Abstract
The purpose of this article is to analyse the role played by the category of ‘nationality’ in global SVOD (Subscription video on demand) services by looking at Netflix and its presence in the European context, with a focus on two key audio-visual markets such as the British and Italian ones. We argue that the persistence of the concept of ‘nationality’ on streaming services, albeit arguably marginal, suggests a new understanding of its function within contemporary media conglomerates.

More in particular, the analysis of the presence of national productions in the British and Italian Netflix catalogues focuses on their availability and discoverability, considering what features the SVOD service finds pertinent to assign a ‘national’ belonging, and how such a ‘label’ of nationality works to guide the user within the catalogue. The question of availability, therefore, frames the idea of national from a production perspective, engaging with elements of cultural policy and EU protective measures. The discoverability instead dictates a pragmatic or consumption-based approach, encouraging an understanding of the concept of national for its function as identifier in the labelling, tagging and categorisation of online catalogues. On the one hand, this approach re-establishes all the complexity, the fluidity, and the mutable persistence of the national concept in media production, circulation, and consumption. On the other, it shows that the idea of national plays a marginal role in the discoverability of the Netflix catalogue, and that a global ‘portal-as-brand’ strategy definitely prevails over ‘nation-as-brand’ strategies.

Keywords
Netflix; national cinema; European cinema; SVOD; discoverability.
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1. Introduction

Since the mid-1990s, the concept of national cinema has been at the centre of several debates within film studies, which have attempted to redefine it and reframe its use and development in a period of technological, economic, and socio-political changes. From the impact of new media1 to the increasing transnational dimension of the screen indus-
try, the new focus on globalization and post-nationalism led to a re-evaluation of the idea of ‘national’ and its function within the discipline. However, as John Hill did not fail to notice, “despite the pronouncement of the death of the ‘national’ by a number of writers, discourses of the ‘national’ do, nevertheless, continue to structure and inform how films of various kinds are categorized, funded, promoted and made sense of by a range of social actors ranging from politicians and civil servants to filmmakers, critics and audiences”.

The persistence of the national can be easily found in film policy and its definition of ‘nationality’ aimed to provide production support and protectionist measures. Moreover, the national is still present in its “generic function”, creating sets of expectations and working within marketing strategies. By looking at national cinema from a consumption-based approach we can also grasp its recurrence, alongside genres, in the categorization and organization of online catalogues.

The purpose of this article is therefore to analyse the role played by the category of ‘nationality’ in global SVOD (Subscription video on demand) services by looking at Netflix and its presence in the European context, with a focus on two key audio-visual markets: those of the UK and Italy. We argue that the persistence of the concept of ‘nationality’ on streaming services, albeit arguably marginal, suggests a new understanding of its function within contemporary media conglomerates.

2. THE ROLE OF NETFLIX IN BRITISH AND ITALIAN AUDIOVISUAL MARKETS

In the VOD (Video on demand) sector, SVOD services such as Netflix represent a new, disruptive force to established distribution models. Different from TVOD (Transactional video on demand), which can be seen as an online substitute for physical video (rental and purchase), the SVOD model better meets the needs of a new, pervasive “on demand culture”. This expression was used by Chuck Tryon to define a widespread promise and expectation of access “anytime, anywhere”, or, more precisely, of new forms of immediate, personalized, ubiquitous and expanded access to films and television shows. Within the SVOD model, viewers are looking for a particular ‘branded’ experience, a curatorial approach and, above all, a seemingly endless catalogue that is accessible by paying a monthly fee.

SVOD has also been considered an “attack on […] the elements of exclusivity and timing upon which windows are constructed”. Indeed, it undermines the primacy

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of theatrical release, bypassing it or encouraging day and date release strategies, and threatens the control exerted by traditional intermediaries, as the on-going conflict between Cannes film festival and Netflix shows very well.

Moreover, SVOD services like Netflix and Amazon largely invest in original content: the development of original productions allows them both to offer some easily recognizable ‘branded’ hits to a new customer base, and to penetrate new markets investing in local productions, problematizing once more the idea of national belonging. Netflix clearly epitomizes the SVOD model and, helpfully for our argument, it features a pan-European presence; a high penetration rate and market share; and a strong reliance on generic organization of its catalogues, making it an ideal case study. Netflix’s new investment plan for European productions not only challenges traditional broadcasters across Europe but, as we shall discuss later, contributes to on-going debates regarding economic-driven cultural policy and production-based understanding of the concept of the national.

