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A Necessary Fiction: the Ritualisation of Stakeholder Practices in New Zealand Cinema

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ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that stability of the concept 'national cinema' is located in the discursive positioning of individual films in such a way that they are connected to a national 'common ground', one which is ritually accessed via engagement with media such as cinema. This positioning, however, is not quantifiable and may not be identified as arising from any particular production practice, dimension of popularity, theme, style, characteristic of production personnel, and so on.

By synthesising the work of several theorists and applying this synthesis to a selection of films, a framework of ideas (around the ritualised 'flagging' of the national via the expression of stakeholder interests) is applied to cinema in New Zealand. In particular, an ideoscape is ultimately mapped as a result of applying this framework of ideas. The normative assumptions of national cinema are examined in this way and found to be lacking despite the weight that the term 'national cinema' continues to have.

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GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

CNZ	Creative New Zealand
FF2	Film Fund 2
FIWP	Film Industry Working Party of the QEII Arts Council
FPF	Film Production Fund
IFC	New Zealand Interim Film Commission
IRD	Inland Revenue Department
LBSPF	Large Budget Screen Production Fund
MCH	Ministry for Culture and Heritage
MED	Ministry of Economic Development
MIC	Moving Image Centre
NFU	National Film Unit
NZFC	New Zealand Film Commission
NZOA	New Zealand On Air
QEII Arts Council	Queen Elizabeth the Second Arts Council
SDGNZ	Screen Directors' Guild of New Zealand
SPADA	The Screen Production and Development Association
SPIT	Screen Production Industry Taskforce
TMP	Te Mangai Paho
TVNZ	Television New Zealand
WIFT	Women in Film and Television

PREFACE

When I first embarked on this thesis, I was interested in why governments, or more particularly the New Zealand government, funded cinema. I was interested in this because during the 1980s and 1990s, successive New Zealand governments cut funding to many services that were once considered core. And yet, despite cuts to film funding, these governments continued to subsidise film production. I wanted to understand why this was. However, on my way to understanding this continued film funding I got waylaid, trying to understand what the relevant literature meant by the term 'national cinema'. And so, this thesis is about national cinema.

This work faces several dilemmas at the outset: Is national cinema an empirical reality that can be found in a body of films? Perhaps it exists because a body of films has a list of common characteristics that differ from those characterising some other body of films, deriving from some other national context(s)? Or is national cinema really just the product of some clever reading of a body of films – one which claims, or even results from claims of, a common rootedness in their national origins? Or again, is national cinema less to do with films themselves and more to do with geographically-bounded industries? Or is it predicated on government interest, either in cinema as a national economic activity, or as a form of cultural maintenance? And there is always the possibility that national cinema is only a product of language that has no real point of reference at all.

By examining the national cinema literature, and then in turn applying the ideas found there to an investigation of first the New Zealand cinema production industry, and then five films made within that context, I have found that there is no straightforward formulation to be found in the literature as to the nature of national cinema. Faced with this absence, I have formulated a theoretical framework that accounts for the persistence of the idea of national cinema, one that provides a way of talking about the notion of national cinema that takes into account the resonance that certain films have with a national audience. And, in doing so, I think I have constituted a theoretical framework

that at least partially explains just why it is that governments continue to fund cinema production.

INTRODUCTION: THE CONCEPT OF NATIONAL CINEMA

This thesis argues that the stability of the concept *national cinema* is not to be found in particular film texts, but rather resides in actions and processes. This argument is grounded in Nick Couldry's formulation of media ritual (2003), which posits that media function as cultural touchstones, creating the sense of a cultural (here, national) centre.¹ While, as I will show, the concept of national cinema is easily undermined by scrutiny, it nonetheless continues to hold meaning for the range of stakeholders who engage with it. And it is this engagement, or *stakeholder practice*, that gives the concept of national cinema its legitimacy.

Despite widespread acceptance of the term *national cinema* in contexts as varied as academic literature, popular discourse, legislation and policy, the notion that a set of films or the practices of one nation's cinema industry exhibit distinctive, stable national characteristics becomes problematic when examined more deeply, due largely to the way in which the global encroaches on the national and the subjective nature of the nation. The idea of national cinema persists none the less and has currency in, for example, film theory and criticism, government policy, film marketing and media commentary, such as film reviews. The circulation of the term national cinema in both formal and popular discourses demonstrates that despite the various ways national cinema as a concept can and has been queried (or, more thoroughly, 'deconstructed'),² it still endures as both adjective and noun. An assumption here is that such persistence may not necessarily be an innocent example of discursive stubbornness in the face of countervailing evidence, but rather is clearly a concept with meaning for those who variously have stakes in it: those who work, critique, discuss and watch national cinema.

