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Towards a ‘transnational regional’ cinema: the francophone Belgian case study

This article proposes the concept of the ‘transnational regional’ as a means of better understanding the transnational-national-regional basis of contemporary francophone Belgian cinema. It is an equally apposite way of approaching questions of national and transnational cinema, and the notion of a cinema of small nations. Although the ‘national’ approach remains salient, it is not wholly sufficient for thinking about the industrial predicate of contemporary Belgian cinema, particularly since the formation of Wallimage in 2001. This idea takes into account the global and the local, since it is within this tension that the ‘transnational regional’ begins to emerge, particularly in the contexts of film production, distribution and exhibition.

Keywords: francophone Belgian cinema, transnational, regional, Dardenne brothers, Wallonia, Wallimage

The 2013 Cinema Communication – published by the European Commission – recognized the increasing presence of regional forms of film production and filmmaking in contemporary European cinema. It addressed the ‘region’ in three forms, (1) as a devolved unit with a specific tradition, history and culture, (2) regional and local funding schemes and (3) a regional film market. This article will begin to address these interpretations of the ‘region’ in a francophone Belgian context, and it will consider the ‘transnational’ basis of film production, distribution and exhibition.

Two film festivals – that took place outside of Belgium – neatly highlight the bifurcated nature of Belgian cinema. The Cinémathèque suisse (2012, 19-26) organized an exhibition event dedicated to ‘le nouveau cinéma belge francophone’ [New francophone Belgian cinema]. This included the screening of films by the emerging French-speaking Belgian filmmakers Bouli Lanners, Olivier Masset-Depasse, Joachim Lafosse and Fabrice du Welz. The ‘Other Belgian cinema’ film festival in Strasbourg aimed to showcase the oft-neglected production of Flemish language films that has received higher levels of visibility across Europe since the breakthrough hit of *Rundskop/Bullhead* (Michaël Roskam, 2011).¹ The programmes for these two film festivals place a spotlight on increased levels of film production within a country that has seen its film

¹ For the film festival’s programme list, see <http://cineuropa.org/nw.aspx?t=newsdetail&l=en&did=288287>

production and funding mechanisms evolve and grow since the creation of Wallimage in 2001. The bifurcation of Belgium's film industry is not a new phenomenon, since it is acknowledged in Mosley's (2001) work entitled 'Split Screen'. In this case, Mosley proffers a fixed and insurmountable binary between a French-speaking and Dutch-language cinema up to 1996. This clear distinction between two linguistically different cinemas in one country problematizes the notion of a 'national' cinema. It immediately points towards the 'region' as an apposite partner for cinematic transnationalism when interpreting francophone Belgian film production, distribution and exhibition.

Transnational Cinema: Regional Perspectives

Cinematic transnationalism has been widely conceptualized since the term's first use to consider the plurality of Chinese cinema (Lu 1997). Although the popularization of the term in film scholarship is recent, the trends and tendencies of cinematic transnationalism are not. The production, distribution and exhibition sectors of the film industry have crossed national borders since at least the 1920s (Higson 2010). Hayward and Higbee (2005, 19-21) trace the entrepreneurial nature of French cinema's early distribution practices for Pathé, Gaumont and Eclair as they created films cheaply and exported them widely to film offices across the globe. This period of expansion by the early French film companies shows the nascent connections between French and Belgian filmmaking prior to 1914, particularly in the case of Pathé. For example, the French filmmaker Alfred Machin resided in Belgium between 1911-1914 to set up the production company, Belge-Cinéma Film (Bolen 1971, 2). The production house effectively served as Pathé's Belgian arm, with the twenty films produced in this period all being distributed worldwide by the French company (Bolen 1971, 2).

The concept of cinematic transnationalism has gradually become broad – at times even vacuous - and had a rather homogenizing role in terms of grouping films together that are often unrelated (Hjort 2009). From this point, key scholars in this field have adopted their own approach to cinematic transnationalism (Higson 2000; Ezra and Rowden 2006; Higbee and Lim 2010) or have created a set of typologies and taxonomies (Hjort 2009; Shaw 2013).

Vincendeau's (2011) re-appraisal of 'national cinema' in the context of French cinema outlines the prevailing trends in film scholarship and academic work to transcend the nation and consider 'smaller' or 'larger' units. From this premise, Vincendeau considers the region as part of a downsized approach beneath the level of the nation,

which we can extrapolate to an understanding of filmmaking traditions in the Basque country, Wallonia, and Flanders. The ‘larger’ units – that Vincendeau outlines – align with conceptions of ‘transnational’ or ‘supra-national’ means of considering blocs, such as European, Latin American, or (East) Asian filmmaking traditions.² For both of these concepts, the ‘national’ remains embedded within the sectors of production, distribution and exhibition, and on a textual level.

Whilst Higson’s re-evaluation of the ‘national’ concept (2000) asserts the act of border crossing as necessary for a consideration of transnationalism, Ezra and Rowden (2006) emphasize mobility as a means of moving beyond national borders. For Ezra and Rowden (2006, 1-3), there is a greater intensity of transnational collaboration, particularly with the greater circulation of capital produced through relationships between countries with the increase in co-productions and the rise of new media technologies. There are two forms of capital that undermine national insularity at this point, with the circulation of finance for film production and the ‘cultural capital’ of certain filmmakers developed at international film festivals and in national and international film criticism. The methods of film production, distribution and exhibition inform this approach to cinematic transnationalism and the discussion of the ‘regional’.