On this occasion, our analysis of the presence of Netflix in Europe will focus on its offering in the UK and Italy. What is more relevant to our analysis is that the two markets represent the different ends of the company’s European expansion and of the penetration of the SVOD model. While the UK was the first territory where Netflix launched in Europe in 2012, Italy joined at a later stage in 2015, when the presence on the continent of the SVOD service was already well established. In 2016, the UK stood out with a SVOD penetration rate of 43%, whereas Italy registered only 9%. Among the SVOD services, Netflix had a market share of 61% in the UK and 53% in Italy. In this respect, studying the UK and Italy allows to draw a comparison between two catalogues which significantly differ in the amount and diversity of titles, in two differently-shaped SVOD markets that present a huge difference in revenues – 804 million EUR for UK and 99m in Italy.

Despite the differences between SVOD markets, the two countries are among the traditional ‘great five’ of national production within the European screen industry sector. From 2011 to 2015, they represented – along with France, Germany, and Spain – 65% of total European film production. On average, 271 films were produced per year in the UK and 169 in Italy, making a significant influx of national cinema in the respective local markets.

The UK is also a dominant force in national TV production, having made 112.5 titles between 2015 and 2016, representing 12% of all European production – while Italy only accounts for a much smaller 4% (40.5 titles).

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9 Based on a sharp conflict started in 2017, the 2018 Cannes film festival has changed its regulation and prevented movies without a theatrical distribution to be selected for the official competition.
10 If the rights have not previously been sold to a national Pay TV, as was the case for House of Cards in Italy prior to Netflix availability.
11 Netflix holds an approximate 47% of the total number of over-the-top (OTT) SVOD subscribers in the EU.
The analysis of the presence of national productions in the British and Italian Netflix catalogues will focus on their availability and discoverability, considering in particular what features the SVOD service finds pertinent to assign a ‘national’ belonging, and how such a ‘label’ of nationality works to guide the user within the catalogue. The question of availability, therefore, frames the idea of national from a production perspective, engaging with elements of cultural policy and EU protective measures. Discoverability instead dictates a pragmatic approach, encouraging an understanding of the concept of national for its function as identifier in the labelling, tagging and categorization of online catalogues. Hence, it re-establishes the importance of national cinema as a constructive taxonomic tool, that is just as constructive as ‘authorship’, ‘genre’, and ‘period’.

3. NATIONALITY AS COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: AVAILABILITY IN THE EUROPEAN MARKET

The availability of national screen productions in a given market – namely, films or TV productions for which the first (or main) country of origin corresponds to the country in which the SVOD catalogue is offered – has been at the centre of a series of specific reports\(^\text{18}\). Indeed, this issue is becoming increasingly important in light of the EU DSM (Digital Single Market) policies and the revision of the AVMSD (Audiovisual Media Services Directive)\(^\text{19}\), which imply cross-border portability\(^\text{20}\), cross-border access\(^\text{21}\), and especially new programming and investment obligations for the promotion of European works. In order to provide European citizens with richer access to online cultural goods and to support the European creative industries, these measures create a common regulatory framework for both linear and non-linear audiovisual media that fits the digital age, thus compelling global Internet companies to make a greater effort to support the local audiovisual cultures and economies in which they operate.

Under the DSM strategy and the revised Directive, VOD services will need to ensure at least a 30% share of European works (without further specifications about nationality), in their catalogues, and provide them a good visibility (prominence). Moreover, member states will have the power to impose a financial contribution for the production of European works and to impose fees on providers of on-demand services in their territory, even if the providers are based in other member states\(^\text{22}\).

National laws pursue the same objectives, and combine support for European productions with that for national audiovisual industries. For instance, the most recent obligations in the promotion of national and European content were introduced in Italy

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by law no. 220/2016, which at present governs the entire Italian audiovisual sector, and specified in the legislative decree no. 204 of December 7, 2017. The ruling establishes that specific quotas of European works – 30% of the total hours – and “audiovisual works of Italian original expression” – 15% of the total amount of hours – must be included in VOD catalogues. It also specifies investment commitments and the obligation to give prominence, and delegates the task of preparing implementation regulation to the Italian Communication Authority.