¹ Of course, this has similarities with Anderson's conception of the nation (1991 [second edition, first published 1983]), itself so reliant on the advent of the mass media.

² Some examples include Crofts 1993, 1998; Higson 1989.

In its influence over the 'national', the state is taken to be the entity, centred on a form of government, which comprises institutions and exercises responsibility, through a collective agreement, in its mandated duty to govern a nation.³ This thesis takes as a starting point the argument, put forward by Antony Smith (Smith, 2001), that a nation and a state are entities which, while they will often have a necessary relationship to each other, do not necessarily or automatically map neatly one onto the other. Following Smith, a nation is here taken to be:

a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members. (Smith, 2001, p. 14) [original italicisation]

The key points here are the territorial relationship and the commonality in myth, culture, economy and legal demarcations. Grosby echoes Smith succinctly:

The state may be loosely defined as a structure that, through institutions, exercises sovereignty over a territory using laws that relate the individuals within that territory to one another as members of the state. (Grosby, 2005, p. 22)

This emphasis on the deliberate relating of 'members' to each other as an underpinning imperative of the state is important because it reminds us that such relating may be a constructed, rather than a simple, assumed reality. The shared territory described above is the point at which the relationship between nation and state is *enacted*. This relationship is not necessarily stable; a state does not speak with legitimacy for a nation (although it may claim to), and a nation does not need a state in order to exist. The sometimes inconsistent nature of this relationship mirrors the instability of national

³ I take the difference between state and government to be that the latter is responsible for the mechanics of the former – a state is mandated to govern a nation, while a government is mandated to manage the state.

cinema's relationship with both the nation and the state.⁴ But although multiple nations may exist within the territory controlled or assumed by one state, states have historically exerted control and influence over – have fashioned – national territories and consequent relationships:

Though nationalism does not require sovereign political institutions to flourish, nevertheless the state has played a vital role in fashioning national identity as a mass public culture, through its management of the education system and, in the twentieth century, publicly controlled broadcasting. (Day and Thompson, 2004, p. 170).

However, whatever their relationships, states and nation do not exist in isolation. Rather, they are situated within the matrix of the states and nations that constitute the global milieu, where they are drawn into complex transactions and links with each other and other entities.⁵ Nations should not be considered in isolation, but rather in ways that take into account this multifaceted and inflecting context. Therefore, in order to take a view of national cinema in the global context, while at the same time taking into account this context, Arjun Appadurai's 'scapes' model (Appadurai, 1990) will be employed. Appadurai offers a useful framework for envisaging and interrogating the effects of highly mobile global systems, underpinned by the idea that the world is fragmented. His exploration of this disjuncture is elaborated in the proposal of five 'scapes' that are in complex, contradictory interaction with each other: the *ethnoscape*, *financescape*, *technoscape*, *mediascape* and *ideoscape*. These "five dimensions of global cultural flow" (Appadurai, 1990, p. 6) are permeable and interconnected.⁶ This notion of connection must be seen alongside the fact that disjuncture in the global system exists alongside notions of coherence, as in the persistence of the concept of nations (and for us national cinema). The media (which play a key role in Appadurai's schema in the form of the *mediascape*), are highly mobile

⁴ This is demonstrated more extensively in the following discussion of literature concerned with national cinema(s), and in subsequent chapters.

⁵ Such entities include multi- and intra-national organisations or commercial interests.

⁶ They are not, however, fixed. The *scapes* model does not take physical location into account. This is returned to in Chapter Four.

and able to transcend national borders to provide what Appadurai terms “landscapes of images” (Appadurai, 1990, p. 9), which is where we will look for some of the fashioning of relations evoked above. But despite the superficial usefulness of the model for the analysis of national cinema in the international⁷ context, the ‘scapes’ model does not ultimately offer enough purchase on the notion of national cinema to explore it as fully as we need to. Additional theory is required to account for the persistence of the concept of national cinema. The work of Benedict Anderson (Anderson, 1991), will be useful. Anderson argues that a central condition of nations is the shared notion that citizens belong to a community and that this belonging essentially exists in the imagination of those citizens. Michael Billig (Billig, 1997) takes Anderson’s thesis further, identifying what he terms ‘flags’, the material presence of signs and symbols that are recognised by those inside and outside the nation as representative of it. These most obviously take actual forms (such as national flags), as well as those that are more metaphorical or discursive (such as the use of ‘us’ or ‘we’ when politicians talk about the nation). This thesis will push the idea of ‘flags’ somewhat further.

