. It is hoped that the patterns detected in the examples used in this study can act as a point of comparison for further work in this area.

It is important not to overstate the role that the organization of these sites may play in structuring audiences' engagement with and understanding of film. Audiences are likely to be primed by online and/or offline promotion, reviews and/or word-of-mouth before searching for content on these sites. Nevertheless, these sites still play an important part in mediating our encounters with film, and this article seeks to understand this role in greater depth.

## Organization of catalogues

In keeping with Baschiera's observation, there is a limited emphasis upon categorizing film as national in the legal paid VOD sites available in New Zealand. For example, iTunes, Google Play, YouTube Movies, Vimeo On Demand, Video Ezy on Demand, EzyFlix, Neon and Sky Go each allow you to search for films based on between 8 and 21 basic genre categories, and a further selection of more specific collections, such as 'Bromance' on iTunes, 'More Liam Neeson' on EzyFlix and 'Female-directed Vimeo approved'. None of these sites include nation or region as an explicit, listed searchable category except YouTube which lists 'Indian Cinema' as a channel. There is no category for foreign or world cinema on these sites either except on Neon and YouTube Movies. Difference is thus largely presented in terms of subject matter on these sites, rather than in terms of geography or language. As a result, these sites stress the commonalities that connect together films and audiences from around the world. For example, on iTunes no mention is made of the nationality of the NZFC-funded film *What We Do In The Shadows* (2014). It is simply tagged as a 'Comedy' and recommendations for further viewing are based upon what 'Viewers Also Bought'. This includes films such as *St Vincent* (2014), *The Trip To Italy* (2014), *Red Dog* (2011) and *The Sapphires* (2012). Through these purchasing recommendations, the emphasis is thus placed upon the audience to reveal the parameters of any relevant grouping of film based upon their behaviour. Here, then, the film's generic status as comedy appears particularly relevant, along with its links to Australian cinema (via *Red Dog* and *The Sapphires*). The importance of region as a way of engaging with film consequently can emerge, but only from the ground up. Nevertheless, the fact that one cannot search for films based on their nation or region arguably makes it more difficult to engage with films in this way.

The limitations of a ground-up approach are underlined by the organization of the Netflix NZ site. Netflix prides itself on a personalized engagement with the user, tailoring the content it shows the user to their tastes. Indeed, Netflix US is famous for the nuances of its recommendation algorithms (Madrigal 2014). However, the first step in this process is incredibly prescribed. It involves a new member selecting three titles from a list of 80 titles presented to them. These choices then shape the foundation of a personalized home page for the user. All of the choices in the list are US or UK film and television,

prioritizing this content in the first place, under the guise of universal choice. Once in the home page, users can search for content based upon 12 Genres. Unlike the majority of the sites mentioned above, this does include the category of 'International', which is subdivided into 'Asian', 'Bollywood', 'French' and 'Scandinavian'. The concept of the nation or the region thus does come into play as a way of understanding film here, but the design of the site clearly subordinates this to the alleged universality of US/UK content. International also obviously only extends to what are perceived to be the four most important/lucrative foreign-language industries/areas. Even if the user types 'New Zealand' into the search box this does not produce any results. If you search for a specific title that you already know to have New Zealand-specific content like *Boy*, then you are recommended titles with local content, specifically *Eagle vs Shark* (2007) and *Once Were Warriors* (1994), indicating that geographical classification is functioning as metadata within the algorithms that recommend content to users. These are joined by 23 other comedies and dramas with a marked emphasis upon African-Americans. Local connections thus still have a role to play, along with more nuanced connections to content from beyond New Zealand that are based on more than just genre. The links to African-American comedies, for example, suggest the importance of non-white ethnicity as a determining factor. The merits of such subtleties are undermined, however, by the structural prioritization of US/UK content across the site as a whole.