In this respect, it is worth noting that most of the currently available data about the accessibility of European works and of film and TV content is based on a ‘productive’ definition of ‘national content’ (content produced in the same country in which the catalogue is offered) that may ultimately not match the ‘legislative’ definitions proposed by other national laws. The Italian case is a good example of this, since the current notions of audiovisual/cinematic work “of Italian original expression” do not include the country of origin as a necessary criterion to be considered as Italian.

In addition to being relevant to the current national and European policies supporting the creative sector, a quantitative overview of the availability of national screen production across the continent also supplies an essential framework for the issue of discoverability. In other words, it is important to estimate how many European national and non-national items a certain catalogue offers, before being able to analyse how these items are positioned into the catalogue through recommendation systems.

The most updated and reliable data is released by the EAO, the European Audiovisual Observatory. In the entire SVOD European market, European (EU28) cinema has a 19% share, of which 3% is national cinema. If we limit the scope to just Netflix’s European offering, the average shares are lower, respectively 16% and 2%. Overall, the share of EU films ranges from 21% in the catalogues in France and Spain to 12% in Portugal. Looking at the Italian Netflix catalogue (1590 films) the presence of European films is about 21%, of which 4% are national productions. The UK catalogue (2490 films), instead, shows a predominance of national cinema in the European productions offered: of a share of 17%, 10% are films made by the UK. In general, in the European market, the share of national cinema ranges from 10% in the UK to 0% in many countries, including Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus and the Czech Republic, among others.

As regards TV content, across the SVOD market European (EU28) fiction has a share of 21%, of which 4% is national production. Looking at Netflix alone, as with films the offering of European TV has lower shares: 15% and 1%. The percentage of European TV content in the Italian Netflix catalogue (13,798 episodes and 475 titles) is about 15%, of which 2% is national content; both are far lower than in the UK catalogue (21,646 episodes and 1282 titles), where European TV content has a share of 21%, with a predominance of national content at 15%.

No official data is available regarding the presence of specific European non-na-

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24 On the other hand, according to the inter-ministerial Decree dated February 28, 2013, in order to be considered a work “of Italian original expression” a film must present 50 per cent of dialogue in Italian.

25 All data refer to the cumulative film offering (42,236 titles). See G. Fontaine, C. Grece, Origin of Films and TV Content in VOD Catalogues & Visibility of Films on VOD Services, Strasbourg: European Audiovisual Observatory, 2016.

tional cinemas in the SVOD sector\textsuperscript{27}. The only data about the availability of non-national TV content, is limited to single titles present in 8 catalogues\textsuperscript{28}. Among the 362 different EU28 TV content titles in these catalogues, the majority come from the UK (44% or 160 titles), while Italy only takes a tiny 2% (6 titles).

Trying to collect more specific and updated empirical data, we see that the total number of items labelled as “Italian” in the Italian Netflix catalogue (at the time of writing) is 136, including 108 films and 28 TV series. Therefore, national screen productions represent 4.4\% of the entire catalogue (3065 titles)\textsuperscript{29}. Italian films amount to 4.7\% of the films offered, and TV shows to 3.6\% of the entire TV content. The total number of labelled British items is 84, including 42 films and 42 TV series. They represent 2.7\% of the entire catalogue. British films amount to 1.8\% of all movies, and TV shows to 5.4\% of entire TV content. US TV series alone (288 items) represent 37.7\% of all TV content and 9.4\% of the overall catalogue, showing the continuous dominance of the American screen industry.

In the UK Netflix catalogue, the total number of labelled British items is 551, split into 262 TV shows and 289 films, representing 10.5\% of the entire catalogue (5216) – more than twice the national production in the Italian catalogue. British films make up 8\% of the films available while the TV shows cover an impressive 17\% of the TV products offered overall.

In addition to offering a necessary background to the qualitative analysis that follows, this brief quantitative analysis is already revealing of a series of considerations of the role played by national productions in Netflix’s catalogue. First, it shows the strength and appeal of British content and especially TV productions, both in the internal market and abroad, as the Italian Netflix catalogue clearly shows. Second, the difficulty of collecting reliable empirical data about the presence of European content, and, consequently, about its internal composition in terms of European non-national screen productions, stresses the relative weakness of the European identifier in different national catalogues. Instead of the cultural diversification promoted by EU cultural policies, the catalogues promote an idea of homogeneity.