Nick Couldry’s concept of media ritual (Couldry, 2003) also informs this study. Media rituals are defined by Couldry as the everyday patterns and actions facilitated by media. These are the moments, behaviours and performances enacted within what Couldry terms the ‘ritual space of the media’ (Couldry, 2003, p. 13). His work allows for, and even is based on, the notion of a common ground and the way media connect these rituals to the *sense* of a social centre,⁸ an idea which finds parallels with Anderson’s national imagining, and further has some common ground with Billig’s concept of banal nationalism. The banal flagging of the nation (as described by Billig)

⁷ I adhere to the following conventions of ‘domestic’ and ‘international’ with regard to audiences: “The domestic market is the ‘home’ market where the film or TV programme is produced, which in the case of film may or may not be the international boundaries of the country concerned. For example, in Australia an independent feature film will sometimes include New Zealand in its ‘domestic’ market. Similarly, the domestic market for US studio movies is defined as ‘North America’, that is the USA and Canada” (Investment New Zealand, p. 6).

⁸ As discussed in the following chapter, Couldry simultaneously argues for the *sense* of this centre while refuting its existence in reality.

is one way that the nation may continue to be imagined and fashioned – not least representationally – despite countervailing tendencies; indeed despite countervailing realities.

Hence, I am arguing that no existing theory or approach accounts on its own for the persistence of the notion of national cinema. When taken together, the perspectives evoked above provide the promise of a more complete theoretical framework with which to explore and engage this topic. First, a survey of understandings of national cinema is required.

The Concept of National Cinema

‘National cinema’ has been approached from a variety of perspectives and in a number of contexts, and so is clearly a concept with a wide range of stakeholders,⁹ including academics, audiences and those involved in the financing and production of cinema. It is a concept important to “public policy makers, interest groups, lobbyists, film-makers, and audiences as targets for their national cultural and national political projects and ambitions” (O’Regan 1996:67), among others who, even as they might critique it nonetheless have a stake in the concept. The following survey of the academic literature concerned with national cinema is intended to give a broad indication of the major bodies of thought around the topic, as it has been extensively considered in a range of contexts.

The concept of national cinema functions in some instances as a commonsense notion, in that its validity as a descriptor is unquestioned (for example, Ritchie, 1971). It also exists in government policy and popular discourse, generally allied with a cinema production industry and the films which are made in that industry. Such filmic texts, which in the vast majority of national cinema studies are feature films, are usually privileged in the

⁹ *Stakeholder* is a term that is important to this piece of work. It is a descriptive term which takes in the many and varied groups and individuals who have something *at stake* when it comes to national cinema. These

discourses surrounding the national in cinema. These films are often arranged into a canon of 'key' works believed to communicate something essential, or at least highly distinctive, about a national culture. While, on the face of it, these descriptions of national cinema seem quite straightforward, on closer examination the concept has less stability. It often seems, with the national in national cinema, that the moment you attempt to define it, it appears to fragment in a way that is frustratingly elusive. This is because such notions raise questions about which films to privilege, as well as whether the 'national' tag can be applied to films that, while produced within a nation's borders, are not conspicuously 'national' in any other way. Further complications arise when other factors are taken into account, such as intended audiences, actual finance sources and so on.

This inconsistent character of national cinema may be traced in part to the way any cinema industry found in any national context is deeply embedded in the international context. Trying to draw a ring around a national cinema is inevitably a frustrating exercise, as multiple considerations force themselves to be taken into account: is it possible for any one film, or even a canon or group of films, to be demonstrative of a national culture? What is 'the' national culture – which version if any (official, ethnic, subversive, popular) takes precedence? What are the relationships between cinema and the nation; how are such relationships understood to function and, further, what role does the state play and how much importance is attributed to this? Does the 'nationality' of a film or industry take into account the nationalities of those working within it? Or the source(s) of financing?