In terms of cinema, Pierre Bourdieu ([1989] 2010 19-20) posits that ‘knowledge of directors is much more closely linked to cultural capital than mere cinemagoing’ and foregrounds the role of the critic as a producer of ‘legitimate classifications’. Film festivals – with selection committees – and film criticism are ways in which certain films and filmmakers can reach their markets and public. From Bourdieu’s premise, Czach (2004, 82) develops the notion of ‘critical capital’, which refers to films that gain distinction over and above others through their selection at ‘A’ grade film festivals – such as Berlin, Cannes and Venice. For her part, Vincendeau (2011, 340) further asserts that the ‘national’ - as a means of categorization - has not been replaced by the aforementioned approaches in film criticism and at film festivals, as they play a key role in the formation of a ‘national’ film canon.

In the context of francophone Belgian cinema, the ‘national’ or ‘regional’ filmmaking canon is largely established through events and film festivals that take place outside of the country. A diverse set of film festivals take place in Brussels and Wallonia – from the Brussels Film Festival dedicated to European cinema, the Brussels International Fantastic Film Festival to the Festival International du Film francophone in

² For a nuanced and informed discussion of the ‘supra-national’, see Bergfelder (2005).

Namur. However, it is the presence of francophone Belgian films at Cannes that has captured the attention of francophone Belgian film critics, and this has increased the level of visibility and international valorization of a cinema from a ‘small nation’.³ For instance, in 2008, there was an increase in interest in Belgian filmmaking after the Cannes film festival. Five Belgian films were selected for consideration – *Le Silence de Lorna/Lorna’s Silence* (Dardenne brothers, 2008), *Eldorado* (Bouli Lanners, 2008), *Elève Libre/Private Lessons* (Joachim Lafosse, 2008), *Rumba* (Dominique Abel and Fiona Gordon, 2008) and the Flemish film *Aanrijding in Moscou/ Moscon, Belgium* (Christophe Van Rompaey, 2008). The French film magazine, *Positif*, published an 18-page dossier of films produced by Belgium since 2001 in February 2009. The magazine’s focus was primarily centred on the aforementioned French-language Belgian films screened at Cannes the previous year. This legitimizing of francophone Belgian films begins to overlook a more variegated selection of films produced in the country. The ‘national’ is further problematized through a survey of film magazines in Belgium. For example, *Cinéma Belge* has produced one annual issue in the build-up to the Cannes film festival since 1987. The May 2002 issue highlighted the shift in focus to – as the title suggests - ‘Film productions of the French-speaking Belgian community from Wallonie-Bruxelles’. The bifurcation of film magazines – representing the division in the film industry – is also the case in terms of the French-language *Cinergie* (produced since 1985) and the English quarterly *Flanders Image* (produced since 2005), i.e. a ‘regional’ or ‘community-based’ is a more apposite means of categorizing Belgian film production.

In their approach to ‘critical transnationalism’, Higbee and Lim (2010) outline that the local, regional, national and the transnational are not mutually exclusive. This approach suggests that filmmaking activities, financial arrangements and cultural policy formed at a local or regional level – in a downsized or devolved sense – have the inherent ability to inform the image of the nation that is distributed beyond its national borders (Higbee and Lim 2010, 18). This therefore necessitates a consideration of film policy and institutional frameworks on a local and regional level within this paradigm. In terms of this case study, these institutions are formed at a community-based or ‘regional’ level, such as the Centre du Cinéma et de l’Audiovisuel (CCA) for the francophone community of Belgium, Wallimage for Wallonia, Bruxellimage (renamed Image.Brussels

³ For a conceptualization and detailed interpretation of ‘cinemas of small nations’, see Hjort and Petrie (2007).

in 2014) for Brussels, and the Vlaams Audiovisueel Fonds (VAF) and Screen Flanders representing Flanders.⁴

Both Hjort (2009) and Higbee and Lim (2010) identify the notion of ‘shared culture’ and posit the possibility of a ‘regional’ paradigm being formed across national boundaries. In Naficy’s brief article on a ‘theory of regional cinemas’, he outlines how the ‘regional’ concept has not been fully developed, and instead it lies latent in books that have identified ‘shared features of films from contiguous geographic regions’ (2008, 97). Naficy (2008) draws upon Middle Eastern, the Maghreb, Balkans and Central Asian countries – since the dissolution of the Soviet Union – as examples of such an approach to ‘regional’ cinemas. In a European context, the funding of films in Scandinavia highlights such a trend in what Elkington and Nestigen (2005) term ‘Transnational Nordic Cinema’. This approach epitomizes how the ‘transnational’ and ‘regional’ concepts can work together through exchanges in finance, crew and films across the national borders of Denmark, Sweden and Norway. All of these approaches to cinematic regions retain the idea of a ‘national’ framework, since they retain a reference to a country as a sovereign entity. The ‘national’ still has a certain analytical and conceptual value within such a framework, but it remains ‘limiting’ – in Higson’s (2000) words – for a consideration of cinematic blocs or ‘regions’ that encompass several sovereign countries.