4. THE QUESTION OF ‘NATIONAL’ AND SVOD CATALOGUES: DISCOVERABILITY IN THE EUROPEAN MARKET

While availability is a quantitative notion and concerns the number of titles offered and corresponding shares, discoverability is a qualitative notion which concerns the visibility, or prominence, of specific kinds of content. That is, the multiple ways in which

\textsuperscript{27} The only official data available concern TVOD services. Among the 33,810 EU non-national films in TVOD catalogues (October 2016), Italian films account for the 6 per cent (1853 titles), far lower than UK films, 40 per cent (13,563 titles). See The Circulation of EU Non-National Films – A Sample Study: Cinema, Television and Transactional Video On Demand, Strasbourg: European Audiovisual Observatory, 2017.

\textsuperscript{28} The countries are AT; DE; DK; FI; FR; GB; NL; SE. See G. Fontaine, C. Grece, Origin of Films and TV Content in VOD Catalogues & Visibility of Films on VOD Services, Strasbourg: European Audiovisual Observatory, 2016.

\textsuperscript{29} Data was collected in June 2018. To calculate percentages, the total number of items in the catalogue is taken from Unogs, http://unogs.com, accessed July 20, 2018. Given the continuous variations occurring in SVOD catalogues, these data do not aim to provide a comprehensive overview. Rather, they simply want to suggest some trends and possible developments based on the official data provided by EAO, while offering an appropriate framework to discuss discoverability.
they are made visible in the catalogue through content structure, navigation categories, search options, and recommendation systems.

Considering the role that the concept of nationality plays as a taxonomic tool in the organization of Netflix’s catalogue is important in view of at least two, well-defined functions. The first, closely linked with the question of availability, is the ‘top to bottom’ application of nationality following the basis of state regulations, and its presence in the catalogue is hence partially dictated by sets of policies.

As already mentioned, the revised AVMSD obliges VOD services to “give prominence” to European works in their catalogues, and such parameters are increasingly present also in national regulations. The main issue arising from these policies is of course that of the definition of “prominence”. The 2017 EAO report on the visibility of films and TV content defines “visibility” as its mention on the home page of the service, or a promotional spot 30.

The new Italian draft regulation about programming obligations for media services provides a list of criteria to assess the prominence given to European works by VOD services, both in their catalogues and promotional campaigns. Such criteria feature: the indication of the country of origin in the catalogue; the use of trailers or visuals to enhance visibility; the placement on the home page of a stable category or collection that includes all European works; the possibility to search for European works; the inclusion of at least a 20% share of European works in the content suggested through recommendation systems.

The regulation of “prominence” (at national and supranational level) is a sensitive topic since it directly affects the kind of branded experience and style of access that VOD services offer.

The second function is connected to an ‘algorithm-mediated bottom up’ approach, where the actual everyday use of the national taxonomy stresses the classificatory role of the streaming service and shapes the understanding of the concept of national in a moment of cross-border availability, by its association with other categories, labels, and genres. The national here is present in an ecosystem, generating new meanings and understandings, stressing the fluidity of the concept beyond that of policymakers.

As Morris and Powers point out in their argument about streaming music services, “in an ecosystem where many of the services offer the same catalogues of content, the affective cues and features for discovering and encountering content become the main point of differentiation” 31. In addition to representing a key strategy to “extract profit and value from the consumption process” 32, interface and curatorial mechanisms create the service’s identity, since “services demonstrate their quality through how they recommend and categorize content” 33.

Major global SVOD services like Netflix and Amazon have been mainly associated with the idea of a new, contemporary “data-driven algorithmic culture” 34, in which, 

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30 The Visibility of Films and TV Content on VOD, Strasbourg: European Audiovisual Observatory, 2017.
32 Ibid., 117.
33 Ibid., 114.
thanks to “application of metadata systems and filtering technologies to the process of program selection”\textsuperscript{35}, increasingly sophisticated recommendation systems combine popularity with personalization in order to produce “a never-ending stream of custom-tailored pleasure”\textsuperscript{36} or, more precisely, “a steady stream of programming designed to stay in touch with our changing rhythms and moods, selected and accessible with no effort on our part, anticipating our every interest and nearly infinite in its capacities”\textsuperscript{37}.