Nonetheless, the notion of national cinema continues to circulate persistently in academic literature, at various levels of government policy, in film festival literature, film publicity material, film reviews, media commentary and everyday discourse. Hence, the question becomes: how does the notion of national cinema persist? How does 'national cinema' as concept persist in the face of alternative views about what constitutes its object? Or, more broadly: how does the notion of national cinema persist in the face of global

stakes may be economic or cultural and take into those as diverse as financiers, audiences, film workers and the state.

flows of culture, technology, people and the currencies of finance and ideas?¹⁰

National Cinema: the Literature

Many academics, both theorists and historians, have written about the cinema of specific nations, variously using or not using the term 'national cinema'. In this extensive body of literature, two main approaches can be observed: one that is concerned with national cinema as a conceptual category (for example, Crofts 1993, 1998; Williams 2002), and another that seeks to investigate a specific occurrence of a 'national cinema', usually in the form of a geographically-based film industry (for example, Hayward, 1993; O'Regan, 1996; and Hake, 2001), approaching it as what Hayward terms a "territorialised historical subject" (Hayward, 2003, p.92). These approaches are generally not carried out in isolation, and often interrogations of the latter variety are informed or prefaced by in-depth considerations of the nation and its relationships to cinema (for example, Higson, 1995; Hayward, 1993; O'Regan 1996; Hake 2001).

Fundamentally, the majority of writing concerned with national cinema (or with *a* national cinema), usually assumes the term refers to the films produced within the geographic boundaries of a certain nation. Here, national cinema is taken to be a film production industry operating within a designated national territory, usually having a relationship with the state which assumes responsibility for that territory, and the films produced there, particularly those films that are argued to have a particular relationship to that nation. As such, the term national cinema is often used "in an unproblematic way to designate the range of film activities and institutions within a nation-state" (Moran, 1996, p. 8). Despite the apparent simplicity of this approach, many have grappled with the concept of national cinema, and several such

¹⁰ This latter question will be approached through engagement with Appadurai's 'scapes' model, in the following chapter, and after the following introductory survey of the pertinent national cinema literature.

writers (of whom Higson is the most often cited) have written frequently of national cinema over a number of years or decades. Even as the concept is often seemingly taken for granted, it is envisaged “messy” (O’Regan, 1996) or, as Barton argues, “it is ... extremely difficult to identify what we mean when we refer to a national cinema” (Barton 2004:11), not least because of the complicating factor of the international context.

Because all nations exist within the global, amongst other similar-but-different-nations, national cinema is by definition a fundamentally relative term (Higson, 1995, p. 278; Soila et al., 1998, p. 45; Soderbergh-Widding and Iverson, 1998, p. 45), with each national cinema necessarily seen in relation to others (O’Regan pp.48-9). This is of course also true for ‘nation’, which is also a relative term: “as Benedict Anderson has argued, ‘nations...can’t be imagined except in the midst of an irremediable plurality of other nations’” (Higson, 1989, p. 38). An example of the articulation of this relativist status of national cinema is in the way that the term ‘national cinema’ is often used as a means of labelling and promoting films in the international marketplace, and of differentiating them from other ‘national’ cinemas as well as from Hollywood (Crofts 1998:385). This relationship between national cinema and that which takes place outside of national borders (loosely termed here ‘international cinema’), has a variety of consequences, such as so-called ‘national’ cinema industries’ reliance on the technological and narrative conventions, the distribution capacities and, at times, the financial investment of industries located outside of the nation.

The significant presence of a internationally popular cinema industry – usually but not always Hollywood (Miller, 1999, p. 96) – means that most cinema audiences, regardless of geography, view more overseas- than domestically-produced cinema (Higson, 1989, p. 39; Nowell-Smith, 1985, p. 125), thereby creating a situation in which an outside dominant cinema becomes part of the cultural fabric of the nation (O’Regan, 1996, p. 47). Following Elsaesser (1989, p. 6), Higson suggests that Hollywood is no longer in fact the ‘other’ of national cinema but, because of its pervasive presence, is significantly influential on other forms of film (Higson, 1989, p. 39), and that Hollywood is therefore heavily implicated in any concept of national cinema (Higson, 2002, p. 56). Further, as O’Regan points out, “Most national cinemas

seek to involve international players ... in the creative, financing and circulation of national cinema” (O’Regan 1996:55). As Schlesinger puts it: “it is precisely the extra-territorial cultural pressure of Hollywood’s production, imported into the national space, that sets up the contemporary issue of national cinema” (Schlesinger, 2000, p. 24).¹¹