The ‘larger unit’: transnational modes of production

The first port of call in this discussion of a ‘larger’ unit in the context of francophone Belgian cinema is the use of the ‘francophone’ appellation. This is a clear a point of distinction between films in Belgium along linguistic lines. Vincendeau (2011, 339-342) considers language as forming a crucial element within the construction of national identity and - by extension - national cinema. However, the notion of ‘francophone’ posits a connection beyond the nation and the state in a relational sense to France and other French language filmmaking countries, such as Switzerland, Quebec, the former French colonies of North and Sub-Saharan Africa and the French Caribbean. Marshall’s definition of ‘francophone cinema’ emphasizes its difference from French cinema and foregrounds the role of borders, movement, language, and lateral connections (2012, 41-42). ‘Parts’ and ‘particles’ underpin these four key elements, with the flow of filmmakers,

⁴ In 2009, Wallimage and Bruxellimage established a financial line that connects the two institutions for the funding of feature length films (Wallimage-Bruxellimage).

personnel, characters and films moving across national borders and into different national cinema markets (Marshall 2012, 41-42). In the case of francophone Belgian cinema, the movement of financial ‘particles’ between Belgium and France play an important role in the formation of transnational and regional film production.

Higbee and Lim (2010, 10) highlight the reductive tendency to immediately categorize a co-production film as ‘transnational’ without analyzing its aesthetic, political or economic implications. At this point, Hjort (2009, 13-15) proposes the useful analytical instruments of ‘marked’ and ‘unmarked’ forms of transnationalism, which suggest that the arrangements - formed at a level of production - are not always evident in the film that we see on screen. This is particularly salient to foreground when considering co-production arrangements between countries that are culturally and linguistically similar, and even within a certain circumference.

In Belgium, a study of French-language productions quickly moves beyond the ‘national’, with notable levels of film funding being acquired through co-production agreements and collaborations between regional film funds. Between 2001 and 2014, co-productions with France accounted for 66.1% of the total of films produced in French. Discounting films funded through only Belgian funding streams, 79% of all co-productions were with France as either the majority or minority partner (CCA 2014, 224). Within this period, the highest number of co-productions occurred with France in 2012 (19) and the fewest in 2002 (9). The high number of co-productions between France and Belgium nuances the transnational economic co-operation between the devolved francophone regions of Belgium and France. On the basis of these statistics, the co-production relationship with France is important to the development of a Belgian, and in particular francophone Belgian, film production sector. The connection, in this case, is predicated upon a source of ‘affinitive transnationalism’ (Hjort 2009, 17) in which mutual intelligibility between the languages and the cultures has a role. As Hjort further outlines, this is primarily the case for cinema systems of small nations with challenges to sustain a ‘national’ cinema (18). For instance, Switzerland produced 15 ‘national’ films with 26 majority and minority co-productions, and the Netherlands funded 19 ‘national’ films and 30 co-productions (Grece et al. 2013). These statistics highlight the general trends of financial arrangements for film production, but it shows a partial story of the complex set of interactions that are taking place. This interpretation of cinematic transnationalism is primarily concerned with centrifugal forces in the form of state and

corporate actors – which includes co-production agreements that have been formalized between countries.

Hannerz's (1996) anthropological study of the term 'transnational' is a particularly apposite means of approaching the modes of production and tendencies of francophone Belgian cinema. Hannerz (1996, 6) suggests that rather than focusing on nations or states as corporate actors forming connections (in essence, as international partners), it is the actions of individuals and businesses creating working relationships beyond national borders that is driving the turn towards transnationalism. In the film industry, funding mechanisms are more complex than a reliance on state-funded institutions and partnerships with private investment often required to increase a film's budget. The aspect of private investment is particularly salient when considering the increase in the number of film productions and co-productions in Belgium. This provides a more nuanced interpretation of the co-production means of funding, since reports by national film bodies and the European Audiovisual Observatory use only national appellations to ascertain the origin of film funding.

The Belgian Tax Shelter (established in 2004) provides a 150% tax exemption on the amount invested (Taxshelter.be 2015), and it functions as an intermediary between investment groups and the audiovisual industry. The pre-requisites are primarily concerned with compliance to the conditions of taxable expenditure in Belgium and the lead producer being resident in the country. The 'national' remains salient to this funding mechanism, since it incorporates all of the linguistic communities of Belgium. However, this shows a shift in the film industry in Belgium to the private sector and to encourage inward investment from companies by promising tax write-offs. It also makes Belgium more desirable to producers and projects for co-production deals with these incentives. This has seen exponential growth in majority and minority co-production arrangements. For instance, in 2013, Belgium had a level of minority co-productions consistent with the largest film producing countries in Europe - France (59), Germany (37), Spain (38), and Belgium (34) (Grece et al. 2013). These minority co-productions are primarily with France, and includes award-winning films such as *La vie d'Adèle/ Blue is the warmest colour* (Abdellatif Kechiche, 2013) and *De rouille et d'os/ Rust and Bone* (Jacques Audiard, 2012) – the latter included the Dardenne brothers as co-producers. This nuances the 'affinitive' nature of the cinematic transnationalism and interactions at play between France and Belgium to one of 'opportunism' – to once again draw upon Hjort's (2009) typologies.