As with Netflix NZ, a typed search for New Zealand content on Video Ezy on Demand and EzyFlix produces nothing. A search for such content on Neon and Sky Go only yields films with 'New' in the title and in iTunes it produces just one extreme sports documentary with New Zealand in its title. In contrast, although Google Play does not provide users with a listed category of New Zealand film, typing these words into the search box does produce a selection of 39 films that have been tagged as such. These include wholly New Zealand-funded films with local content such as *The Dark Horse* (2014), large transnationally funded blockbusters such as *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*, and, more unexpectedly, US-funded and set films such as *Cloverfield* (2008). The concept of New Zealand film is thus constructed very much in a transnational outward-looking vein. Similarly, although it does not flag New Zealand films as a category, a search for such content on Vimeo On Demand produces 63 films. These films consist largely of documentaries, and these range from the life story of transsexual New Zealand politician Georgina Beyer (*Georgie Girl* 2001) to a profile of South African lesbian couples (including one New Zealander) who adopt across racial lines (*Waited For* 2011). Searching for New Zealand content is also possible on YouTube Movies and produces an even greater range of films. This includes locally produced films such as *The Dead Lands* (2014), which appears third on the list of films produced by a search, but also Indian films set in New Zealand, which make up 8 of the first 10 films listed. Despite downplaying the nation as a category, then, it still exists as *searchable* metadata linking the content for users on Google Play, Vimeo On Demand and YouTube Movies. Moreover, through the listed content, the nation as a category functions not in a reductive sense but, rather, constructs New Zealand cinema as an inherently heterogeneous and transnational entity. However, given that the user has to search New Zealand cinema out, rather being presented with it as a category, and given the fluidity of their definitions of New Zealandness, locally funded content still struggles somewhat for visibility on these sites.

Quickflix NZ is distinct from any of the other sites mentioned above in that it does include 'Kiwi' as a one of its nineteen genre categories. The only other nations to be named are French and Chinese cinema, as subcategories of its 'Foreign' category. The site thus emphasizes New Zealand film's status as national cinema despite a fairly limited emphasis upon film as national across the site as a whole. This is arguably due to the fact that New Zealand is one of only two markets in which Quickflix operates, leading to a foregrounding of local content due to perceived user interest (though their regional rivals Ezy On Demand and EzyFlix do not highlight New Zealand content in this way). Quickflix NZ's New Zealand category consists of 29 films, dominated by locally funded content, with 18 of them being funded at least in part by the NZFC, and the remaining eleven primarily locally produced documentaries. The films themselves primarily focus upon New Zealand settings and characters but include those that resonate with transnational connections, such as *Boy*, and those that are filmed overseas, such as the NZFC funded but Samoan set *The Orator* (2011). More importantly, you can search for New Zealand films based on



their nationality or their genre tagging. *Housebound* (2014), for example, is tagged as 'New Zealand', 'Comedy' and 'Horror'. In addition, the 'More Like' section on each individual film is primarily rooted in each film's generic identity. *Housebound* is consequently linked to a selection of Comedy-Horrors, some Comedies and some Horror from the whole catalogue. The 'More Like' suggestions thus work to open the film up in a global sense, looking outward to the film's connections with film from beyond New Zealand. Quickflix NZ thus presents a navigation system which highlights national specificity without this being at the expense of films' more universal themes/connections.

The most obvious construction of New Zealand cinema as national is presented through the NZFC's NZ Film On Demand site, which is also available as an App via the iTunes store and Google Play. This site includes (at present) 63 NZ films that the NZFC has funded (44 features, 18 shorts and 1 television season). The listed films are dominated by an emphasis on the national specificities of New Zealand, in keeping with funding criteria of the Commission, while at the same time resonating with transnational influences and connections, as with Quickflix NZ's collection of largely NZFC-funded content. However, the fact that this represents the main portal for engagement with New Zealand film has the effect of ghettoizing such film-making somewhat, separating it out from other sites and iTunes'/Google Play's main catalogues on the basis of its national specificity. Rather than the national specificity of a film being one element among many in our understanding of how films may connect to each other, as on Quickflix NZ, such ghettoization presents this as the dominant characteristic. The films in the NZ Film On Demand site also carry genre descriptions such as 'Comedy' or 'Science Fiction', but they cannot be searched for or organized on the basis of these categories, and are not linked to any other films beyond those funded by the NZFC given the limitations of the catalogue. Ultimately, the site does not look outwards, however much its films might.