However, and despite varying levels of integration, some view national cinema as an oppositional concept in relation to Hollywood (Crofts, 1993, p. 49; Higson, 1989, p. 37; Williams, 2002, p. 17). For example, the use of the ‘national’ label as a point of difference would not be invoked without larger, more dominant cinema industries to contest. Within the global marketplace, such channels of distribution are open to films which can be labelled ‘national’, as part of what O’Regan calls “strategies to respond to Hollywood’s pre-eminent place on the cinema horizons of the Western world and beyond” (O’Regan, 1996, p. 49). Opportunities to compete in the international marketplace while skirting the high budgets of Hollywood blockbusters often take the form of the art film circuit, where the national label is used alongside recognisable conventions of art cinema (Higson, 2002, p. 59; O’Regan, 1996, pp. 45-50). One way this is pursued is via international film festivals, which have come to “provide an important site to help shape and confirm as well as contest the [national] canon” (Czach, 2004, p. 78).¹² While O’Regan argues that such ‘festival’ cinema puts Hollywood at arm’s length by privileging other expectations (O’Regan, 1996, p. 62), Hollywood is increasingly involved with the production and distribution of such cinema.¹³ Indeed, since the 1980s the ownership of Hollywood is itself increasingly outside of US borders (Moran,

¹¹ Of course, what constitutes ‘Hollywood’ is itself contentious, as is whether the cinema of Hollywood may be considered to be national cinema.¹¹ For the purposes of this thesis, Hollywood is understood as the cinema industry, comprising distribution, production and exhibition, which while not wholly owned by interests based in the United States, is strongly identified with that region, specifically the industrial and production practices common to, organised around or historically derived from Hollywood, California.

¹² This can be clearly be seen in the New Zealand context, where films such as the very successful *Whale Rider* (Caro, 2002) are released at international film festivals before any wider release, including release to their domestic audiences, so that the ‘festival’ label can be subsequently leveraged.

¹³ For example, through subsidiaries and companies including Paramount Vantage, Miramax and New Line Cinema.

1996, p. 6), and film is itself an irremediably international industry (not just an international marketplace for a few nations' films), an industry operating not in isolation but in a global environment based on new two-ways flows between notional centres and peripheries:

...the system now exists whereby national film making is, through a series of commercial linkages, also a part of Hollywood. (Moran, 1996, pp. 6-7)¹⁴

More broadly, the regional implications of the term 'national' are in a paradoxical relationship to the global, being simultaneously cast in opposition to dominant nations and yet also inherent to the global itself, or to globalisation's creation of opportunities for national re-assertiveness. Similarly, though more particularly, the idea of 'national' cinema is complicated by the international aspirations of, for example, co-production treaties which see films produced with the explicit (and often actual) support of more than one state. Despite such complications, and as many national film histories demonstrate, national cinema's relationship with Hollywood is generally viewed as an essential component of a national cinema. Put at its simplest, to be popular in their own markets, the products of national cinema industries may need to achieve a supposedly international standard in production values, etc.; both because this is what domestic audiences expect, and due to the need for most cinema to be financially successful in the international market – with its often standardised expectations – in order to break even or make a profit. Hence, 'for a cinema to be nationally popular, it must paradoxically also be international in scope' (Higson, 1995, p. 9, 2000, p. 58). In this vein, Cook argues that *recognition* by an audience outside of the nation is a precondition for the existence of a national cinema (Cook, 1996, p. 2), and international success may be perceived by national audiences as endorsement for 'national' cinema, serving to strengthen its national kudos (Hill and Gibson, 2000, p. 172).

¹⁴ The changing nature of Hollywood has been noted by many; since the 1990s, as Danan points out, Hollywood cinema has transformed "into a large-scale cultural industry, to be integrated into a whole media network" (Danan, 2006, p. 181).

So the concept of national cinema is beginning to seem open to seemingly endless challenge from its international context. The definition of national cinema as an industry found within national borders (and the films – or a selection of the films – produced there) is undercut by the reality of the encroaching international context. No cinema industry exists in isolation, which means that no cinema can truly be *national* – not in terms of an industry or of films themselves. Hence, national cinema is necessarily inflected and undercut by its context. Because such ‘national cinemas’ co-exist with and are implicated in transnational production, an analysis of national cinema needs to be undertaken with a ‘dialectical’ model of international relationships capable of taking national cinemas’ international realities into account.

A important relationship highlighted in discussions of national cinema is with the state. State involvement in cinema production is common,¹⁵ because many states have put into place policies (often in response to the dominance of Hollywood cinema within national borders, discussed above), to promote national images on cinema screens by extending protection and assistance to domestic cinema industries (Forbes and Street, 2000, p. 27). Often this relationship is seen as so important that national cinema is claimed to be a function of state (Crofts, 2000, p. 2; Turner, 2002, p. 13). O’Regan points out that most national cinemas have needed the financial support of the state (O’Regan 1996:46), although his contention that government assistance is the key to national cinema industries is not a universal assumption (White, 2004, p. 212).