The Tax Shelter has an intricate infrastructure that incorporates individual producers, intermediary production companies and banking systems (Tesolin and Zylberberg 2009). The complex set of alliances between individuals and intermediary production companies across borders nuances this concept of cinematic transnationalism through a 'regional' lens due to mutual and shared intelligibility between France and Belgium. In 2012, the Dardenne brothers adopted a new business strategy that allows the filmmakers to create their own contacts with investors. This bridges the gap between individual producers and intermediary production companies based in Belgium to attract film productions. To fund the film – *Deux jours, Une nuit/ Two Days, One Night* (Dardenne brothers, 2014) – the filmmakers were attached to the operator Cinéfinance through their own production company, Les Films du Fleuve (Carré 2012, 10). By adopting this strategy, filmmakers no longer need to have an intermediary to fund a project through the Tax Shelter system, thereby forming a direct link between the investment and the filmmaker. The working relationships between film production companies and funding mechanisms are functioning within Hannerz's (1996) conception of transnationalism, in essence beyond state patronage of the film industry and production sector. In essence, inward investment – in the form of the aforementioned co-productions and film funding from the Tax Shelter – is designed to supplement, rather than supplant, regional and cultural filmmaking activities in Wallonia.

In terms of the 'national' cinema paradigm, the Belgian film industry is particularly complex due to how the film institutions are organized by linguistic communities and by region. For instance, there is no central film institution – like the CNC (Centre national du cinéma) across the border in France – to coordinate the Belgian film industry, since production funds, distribution and promotion support are provided by either the CCA for the French-speaking regions of Belgium or the VAF for Flanders. In essence, there are two central Audiovisual and Media services that delineate the country's film output according to linguistic community. To complicate matters further, a fiscal line was established in 2009 between the CCA and the VAF in which a small level of funding from the CCA goes towards projects supported by the VAF. In 2014, this constituted 5% of the CCA's total budget for feature film production (CCA 2014, 26). The most prominent example of a film supported through this line is *Rundskop/ Bullhead* (Michaël Roksam, 2011). This film largely takes place in Flanders and in Dutch, but it crosses the internal linguistic border into the French-speaking city of Liège on two occasions.

The CCA was formed in 1996 under the auspices of the controversially named French Community of Belgium or the Wallonia-Brussels Federation. This decentralization of film finance coincided with the federalization of the country in 1993, which witnessed an increase in political powers and competencies provided to the linguistic communities. The Belgian film industry has, however, consistently developed along linguistic and community-based lines since the 1960s. The Flemish Community of Belgium put in place a decree to support cultural production in 1964, and this was followed by a similar decree in 1967 for the French Community of Belgium. The cultural criteria outlined in the 'Arrêté royale du 22 juin 1967 tendant à promouvoir la culture cinématographique' (1967) still remains salient for the CCA selective aid system and its 'cultural project tests'. In Belgium, 'cultural project tests' are tailored towards the communities, since they primarily focus on the audiovisual project's language. For example, all francophone Belgian film projects must be articulated in French. These tests demonstrate a level of commitment to cultural objectives and highlight the nation's internal cultural, ethnic and religious diversity. By adhering to this selective aid and 'cultural' criteria, film projects can then qualify for funding from automatic funding systems on a regional level, such as Wallimage and Image.Brussels.

In Flanders, the region and the ethnolinguistic community correspond to one another, whereas the French-speaking regions of Wallonia and Brussels do not directly cohere with the overarching linguistic community. Henry Ingberg, the first Chairperson of the CCA, neatly foregrounds the incongruity of the linguistic community as a 'laboratoire de l'identité' (Sojcher 1999, 199). This suggests that a francophone Belgian identity is present in a plural form, acknowledging the hyphen placed between the two geographic regions in the Federation. Mosley (2001, 2-3; 207) further outlines the need to decouple Wallonia and Brussels as a result of differences in their respective political aspirations, demographic composition and self-images. The cultural and social differences between the two French-speaking regions are profoundly emphasized in the Walloon cultural manifesto (1984), which describes francophone Belgian identity as a 'notion hybride et artificielle qui est de nulle part' ('Manifeste pour la culture wallonne, 1984). The manifesto has been revised in three white papers, with the latest version made available in 2009 (Culture et la citoyenneté en Wallonie, 2009). This clearly highlights how the two French-speaking regions differ from one another culturally, which in turn foregrounds the saliency of the term 'region' when discussing their respective identities as distinct cinemas.

The complexities of the film funding ecosystem in Belgium – and primarily the French-speaking linguistic community – highlight how the ‘national’ remains salient when outlining public funding systems. The ‘national’ remains as a ‘dialogic partner’ – to adopt Ezra and Rowden’s (2006, 6) notion – to both the transnational and the regional. It also speaks to a centre-margin relationship in which the CCA – located in Brussels - determines the selection criteria for projects that can then receive automatic funding from Wallimage in Wallonia. The ‘transnational regional’ becomes a profitable way to tease out the continuities that lie within (francophone) Belgian film production. It therefore provides a scalar interpretation of cinematic transnationalism as a more inclusive means of understanding the trends in the francophone Belgian film industry.