While scholars have stressed that algorithms must be conceived as “socio-technical assemblages”, “joining together the human and the nonhuman, the cultural and the computational”\textsuperscript{38}, in general discourses about algorithms, the fundamental human agency implied in any algorithmic system – namely the strong editorial activity that provides data to be processed – tends to be completely removed, in order to emphasize the efficiency and objectivity of the machine agency. Consistently with this general rhetoric about algorithms, Netflix tends to remove the role of meta-data programmers in the framework of its communication strategies, as well as the underlying tagging system\textsuperscript{39} created by Todd Yellin – as research by Gomez-Uribe and Hunt on Netflix recommender system illustrates very clearly\textsuperscript{40}.

Without any intention of retracing Netflix’s tagging practices, our aim is to discuss how the idea of nationality takes shape in content organization, navigational options, and recommendation systems. To do so we examine the different tags and labels with which it is associated, and what categories it contributes to create. Of course, we must assume that this discussion is inevitably affected by personalization and how the recommender system works. No “objectives” and exhaustive outcomes are possible from a user perspective; yet, we can detect some trends and recurring configurations. It is noteworthy that what makes it difficult to access reliable data about content organization in Netflix’s catalogue also raises doubts about obligations concerning prominence. The Netflix rhetoric and experience are all about choice and personalization. Therefore, one may wonder whether it would be acceptable that European and/or national content would be somehow ‘imposed’ on users who do not usually watch these kinds of products.

The Netflix homepage is organized in streams of ‘personalized’ content. The homepage has a key role in the Netflix experience since it is “the main presentation of recommendations, where two of every three hours streamed on Netflix are discovered”\textsuperscript{41}. The list of categories refers to the user’s previous viewings and suggests similar content, offering the impression of an infinite catalogue that takes the shape of endless, parallel flows based on the user’s taste. From this perspective, references to the country/countries can occasionally appear when they are relevant to the user’s personal activity, organized in categories such as: US Crime TV Programmes, Suspenseful International TV Shows, International Political Thrillers, Foreign Art House, European Films and Programmes, Romantic Latin American Comedies; Italian Films. It is noteworthy that


\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 178.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 177.

\textsuperscript{38} T. Striphas, “Algorithmic Culture”, 408 (note 1).

\textsuperscript{39} Known as “Netflix Quantum Theory”, that provides guidelines to create almost 80,000 unique ways to describe types of video.


\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
the use of geographical origin in the catalogue’s categories is not limited to single countries, rather it can also refer to continents (Europe) or to a heterogeneous set of countries – as in the case of the labels “international” and “foreign”, intended as “non-US”. Furthermore, national belonging is combined with various elements referring to traditional genres, adjectives, and other disparate descriptors.

More often, the national taxonomy, when present, is well hidden in the depth of the catalogue. National cinemas or TV content—those produced in a different country to that in which the catalogue is available—tend to appear as specific categories only when a user intentionally searches for them in the search engine provided by the service.

Searching for “British” in the Italian catalogue, for instance, leads to the following labels which show how nationality is combined and associated with other elements: British TV programmes; British films; British TV Comedies; British Crime Dramas; British TV Dramas; British Comedies; British Detective TV Programmes; British Crime TV Programmes; British TV Mysteries. Similar terms appear also in the British catalogue. However, searching for “English” in the Italian catalogue offers an understanding of nationality which has thematic connotations such as: umorismo inglese (British humour), commedie con umorismo inglese (comedies with British humour). In the British catalogues, instead, English refers mainly to audio options and a category “ESL English as Second language”.

Italian content appears to be organized differently. Searching for “Italian”, the following labels become accessible: Italian Films, Italian Films and TV, Italian-language films; Award-Winning Italian Movies; Audio in Italian; Italian TV; Critically-acclaimed Italian Films; Discovering Italy; Italian Comedies.

Some relevant differences immediately emerge: the categories available through the search engine emphasize British TV more than British cinema, but Italian cinema more than Italian TV. While British production is mainly characterized through genres, and crime evidently prevails, Italian cinema is instead characterized by its aesthetic qualities, stressing its cultural capital (the references to film criticism and awards). A number of labels do not match with the productive or regulatory definitions of national cinema, suggesting instead a different kind of thematization of nationhood, also recurring to national stereotypes such as Italian beautiful locations (“Discovering Italy”) and British humour.