Moran explains the historical basis of the state-cinema relationship:

So far as national cinemas are concerned, the early pattern, evident from the time of the First World War onwards, was for American dominance of local distribution

¹⁵ Jarvie puts up and considers three possible arguments for the maintenance of nation-state cinema: “protectionist”, “cultural defence” and “nation-building” (Jarvie, p. 77).

and exhibition leading to a situation where the local production industry languished, facing the possibility of complete extinction. Nation-states everywhere confronted this crisis and were slowly drawn into regulatory and legislative actions to support their local production industries. (Moran, 1996, p. 7)¹⁶

Such support has been linked to government recognition of what Higson terms “the potential ideological power of cinema” (Higson, 1989, p. 43), which may be seen, broadly, as a recognition by states of national cinema as important in terms of its potential to set and support the national agenda.

The consequences of state investment in cinema are also complicated because they involve policies devised to encourage international involvement in the domestic cinema industry, such as in the form of runaway production.¹⁷ This means that often state support leads to the production of state-sanctioned versions of the national, and filmmakers will be sympathetic to such versions of the national in order to ensure funding (Moran, 1996, pp. 9-10; O’Regan, 1996, pp. 65-66). This in turn raises questions of who decides what and who constitute the nation, which are further complicated by the multiple relationships between national cinemas and states, relationships that depend on the varying expectations of sometimes competing departments, ministries and offices within the government, or government-endorsed quangos, and which are influenced by whichever policy direction is in favour, so that the idealised image of the nation changes over time (O’Regan, 1996, pp. 68-69). Further still, in her discussion of intercultural cinema, Marks points out that state support is often not extended to diasporic or marginalised peoples, who often find themselves outside of conventional national discourses (Marks, 2000). Conversely, the provision of state funding can create a situation in which capital becomes of more concern than culture, so

¹⁶ Danan (2006) gives a succinct account of this process as it occurred in Europe during the 1920s (Danan, 2006, p. 173); Kinder considers this process in European cinema post-WII (Kinder 1993:7).

¹⁷ For the purposes of this thesis, the following definition of runaway production is used: “The major film studios, and the largest audience, are still based in North America. But, as in many industries, economic forces, including changing technology have led to globalisation. From a US perspective, as mentioned, this phenomenon is known as the “runaway” production.” (NZIER, 2002, p. 26)

that the income generated by film production, especially in terms of foreign exchange earnings resulting from international box office receipts, is viewed by governments as more important than the 'national' qualities of the films themselves (Hayward, 1993, p. 22).

Overseas investment and the state formally come together in co-production treaties, which states sign in part as a strategy designed "to compete with Hollywood's domination of world markets" by collaborating with other states that have common interests, be they cultural or geographical¹⁸ (Kinder, 1993, pp. 398-399). This even further complicates any simple notion of national cinema, blurring the line between what are national, regional or international projects (Kinder, 1993, p. 440), often resulting in difficulty identifying a film's national lineage (O'Regan, 1996, pp. 71-73). The state sanctioning of the 'national' content of such films and their encouragement, creates a situation in which films can seem to be simultaneously national and non-national. An example of the difficulty in ascribing national lineage to a coproduction can be seen in the film *Fire*, directed by Deepa Mehta, described as:

...an Indian-Canadian coproduction, [which] was shot in India and explored a lesbian relationship between two married Indian women. The film's Canadianness was called into question by numerous institutional bodies, including the media. (Czach, 2004, pp. 85-86)

So the unreliability of the notion of an incontestable definition of national cinema is especially apparent around the question of the 'nationality' of films that have received foreign investment, investment understood as contributing to the mixed ancestry of 'national' films (Czach, 2004, p. 86; O'Regan, 1996, pp. 71-73). Foreign investment can contribute greatly to cinema production's infrastructure at a national level (O'Regan, 1996, p. 56),

¹⁸ The "policy priority of the Australian, Canadian, English and New Zealand film organisations to pursue greater policy and industry links between themselves to better coordinate and integrate their markets to mutual benefit" (O'Regan, 1996, p. 74) is an example of the former; the adoption of co-production strategies by nations to compensate for a weak production industry, and to promote a strong regional identity, as is the case in southern Africa (de Souza, 1996, p. 130), is an example of the latter.

potentially facilitating the production of what might be more accurately termed *national cinema*.¹⁹ These examples demonstrate some of the conceptual difficulties with the term national cinema.