‘Regional’ film production: Wallimage and Ciné-regio

In his analysis of European film production and funding, Bergfelder adopts Hannerz’s interpretation of transnationalism, since it is more inclusive of the local (2005, 322). Within this framework, there is a requirement to negotiate between cultural and national specificity at the same time as acknowledging the larger European supra-national community. Bergfelder (2005) takes into consideration the development of a European production base from the 1980s through to former incarnations of the MEDIA and EURIMAGES programmes.⁵ The turn to supra-national forms of film funding and support coincided with the emergence of film funds and institutions on a ‘devolved’ or regional level in Europe.

This ‘devolution’ of film funding to regional bodies occurred first in larger European countries. In the 1980s, Germany (Länder), France (Départements) and the United Kingdom (National Arts Councils) created regional funding bodies as a means of supporting film production in a local area (Wood 2007, 8). In the case of Scottish cinema, Petrie (2000a; 2000b) further outlines a turn in the late 1980s and the 1990s to ‘new institutions’ with indigenous forms of finance linked to developing film production in a local environment. Petrie adopts the notion of a ‘devolved cinema’ to film production in Scotland, since it is still necessary to take into account the wider ‘national’ context. This arises in the form of public funding systems, the circulation of filmmakers and the distribution of films on exhibition circuits (Petrie 2000a, 154-157; Petrie 2000b,

⁵ The current incarnation of the MEDIA programme is known as Creative Europe for the period 2014-2020. See: <http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/>

185-186). The final two areas – outlined by Petrie - will be considered later in the final section of this article.

In Belgium, the institutional forms of film funding had previously been underdeveloped, leading to an interpretation of the Belgian – and particularly the Walloon - film industry as ‘artisanal’ (Mosley 2001; Mosley 2013). With a lack of institutional structure in Wallonia, a filmmaker’s cultural cachet and valorization as an auteur were previously drawn upon to attract foreign and national investment (from the CCA) for a film project. In the 1960s and 1970s, André Delvaux looked to France, Germany and Italy for film funding (Mosley 2001, 212-213), and whilst discussing their early corpus of feature films post-1996, the Dardenne brothers ludically noted that they would have been unable to create films without co-production funding from France (Cowie and Edelmann 2007, 220). At this point, these filmmakers epitomize Maule’s conception of the ‘institutional figure of the author’ (Maule 2008, 17-18), since they are afforded the opportunity to film in the location and work with producers, technicians and actors of their choice.

The creation of an institutional framework in Wallonia has followed the rise of prominent filmmakers, such as the Dardenne brothers. The valorization of the film *Rosetta* (Dardenne brothers, 1999) at the Cannes film festival in 1999 reinvigorated the film production sector in Wallonia and highlighted the need to implement a regional film fund and structure.⁶ The development of a ‘regional’ cinema in Wallonia and francophone Belgian cinema has been progressive, with breakthrough films and filmmakers reinforcing the need for film funding mechanisms and institutions to be formalized.

Wallimage was initially conceived as a three-year long trial system in 2001, and later made permanent in 2004. The Walloon government provides the fund with 5.5M€ annually, which is allocated across three funding lines. The first two funding lines directly pertain to the development of film production and post-production in Wallonia. Since 2001, the first line has provided funds to film projects that have had a direct audiovisual expenditure in the region, and the second – known as the ‘Enterprise Line’ – has contributed to the development of production companies and post-production facilities in the region. In 2009, a third line was introduced between Wallimage and Image.Brussels

⁶ Austin (2004) outlines the controversy around the Dardenne brothers’ award of the Palme d’Or and Dumont’s Grand Prix du Jury in 1999, foregrounding how the *Cahiers du Cinéma* championed their success at the film festival whilst *Événement* described it as a ‘murder’ of French cinema. The controversy was also centred on two non-professional actresses – including Émilie Dequenne for *Rosetta* - winning the Best Actress award.

to provide funds to films that spend at least 100.000 Euros in both French-speaking regions (Wallimage Coproductions 2013, 9). This line was initially designed to forge links between Wallimage and film funding mechanisms in Brussels, which did not have an equivalent structure at the time. The Bruxelles-Capitale region has since developed Image.Brussels, which has an annual budget of around 5 Million Euros. This has subsequently enabled Brussels to attract film projects to Belgium alongside the regional film funds in Wallonia and Flanders (du Jaunet 2015, 25). The first film financed by Wallimage was the Liège-set *Gangsters* (Olivier Marchal, 2002) – a French/ Belgian co-production - that was provided with a sum of 322.262€, quickly followed by Philippe Blasband's *Un Honnête Commerçant/ Step by Step* (2002) and the Dardenne brothers' *Le fils/ The Son* (2002). In Wallimage's first ten years, the fund supported 136 film projects – including majority and minority co-productions – in which 31.305.580 Euros was spent and an estimated 94.051.460 Euros of audiovisual expenditure was generated in the region ('Wallimage a dix ans: bilan positif' 2011, 18). This audiovisual expenditure was primarily attributed to expenditure on technicians and personnel, shooting locations and settings. There is certainly evidence of an economic advantage for film funding on a regional level in the French-speaking region of Belgium, with an economic fallout that leads to greater employment of local talent, use of local setting and post-production facilities, and the potential to attract tourists.