In contrast to the majority of the legal VOD sites in NZ, a number of the 'grey' semi-legal sites that are available place a strong emphasis upon nationality as a way of searching for content. For example, Zumvo allows users to search for films based upon a list of 117 countries, with 29 countries in particular foregrounded on its home page, including New Zealand. Movieberry.com also has a list of 98 countries and X Movies 8 has a list of 23 nations (both including New Zealand). None of the legal sites come close to this emphasis upon the nation as a way of understanding film. This emphasis could be arguably due to the greater range of international content potentially available through these 'grey' sites, unrestrained by the rights of legal distributors in particular territories. Such emphasis could also possibly result from an awareness of the relevance of these categories to their users, ascribing an importance to the nation that legal sites are reluctant to acknowledge or cultivate. This emphasis upon the nation is complemented by the fact that, despite their wide-ranging access to content, their categorization of New Zealand film is fairly bounded. The volume of New Zealand films on these sites is comparable to that within the legal sites, with Zumvo containing 28 films and Movieberry containing 66 films, and while these films extend from primarily New Zealand funded and set content such as *What We Do In The Shadows* to largely foreign-funded blockbusters such as *The Hobbit* films, they draw a line at the New Zealand set Indian films that appear on YouTube. If the nation is foregrounded, though, this is not at the expense of these films more 'universal' qualities. As with Quickflix NZ, while you can search for films based upon their country, the 'Related Movies/See Also' lists for each individual title are based upon the film's genre categorization, thus highlighting the film's connection to content from around the world.

These semi-legal sites consequently help to reveal the forms of engagement that are suppressed or complemented by legal VOD in New Zealand, making clearer the range of choices available to them. It should be noted though that not all semi-legal sites are organized in this way. Putlocker does not allow users to search for content based on nationality or region, with not even high profile regions listed in its 21 film genres (plus three purely television genres), and Wolowtube doesn't offer any kind of navigation tools apart from a home page of most popular movies, and a link to most popular television shows. The latter relies upon users knowing what they are looking for in the first place and typing this into a search box. Wolowtube consequently acts as an acute reminder of the importance of online and offline promotion, reviews and/or word of mouth in priming audiences before they utilize VOD sites, thus

highlighting some of the limits in the ability of these sites to determine the relevance of New Zealand as a way for audiences to understand cinema and themselves.

## Conclusion

The majority of the legal VOD sites available in New Zealand downplay film's role in constituting the nation through the absence of this as a listed search category and in certain instances through the absence of this as a way of tagging films at all. This could be perceived in progressive terms, stressing the similarities between New Zealand and the rest of the world over its differences and providing filmmakers an opportunity to connect with New Zealand audiences outside of the terms of a 'national cinema' ghetto. However, it also means that, given the dominance of US content in the majority of the legal catalogues, New Zealand-specific content struggles for visibility. The New Zealand Film Commission's NZ Film On Demand site counters this problem of visibility on the web in a wider sense, carving out an online distribution space dedicated to primarily local content. This has its limitations though. Firstly, this foregrounding of New Zealand film exists outside of the main portals for users' engagement with VOD, apart from as an App, requiring the user to prioritize an interest in national cinema in the first instance, rather than clicking on it out of curiosity. Secondly, the New Zealand that emerges from the films themselves might be heterogeneous and outward-looking, intersected by transnational economic and cultural relations (Cameron 2010; Smith 2012), but the site prioritizes the films' nationality over all else. The site consequently emphasizes boundaries over connections, producing a slightly defensive (if strategically necessary) nationalism that undermines the complexity of the films.