Approaches to the study of (a) national cinema

Much of what has been discussed so far has dealt with the *context* of national cinema, in terms of the global and the state, and with the way national cinema has been written about as a conceptual category. The key ideas about national cinema (its confinement to within national borders; that there is necessarily a relationship between a national cinema and the state of the host nation), and the ways these ideas are implicitly complicated (the inflection of the international; the question of who gets left out of official versions of national cinema), have been discussed. However, the second popular approach to national cinema is by way of the examination of what the writers identify as instances of national cinema, or what might be termed *concrete* examples of the phenomenon. As much as the conceptual approaches to national cinema foreground many of the issues inherent to its study, the way such ideas are *applied* to the study of a national cinema will give us an indication of the practical efficacies of the various ideas circulating about it. This will indicate how well the concept of national cinema might stand up to scrutiny.

In studies of an example of national cinema, a historical survey often forms the first phase of inquiry (for example Hayward, 1993; Higson, 1995; O'Regan, 1996), and it is not uncommon for these studies to be largely focused on an industrial analysis. Because even when authors argue against such approaches, an object of study is still required, this historical-industrial

¹⁹ This can be readily seen in the New Zealand context, particularly in the wake of the New Zealand-based filming of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (Jackson, 2001-3), which is considered in more detail later.

emphasis points to national cinema as constituted by geographically-bounded production practices and products.²⁰

The consideration of national cinema as a collection of films, a national canon arising from a particular film production industry that is located within a specific nation's borders is typical, and such studies into national cinemas usually undertake a reading or analysis of a group of films (for example Barton, 2004; Gittings, 2001; Hake, 2001, Hayward, 1993; Kinder, 1993; O'Regan, 1996; Ritchie, 1971; Street, 1997). This approach often anchors films in the national context, attempting to 'deconstruct' national ideologies as they are manifested onscreen, and attempts to 'read' the nation, or specific features of it, in the films themselves. This is what Rosen terms the "textualization of the nation" (Rosen, 1996, p. 388), and examples of it include Gittings (2001),²¹ Hayward (1993),²² O'Regan (1996),²³ and Street (1997).²⁴ At times, this approach seems largely untheorised and assumes that a national cinema exists to be 'read' and 'deconstructed' textually by writers who are seeking to identify "national markers" in the films themselves (Soila et al., 1998, p. 4), an approach that Berry describes as "mapping patterns of film discourse that signify the nation in various ways" (Berry, 1998, p.138). In other instances, the films are taken as indicative of a wider context or of specific and more peculiar relationships.²⁵ However, the strength of focusing on a smaller number of films is that it allows for a consideration that takes in the many nuances of a film's national status, allowing for a more indepth study.

²⁰ Ritchie's 1971 study of Japanese national cinema, which considers national cinema to be analogous with cinema production within national borders, is typical (Ritchie, 1971). A more recent example is Hake's 2001 study of German national cinema (Hake 2001).

²¹ Gittings focuses on the cinematic manifestation of colonising discourses in Canada (Gittings, 2001).

²² Hayward argues that films produced within the French film industry will be "intrinsically" French, seeking "to examine France's national cinema through its major artefact, the feature film" (Hayward, 1993; p. 12).

²³ O'Regan examines filmic texts in terms of how they represent various elements of Australian society and the role they play in nation formation (O'Regan, 1996).

²⁴ Street aims to investigate the way British films both underscore and subvert popular notions of British national consciousness (Street, 1997).

This approach has been taken in studies of national cinema, most notably by Higson, whose study of British national cinema undertook a rounded examination of five films, allowing for a thorough consideration of their many relationships and processes.

But among the flaws inherent in using films as a way of 'reading' the nation is the small number of films any study can subject to detailed analysis (Hjort and MacKenzie, 2000, p. 2), which is linked to the considerations of space which must be taken into account in any academic study. Another potential problem is the frequent privileging of films largely unseen by national audiences (Miller, 1999, p. 93), usually 'art' films which may be the object of academic study in preference to popular tastes or other genres of film. Further, the act of selecting the films to be studied hints at an underlying set of criteria for the films and their content, which is not always explicitly detailed and which may not be tied specifically to aspects of the national. However, the limited scope of any study calls none the less for decisions to be made regarding inclusion and exclusion of material (and the same will apply to this study). Hake, for instance, decides to include "the most famous, popular and typical" films (Hake, 2002). And, although the process of selection inevitably involves rejection, this approach is persistent even for those who argue against it. Sorlin, for example, argues for an open model of national cinema involving "all relations" of cinema production, distribution and exhibition, but goes on to approach national cinema in a reasonably conventional way (Sorlin, 1996). This is informed by the need for an object of study to use in explications of theory.