Wallimage's audiovisual policy is primarily concerned with the 'cultural' nature of the projects it produces as well as providing a degree of production knowledge and expertise. This is particularly the case for supporting local filmmaking talent and technicians and developing the post-production facilities. In the mid-2000s, Olivier Masset-Depasse, Bouli Lanners and Micha Wald received funding from Wallimage for their first feature-length films: *Cages* (250.000€), *Ultranova* (375.000€) and *Voleurs des Chevaux/ Horse Thieves* (225.000€).⁷ The formation of the regional film funds reduces the levels of competition on a 'national' level in francophone Belgium from the CCA, thereby creating opportunities for breakthrough filmmakers who have previously honed their skills through making short films. Moreover, this 'devolution' of film funding places less emphasis on filmmakers invested with certain 'cultural capital' to attract finance in the form of co-productions and through the Tax Shelter. The screen policies of the regional film funds allow for a re-thinking of the 'transnational' connections between

⁷ In an interview with Masset-Depasse (2013, personal communication), the filmmaker discussed how the visibility afforded to him by the production of *Cages* enabled him to gain higher levels of film funding for his subsequent film, *Illégal/ Illegal* (Olivier Masset-Depasse, 2010).

film funds to support local filmmaking. The film institution's audiovisual policy highlights the aim to co-produce film projects that '[enrich] the cultural patrimony of the countries or regions that co-produce it' (Wallimage Coproductions 2013, 5). As previously outlined, there is evidence of 'affinitive' co-production arrangements with France on a 'national' level. However, the policy points to the possibility of co-producing with regions – on a devolved level – that are linguistically, culturally and geographically contiguous.

A shared film style and shared concerns between films from Nord-pas-de-Calais and Wallonia pre-date the formation of Wallimage in 2001. Mosley posits the existence of a 'nordist' [Northern] cinema as distinctive through its 'social realist' style that chimes with the work of Mariage, Belvaux, Lanners and Lafosse from Belgium; and Dumont, Zonca and Vincent from France (2013, 29). The Dardenne brothers have also been included in a framework of French cinema - and in particular French New Realism (Powrie 1999) and 'the social renewal of French cinema' (Garbarz 1997, 74-75) – in the publications *Contemporary French Cinema* (Austin 2008) and *The New Face of Political Cinema* (O'Shaughnessy 2007). This interpretation of a 'nordist' cinema suggests that this 'shared' aesthetic and style extends beyond the period of French New Realism/ 'le jeune cinéma' (Prédal 2002) of the late 1990s into the mid-2000s, particularly in the case of Lanners and Lafosse.

Philippe Reynaert (2006, 23), the Chairperson of Wallimage-Bruxellimage, foregrounded the alliance between Wallimage and CRRAV (currently known as Pictanovo) of the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region as a means of providing the film fund with initial 'credibility'. In this nascent period of Wallimage's existence, the regional film fund experienced difficulties in co-producing with the 'national' film funds of France, the United Kingdom and Italy. The fund consequently drew upon the perceived shared cinematic culture and filmmaking traditions of the late 1990s and early 2000s. By co-producing film projects with Nord-pas-de-Calais, Wallimage thus gained international exposure and recognition for their film productions. Between 2002 and 2005, the two regional film funds produced three feature length films, *Va, petite!/Go, little one!* (Alain Guesnier, 2002) *Entre ses mains/ In his hands* (Anne Fontaine, 2005), and *Cages*. However, Wallonia does not feature as the location for any of these film projects, as the strings attached to the funding required each region to play to their strengths. In the early 2000s, Nord-pas-de-Calais did not have post-production facilities for film projects, which therefore necessitated the editing and special effects of these films to take place in Liège,

Wallonia and all on-location shooting to occur in Nord-pas-de-Calais. The contiguous nature of the collaboration is a starting point for an expanded level of funding on a devolved ‘regional’ level that is no longer mutually exclusive between funding institutions in France and Wallonia.

The cross-border pooling of finance is also formed within a wider network of regional film funds and institutions, currently known as Ciné-regio. In 2005, Ciné-regio was created through support from INTERREG IIC and the European Regional Development fund, which provided 600.000 Euros (Lange and Wescott 2004, 18). The trial system lasted from 2003 to 2005 in the form of the ECRIF-AV (European Co-ordination of Regional Investment Funds – Audiovisual). Wallimage led the bidding process for this network, alongside the Film Fonds Wien (Austria), Lecce Province (Italy), Medien-und Filmgesellschaft Baden-Württemberg (Germany), and the Rotterdam Film Fund (the Netherlands).⁸ A larger ‘regional’ funding framework was instigated by a cinematically ‘small nation’ in order to ameliorate production levels and draw upon the mechanisms and incentives in place beyond the French-Belgian binary.

The network’s primary aims and objectives are to support a regional infrastructure, promote local and regional identities and to also encourage co-development and co-production initiatives. This in turn fosters exchanges of talent, finance and the use of post-production facilities between filmmaking regions. The role of such a network further nuances the discussion on co-productions as an agreement between two states as corporate actors, and highlights the increasing visibility of the regional and more localized film funds as part of this complex organization of film finance.