The last issue on the presence of the concept of national within Netflix’s catalogue concerns the description of the product and user reviews. The textual description usually lists no more than four genres and subgenres while, in most of the cases, neither the origin nor the available languages for audio tracks and subtitles are mentioned. References to nationality used to recur regularly in user reviews (before their complete removal42), showing that nationality persists as a relevant element in consumption, interpretation, and assessment.

Let us consider, for instance, the case of the TV crime drama Broadchurch (ITV, 2013-2017) in the Italian catalogue43. The show was particularly appreciated for its capacity to allow the Italian public to discover little-known, suggestive landscapes and


43 User reviews were collected on 13 July 2018. Broadchurch had a significantly higher number of reviews (71), when compared to other British crime TV shows such as Paranoid (ITV 2016; 11 reviews), Collateral (BBC Two 2018; 21 reviews), Happy Valley (BBC One 2014-; 19), Marcella (ITV 2016-; 27), River (BBC One 2015; 29), and Doctor Foster (BBC One 2015-; 32).
locations in the United Kingdom. Actors and characters are highly praised, to the extent that the original version is recommended in order to enjoy the accent of the protagonists. Although we can presume cultural proximity between the US and UK (one user recommends the show “to fans of the ‘Twin Peaks genre’”)\textsuperscript{44}, it is interesting to note that Italian user reviews often underline differences from US series while interpreting the UK product for its cultural proximity – for instance as the characters look “normal” and not like “supermen, as often happens in American series and films”. Another example of such comparison between UK and US comes from a reviewer who states: “Such a beautiful atmosphere: in the useless American remake this is one of the main missing ingredients”. In one case, nationality is the crucial interpretive key: “A classic English crime: rural town, crimes, ambiguous characters and jealousies”. In another comment, the reference to nationality allows to make a comparison with the Italian production: “I would like one day to see Italian products of this quality, but I am afraid that there will be a long wait”. Even those who did not appreciate the series refer to nationality, as in the comment “sometime, even British people get it wrong”.

Generally speaking, users assume that British productions, like Nordic crime shows, provide quality assurance. Users regularly appreciate the acting style, the authenticity and psychological development of the characters, and how British shows succeed in interpreting the crime genre while providing a ‘snapshot’ of the United Kingdom today, offering insights into contemporary issues such as Brexit and immigration.

5. WHAT ITALIAN CINEMA IS FOR NETFLIX UK

Looking instead at the national taxonomy of “Italian” as present in the UK catalogue, we focused on the category “Italian Films” in order to discuss the understanding of Italian national cinema that emerges therein. While the availability of Italian TV shows is quite limited, in particular in terms of variety\textsuperscript{45}, the 22 texts associated with “Italian films”, represent a very diversified offering in terms of genre belonging, production background and ambition\textsuperscript{46}. In fact, the list features prestigious national productions; international co-productions; TV products (some of which lasts one hour or less); and independent low-budget documentaries. There is quite a transversal offering of high-, middle- and low-brow products, and it includes films by internationally recognized directors such as Matteo Garrone, Mario Martone, Gabriele Muccino and Paolo Sorrentino. The national label also includes a good representation of awards winners, in particular of the Italian

\textsuperscript{44} Translated from Italian by the authors.
\textsuperscript{45} In June 2018, it features 14 titles of which 10 are children’s animations like Winx Club and Geronimo Stilton.
\textsuperscript{46} As June 2018 the texts labelled ‘Italian Films’ are: Bianca come il latte, rossa come il sangue (Giacomo Campiotti, 2013); The Comfort of Strangers (Paul Schrader, 1990); Caffè sospeso (Coffee for All, Fulvio Iannucci & Roly Santos, 2017) Fiore (Claudio Giovannesi, 2016); Viaggio da sola (4 Five Star Life, Maria Sole Tognazzi, 2013); Per qualche dollaro in più (For a Few Dollars More, Sergio Leone, 1965); Rimetti a noi i nostri debiti (Forgive Us our Debts, Antonio Morabito, 2018); Francia: Chaos and Recreation (Francesco Carrozzini, 2016); La grande bellezza (The Great Beauty, Paolo Sorrentino, 2013); Il giovane favoloso (Lepardi, Mario Martone; 2014); Influx (Luca Vullu, 2016); L’estate addosso (Summer Time, Gabriele Muccino, 2016); La coppia dei campioni (Giulio Base, 2016); My Way (Antongiulio Panizzi, 2016); Numero Zero: the Roots of Italian Rap (Enrico Bini, 2015); Roberto Saviano: uno scrittore sotto scorta (Pierfrancesco Diliberto, 2016); Slam (Andrea Molaioli, 2017); Son of Pink Panther (Blake Edwards, 1993); Suburra (Stefano Sollima, 2015); Il raccontodeiracconti (Tale of Tales, Matteo Garrone, 2015); Taratatong (Migliazzi and Bondi, 2009); Too Much Stress for My Heart (Ludovica Lirosi, 2015); Benvenuto Presidente! (Welcome Mr. President!, Riccardo Milani, 2013).
David di Donatello award, and, among the feature films, there is a predominance of films produced with the support of the cinema division of the Italian public Broadcaster RAI, as well as, with minor impact, the Italian Cultural Ministry.