Between these poles lie options which capture something of the fluidity of the space of relations that constitutes New Zealand cinema, with the nation situated as one coordinate among many. For example, on those sites where countries are not listed as a category but content is tagged in this way, a typed search produces films that encompass the myriad relations between New Zealand(ers) and film. The fact that such a search capability is not listed, however, places more emphasis on the user to seek this content out. The profile of content with primarily local funding is also lessened a little by its co-existence alongside primarily foreign-funded films, such as the overwhelming number of Indian films brought up by a search for New Zealand content on YouTube Movies. In contrast, Quickflix NZ is distinct for foregrounding locally produced New Zealand film while simultaneously highlighting these films' connections to international content. This consequently compensates for the imbalances in the profile of New Zealand and Hollywood cinema, while also carefully balancing national specificity with a degree of outward-lookingness.

Given that the shakeout stage of the VOD industry's lifecycle is yet to be completed (Cunningham and Silver 2013, 3), questions remain over the precise companies that will constitute an oligopoly in New Zealand during the industry's mature stage, and thus which modes of engagement with New Zealand cinema will dominate in the future. Cunningham and Silver see the mature stage rapidly approaching globally, however, through the emerging oligopoly of the US King Kongs of the online world (Cunningham and Silver 2013, 3). This places sites such as Quickflix NZ in a vulnerable position<sup>8</sup> and could lead to lessening of the emphasis on national specificity within VOD sites beyond the NZFC's site, which is arguably problematic for the reasons outlined above.

Of course, audiences are not restricted to legal means of film consumption. The semi-legal sites analysed here show the endurance of the nation (including New Zealand) as one way among others to search for content, carefully balancing the local and the global. Despite this acknowledgement of cultural complexity, however, this does not benefit the New Zealand film industry. In addition, other semi-legal sites share a lack of emphasis upon national categories with the dominant US companies, prioritizing genre and popularity. In doing so, they arguably privilege those cinematic cultures which are dominant culturally, even if they do not directly benefit these industries financially. Questions thus remain regarding the success with which New Zealand's VOD sites will cultivate audiences' understanding of New Zealand cinema (and New Zealand) as resonating with national specificities and global connections in ways that most benefit the country's industry.



## Notes

1. In this vein, 2014 saw the introduction of the NZFC's China Co-Production Development Fund (NZFC 2015a).
2. See also Verhoeven 1999.
3. Cunningham and Silver are here drawing upon the work of Tracey (1985) and Nordenstreng and Varis (1974).
4. EzyFlix and Video Ezy On Demand were both operated by the Australian Company Access Digital Entertainment (ADE), with ADE also owning the former.
5. Sky NZ is unrelated to the British company, though Rupert Murdoch's News Corp was the majority shareholder in Sky NZ from 1999–2013 (Dann 2013).
6. See Lobato (2012, 95–109) for a detailed account of the distinctions within semi-legal and illegal forms of film distribution online.
7. The analysis of the websites discussed in this article took place from June to September 2015.
8. Quickflix is currently struggling to compete with new entrants such as Netflix in Australia, leading to huge losses and the threat of insolvency (Mumbrella.com.au 2015).

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Notes on contributor

*Ian Huffer*, PhD, is a lecturer in Media Studies at Massey University, New Zealand. His research is primarily focused upon the social, cultural and economic relations constituted through the circulation and consumption of film. His previous work has examined theatrical film exhibition and online DVD rental in New Zealand (*Studies in Australasian Cinema*, Vol. 5, Issue 3 & Vol. 6, Issue 2; *Watching Films: New Perspectives on Movie-Going, Exhibition and Reception*, K.Aveyard and A.Moran [eds.] 2013) and audiences for the films of Sylvester Stallone (*The Ultimate Stallone Reader*, C. Holmlund [ed.] 2014).

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