In the case of Wallimage, the aims of promoting local and regional identities have not necessarily been fully realized within this established framework. For instance, the four Wallimage projects *All Good Children* (Alicia Duffy, 2010), *Cages, Ne te retourne pas/ Don’t Look Back* (Marina de Van, 2009) and *La Cantante de Tango/ The Tango Singer* (Diego Martínez Vignatti, 2009) point to a greater diversification of film funding between regions – Flanders Audiovisual Fund, Rotterdam Film Fund, CRRAV, Apulia Film Fund - and nations on a global scale – France, Italy, Ireland, Holland and Argentina. In essence, these film projects are at once ‘transnational’ by virtue of their funding, and ‘regional’ in terms of the inclusion of regional film funds in this organization. However,

⁸ Ciné-regio membership has increased since the network’s formation in 2005 to a current figure of 43 film funds (as of 2014). See: <http://www.cine-regio.org/members/>

locations, subjects and regional articulations are markedly absent in the films' textual forms. Instead, these projects are present in Belgium – and in particular Wallonia – for post-production purposes. Two newspaper articles in *La Libre* (Gillet 2010; VdB 2014) point to this development of the post-production sector in Wallonia, describing it as both 'Hollywood-sur-Meuse' and as a 'veritable hotspot' of film production.

Distribution and Exhibition: cross-cultural exchanges between France and Belgium

The second strand to this 'transnational regional' concept pertains to trends in distribution and exhibition, and the extent to which films are able to operate seamlessly in different national contexts. As previously outlined in the introduction to this article, the 2013 Cinema Communication placed an emphasis on the presence of a 'regional market'. This interpretation of the 'region' is one that can be seen to operate on a transnational or supra-national level in the form of an enlarged European distribution and exhibition market. Galt (2006, 6) outlines an internal hierarchy in which European films are defined by their difference from others available on the 'art film' circuit. There is a certain 'economic' and 'cultural capital' assigned to specific national cinemas, particularly from countries with a grand filmmaking heritage (i.e. France) (Galt 2006, 6). Indeed, it is also possible to posit the existence of smaller 'regional' markets with films habitually crossing over into different contiguous and linguistically similar national contexts. For example, Marshall (2012, 38) argues that the Belgian and Swiss film markets can be seen to function as an extension of the French market. In Belgium, French films generally have a share around 15% of the domestic market, and in Switzerland the share in 2012 was 16.67% (Swiss Films 2013, 17).

The General Secretary for the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, Frédéric Delor, claimed that '(o)ur domestic market is very permeable to films from France. There is no distinction between Belgian films and French films.' (Delor, in Biourge 2014).⁹ In this sense, there is a conflation between French films and francophone Belgian films in the domestic Belgian market. France produces and distributes a larger number of films per year, which introduces high levels of competition for 'national' Belgian films – in French – in their own domestic market. For example, in 2013, France distributed 70 films to

⁹ Delor (Biourge 2014) further notes that this is not the case for Flemish films due to the lack of competition from its linguistic neighbour. In 2013, the Netherlands distributed only 10 films to Belgium (3.0% of the market) (CCA 2013).

Belgium (21.2% of total films circulated in Belgium), whereas 23 ‘national’ or Belgian films (6.9%) were circulated overall (CCA 2013). The performance of French films in Belgium highlight its ‘economic capital’ – as opposed to its ‘cultural capital’ – since the most-watched films cohere with Bourdieu’s (2010, 24-26) notion of the ‘popular aesthetic’. These films are simply organized, light-hearted and include well-known actors. For instance, since 2008 the top-performing French films distributed in Belgium have been comedies, such as *Bienvenue chez les Ch’ch’is/ Welcome to the Sticks* (Dany Boon, 2008) [1.075.497] and *Intouchables* (Nakache and Toledano, 2011) [576.071] (EAO, 2015). Both of these films were circulated in large multiplex and chain cinemas – such as Kinopolis – on release in Belgium, which further suggests that these films are less vested in ‘cultural capital’. The comedy genre does not generally export well across national markets due to its requirements for a spectator to understand its cultural context and – certainly in the case of *Bienvenue chez les Ch’ch’is* – linguistic particularities. Marshall (2012, 45) draws upon this film example to further posit a challenge to a nation-centric reading of the film and its exhibition. This recalls the earlier approach to cinematic transnationalism, and more precisely suggests the creation of a contiguous ‘regional’ film market predicated upon ‘shared culture’. The permeability of the Belgian domestic market presents only a partial view of Belgium’s modes of exhibition, since its bifurcation presents difficulties (and opportunities) for its own film production.

In 2013, the national market share for Belgian films in Belgium was 9.59%, and in Switzerland the share of Swiss films was 5.2% (Marché du Film 2013, 36). When comparing this share to other cinemas of ‘small’ nations (Hjort and Petrie 2007), the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands all recorded a more favourable national market share (16.3% in the Netherlands, Denmark 28.7%, Finland 28%, Sweden 24.1% and Norway 17.9%) (Marché du Film 2013, 36-38). These box office statistics therefore foreground some of the complexities in referring to a ‘national’ film market in countries that are linguistically divided. In terms of film promotion, the Centre du Cinéma et de l’Audiovisuel (CCA) has been actively attempting to reconcile the aforementioned cultural differences on a ‘national’ level between the two distinct francophone ‘regional’ cinemas and to create a ‘francophone Belgian film identity’. This is borne out through the creation of the Magritte awards in 2010 and the online portal Cinévox in 2011 (‘CCA: Décloisonner et rapprocher’ 2014, 1). Both of these strategies were initially designed to provide francophone Belgian filmmakers with a coherent platform for ‘national’ recognition and valorization. This consequently begins to disassociate regional and

cultural differences evident at a textual level from the distribution, exhibition and reception of francophone Belgian films nationally.