The generic division of the Italian film category shows a clear predominance of documentary films and drama, albeit the documentary category features a majority of low-budget non-theatrical products. According to White, a sustained and diverse tradition is a standard feature in national cinema, which must include the following sectors: “feature-length narrative (commercial), feature-length and short narrative (semi-commercial/independently produced), documentary (independent or government-subsidised), avant-garde (fully non-commercial), political/Third Cinema”\textsuperscript{47}. With the exclusion of the last two sectors, the others are represented in the presence of Italian films in Netflix UK, hence potentially showing a comprehensive picture of the national production. However, the attempt to grasp an understanding of Italian cinema in the UK by looking at Netflix is challenging.

From a productive perspective, half of the films available are international co-productions, and for two of those films (\textit{The Son of the Pink Panther} and \textit{The Comfort of Strangers}) are shot by non-Italian directors, underlying again the fluidity of the concept of national cinema in a ‘transnational era’. Interestingly, even the original language available in the soundtrack does not help to clarify the Italianness of the category, with almost $1/3$ of those films which are available on Netflix exclusively in English.

Unsurprisingly, Netflix’s offering focuses on contemporary cinema, with $19$ of $23$ films in the list produced in the past five years, thus making the portrayal of national cinema a contemporary and ephemeral snapshot. Consequently, such a portrayal is mainly focused on synchronicity and avoids a diachronic approach to the taxonomy, therefore posing certain questions about legacy and sustained tradition\textsuperscript{48}.

Considering the distribution of the texts labelled as ‘Italian films’, we can grasp how Netflix does not seem to rely on the user’s previous knowledge through the kind of press coverage following the theatrical exhibition. Only seven of the films offered had in fact a theatrical distribution in the UK, including \textit{For a Few Dollars More}, \textit{The Son of the Pink Panther} and \textit{The Comfort of Strangers}. Therefore, only four of those released in the 2010s could potentially rely on the cultural capital generated by their distribution, reception and promotion in the UK market. Undoubtedly, \textit{Suburra} and \textit{The Great Beauty} are the films that received a wide European distribution and a presence in British theatres\textsuperscript{49} and are also the two products in the list that attracted the majority of user reviews. In particular, focusing on the crime genre, the British reviews of the film \textit{Suburra} provide an interesting parallel with the Italian users’ reviews of the TV series \textit{Broadchurch}. The national connotations emerge mainly to stress the difference of the film in respect to Hollywood canon – “it is not a Hollywood gore fest” – or for a comparative approach with reference to the genre belonging, with a user writing, “These Italians are Scandinavia and Latin America for the gangster flicks. Original!! Political!! Real life!! Hollywood is a joke, but that’s old news”. However, on this occasion, the reviews feature few references to Italian films, and at most in generic ways: “it looks

\textsuperscript{47} White, “National Belonging”, 225.

\textsuperscript{48} For instance, few weeks after our study of the catalogue’s content, the films \textit{The Great Beauty} (from 2013) and \textit{Tale of Tales} (2015) were pulled from Netflix catalogue.

\textsuperscript{49} According to EAO Lumière, from 2013 to 2016 \textit{The Great Beauty} totalled $155,732$ single admissions in UK while \textit{Suburra} is a distant second among the Italian films in June 2018 Netflix UK catalogue with $5,113$ single admissions.
like there is a new strand of talented Italian directors”. That again raises the question of which kind of picture of Italian national cinema emerges from Netflix UK.

The SVOD service, in its attempt to personalize and categorize the catalogue and feed the algorithms, offers also a set of metadata based on general adjectives that can be associated with a given film/TV show. Looking at the products categorized as “Italian Cinema” we have the following adjectives/labels with their recurrences in brackets. For Netflix UK, Italian cinema is: Dark, Wacky (three each); Romantic, Gritty, Witty, Imaginative, Understated (two each); Scary, Feel Good, Steamy, Provocative, Emotional, Inspiring (one each).

Despite the clear use of national cinema as taxonomic tool, Netflix UK does not offer an informed, diachronic, cultural understanding of Italian cinema based on distribution, availability and consumption history. The lack of a diachronic overview, the dominance of indie documentaries, the problematic role played by some national identifier (languages, settings, director, production etc.) compromises Netflix’s potential to offer a reflection on national cinema in the UK market.

Looking at the genres available is quite revealing of the disconnection between this taxonomy and the cultural capital associated with Italian cinema in different venues of film consumption and exhibition in UK. We are thinking for instance, of the lack of Italian Horror films in the offering, which is arguably the Italian genre with the biggest sub-cultural capital in the UK.

The branding of Netflix constantly overshadows other cultural signifiers. The “Italian films” category re-establishes the idea of branding, mirroring features associated with global international cinema and ignoring the specificities of the UK market and the cultural impact of national cinema with its audiences. Or, more clearly, there is an attempt to frame Italian cinema in terms of continuity and a seamless flow with the rest of the catalogue. The adjectives used as labelling devices stress the universality of the film qualities (‘dark’, ‘wacky’, etc.) instead of underlying any uniqueness or distinctiveness. Italian cinema as a taxonomy goes beyond national specificities, it appears to exist only to point to something else or, better, to lead the user back to the wider offering of the catalogue and to Netflix’s label as a global cultural signifier.

6. CONCLUSIONS: A QUESTION OF BRANDING

The European expansion of SVOD services allows new reflections on the role played by the concept of national production from a consumption-based approach. Interestingly, such an approach re-establishes all of the complexity, fluidity, and the mutable persistence of the national concept in media production, circulation, and consumption. From supranational and national policies dictating national quotas – while shifting the definition of national belonging, on the basis of ‘cultural tests’ – to the use of national labels as taxonomic tools to manage expectations and organize media offerings, SVOD services embody some of the key debates which have surrounded the idea of national cinema in the past 40 years. These debates can ultimately regroup the persistence of the ‘national’ within the two crucial areas for SVOD and online distribution: availability and discoverability. The ubiquitous presence of Netflix, on the one hand, has offered new

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possibilities for a cross-border availability of European productions (in particular TV), inviting possible speculation on the creation of new cultural capital and understanding of a national production in a given market. On the other hand, the idea of nationality has played only a marginal role in the discoverability of the catalogue, alongside the use of metadata that is immediately associated with broader generic labels, which in turn can create personalized paths in Netflix’s catalogue.

In his recent analyses of SVOD’s challenge to traditional television network branding, Michael L. Wayne illustrates how “Netflix’s user interface obscured the branded origins of television content in order to better position themselves as the audience’s primary point of identification”51. Netflix, in fact, seems to employ a “portal-as-brand” strategy (different to the programme-as-brand employed, for instance, by HBO), creating a brand at the expense of network identities and the production origin of its content. The use of the label “Netflix Originals” to market a show for which they own exclusive rights in a country is an example of Netflix’s prioritization of its own brand over the production (and national) origin of a text52. If we consider the role played by national cinema as a marketing strategy, as “an attempt to market the diverse as […] offering a coherent and singular experience”53, we can grasp how the concept of nationality can be understood as a branding practice and, as such, it is now facing the challenge of SVOD services – in a way not unlike traditional television network branding.

Without doubt, as we have sought to argue, the ‘national’ exists in Netflix as a taxonomic tool, an identifier that TV networks and production companies do not have (they are not present in the metadata). However, such a taxonomy is far from being relevant per se. The idea of nationality that emerges from this tool not only focuses on a synchronic understanding, but it aims to reinforce the global brand of Netflix rather than re-establishing a national one.

53 Higson, “‘The Concept of National Cinema”, 38.