Despite the low market share in Belgium for ‘national’ films or majority Belgian co-productions, the French market presents an opportunity for (francophone) Belgian films to receive higher levels of film admissions. Philippe Reynaert (2011, personal communication) noted that France is considered the ‘true interior market’ for Belgian films due to its higher levels of cinema attendance and its number of screens in comparison to Belgium. This is borne out in the CCA’s annual summary, which combines the number of film admissions from the two countries in order to assess the perceived ‘success’ of French-language films. Tables 1(a) and 1(b) tease out the continuities in this overall summary, and clearly highlight the extent to which the French market contributes more film admissions to 100% ‘national’ funded Belgian films and majority co-productions. In essence, there is a certain level of reciprocity between exhibition attendances in the two countries. However, there is a limited diversity of francophone Belgian films being consumed in France, since only films by key francophone Belgian filmmakers constitute the largest proportion of film admissions in France from a smaller number of films circulated in the country.

Francophone Belgian films are not ‘marked’ – in terms of language - with dubbing or subtitling procedures that could initially inhibit their wide distribution in France. Bergfelder outlines that ‘a given audience’s understanding of a foreign film is rarely based on its “original” textual meaning [...] but negotiated through specific and translation and adaption processes’ (2005: 329). Differences engendered at a level of translation and cultural variation can construct a barrier for a given national audience. However, francophone Belgian films are able to easily operate within the French domestic market, which immediately points towards the ‘transnational’ as a more apposite means of considering the distribution and exhibition practices of francophone Belgian cinema. Instead, it is possible to ascertain that – from these statistics provided for a period of five years – the performance of a francophone Belgian film is more linked to the work of a recognizable filmmaker as opposed to an adherence to generic conventions. For instance, in 2014, *Deux jours, Une nuit* received 511.593 film admissions in France in comparison to 60.488 in Belgium. This constitutes approximately 41.9% of the total admissions to francophone Belgian films in France, whereas the film pertains to only 26.4% in Belgium.

The Dardenne brothers neatly exemplify a challenge to a ‘national’ interpretation of francophone Belgian exhibition practices, drawing on a means of distribution that requires valorization in France and a decoding by international film critics. Since 1999, their films have been selected at the Cannes film festival every three years. The attention received at the festival is used as a springboard for the release of their films in French and Belgian markets. For instance, the release date of *Deux jours, Une nuit* in the two countries was also carefully selected to correspond with its opening night at Cannes the day before. This method of release draws upon knowledge of the filmmakers’ corpus of work, and appeals to a specific audience both in France and across Europe. However, film critics in Belgium and in France and selection committees at international film festivals have foregrounded a rather limited interpretation of francophone Belgian cinema. Luc Dardenne laments that these selection committees capture Belgian cinema as a ‘cinema of [economic] depression and poverty’ (2015, 174). The value judgments point towards a valorization of certain filmmakers, such as Lucas Belvaux, Joachim Lafosse and Bouli Lanners, whose films perform best in France and Belgium. A ‘national’ hermeneutics of their works is problematized through the appeal of the films across national borders, which speaks to the existence of cultural imbrications and shared concerns between the two countries.

Table 1(a): francophone Belgian films circulated in Belgium (2010-2014)¹⁰

Year	Number of films circulated	Film admissions
2010	17	537.072
2011	14	681.246
2012	29	690.398
2013	28	152.853
2014	23	228.737

(Source: compiled from CCA, email communication)

Table 1(b): francophone Belgian films circulated in France (2010-2014)

Year	Number of films circulated	Film admissions
2010	13	1.562.502
2011	13	686.031

¹⁰ The statistics included in the two tables pertain to French-language films that have received 100% funding from Belgium or are considered majority Belgian co-productions by the CCA.

2012	23	2.444.204
2013	15	1.720.453
2014	18	1.191.373

(Source: compiled from CCA, email communication)

Conclusion

In this article, I have outlined an approach that takes into account two key tendencies in the francophone Belgian film industry. The high levels of transnational economic co-operation with France require a focus on the combination of the transnational and the regional that are working in unison. The typologies of the transnational approach to funding, as outlined by Hjort (2009, 15-30), are important to consider at this point, since the fiscal incentives for co-productions can emerge from a variety of different strands, from opportunism to affinitive connections. As this article demonstrates, film funding for francophone Belgian films emerges through the transnational (with France), the ‘national’ (Tax Shelter and linguistic communities), the regional (Wallimage), and a larger regional film network (Ciné-regio). The discussion of exhibition practices highlights how French and francophone Belgian films are able to float between two different national contexts in what has been recognized – by decision-makers in the Belgian film industry – as an enlarged ‘interior market’. This tendency points towards the ‘regional’ in its contiguous form as a suitable partner for a discussion of cinematic transnationalism in film markets, as the European Commission begins to recognize the significance of the ‘region’ in contemporary European cinema.

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