Focusing on nationally-produced films is not universal in national cinema studies. For example, Barton examines a range of films which depict Ireland in her study of Irish national cinema, some of which are not made in Ireland, thereby calling for a definition of national cinema that extends the taken-for-granted notion of national cinema as limited to national borders (Barton, 2004). This provides a possibility for the inclusion of the work of diasporic peoples, and potentially those who Marks (2000) points out find

²⁵ An example of this is Kinder's discussion of the cinema of Spain in relation to the appearance of the Oedipal narrative in a number of films (Kinder, 1993).

themselves outside of conventional conceptions of the nation, in understandings of national cinema(s). Such cinema is also usually absent from the conventional sites of exhibition available to national cinemas, so may not be given a place in the canon of national cinema, which also challenges the efficacy of the label national cinema.

That definitions of national cinema that embrace *all practices* relating to cinema within the national borders in question (for example, Higson, 1989, p. 36; Higson, 1995, p. 278; Sorlin, 1996, p. 9) are not generally carried through to studies of national cinemas points to the unwieldy realities of using such a model. This is not to rule out the usefulness of taking these relations into account, and any study of national cinema should endeavour do so. Indeed, Higson's assertion that critical discourses "produce the national cinema in their utterances" (Higson 1995:1) is a useful one, as it points to a relationship between cinema and nation that is not limited to the screen. In foregrounding such discourses, Higson is pointing to a model of national cinema that is inflected by stakeholder opinion, one that is nuanced and shifting. Berry's assertion that it is not so much nations that author cinema as the other way around (Berry, 1998, p. 129-131), are in a similar vein.

It seems, then, that there are a range of contested options for research when considering a 'national' cinema industry. At one end of the scale is the forensic analysis of filmic texts, at the other all relations of production and consumption tied to national contexts. The present study's progressively stronger emphasis on stakeholder interests will ally with more conventional notions of national cinema (what we might term an industry-and-films approach), to establish a more useful model of national cinema.

The Need for an Alternative Model of National Cinema

At this point it is clear, of course, that the notion of national cinema is complicated. The multitude of factors at play in any national cinema, including state relationships, finance sources and existing national discourses, are subject to many interpretations and approaches. Given the range of possibilities for such cinema, we might question whether to consider a film or

industry 'national' in light of international investment, whether in fact a film can be considered national when it has been produced with international audiences in mind, or indeed which factors to privilege when defining a film as 'national'. These issues problematize most efforts to define a stable object of inquiry. Clearly a model of national cinema that allows for its multiple contradictions is required, one that takes into account the international context of, and the many stakeholders in, the term 'national cinema'. It is thus a concept in need of a wide definition, preferably one that is comprehensible in the real world.

In terms of the approaches suggested in the literature outlined thus far, some are self-evident (such as the notion that national cinema may be discursive; cinema, because it involves language, is *necessarily* discursive), some are useful (such as Higson's use of case studies to undertake a thorough deconstruction of his notions of national cinema), and some are impractical (such as Sorlin's proposition that national cinema includes *all cinema relations* within national borders, including the circulation of international cinema). An alternative model would be one that privileged stakeholder practices with regard to national cinema, one that is open to the multiple subjectivities inherent to a nation. Common to the literature surveyed is an acknowledgement of the ways that national cinema is impacted by policy decisions and international relationships. Frequently, however, these studies then proceed to discuss national cinema as though it is a discrete entity and largely independent of the implications and repercussions of those aspects of its context. Hence, some of the arguments above inform the approach to national cinema provisionally adopted at this juncture.

Interpretations of national cinema depend on fundamental (and often contested) assumptions concerning the nation itself. While the tendency is to use a combination of approaches, usually including some textual and some contextual readings of national cinema, and usually involving the identification of some stakeholders in national cinema, no study referred to precisely replicates the approach of another in terms of the combinations adopted. This can be seen in, for example, the Routledge series of books that focus on

national cinemas,²⁶ which each offer a different combination of methodological and conceptual angles. However shared themes remain, such as the baseline conception that a national cinema is comprised of a cinema production industry and a set of films made within that industry (unless films *about* a nation are to be included too), which form the basic parameters for an object of study here. To this end, the cinema of New Zealand will further on form the object of study, and its stakeholder and international relationships will be considered, specifically in terms of five case study films.

The consideration of these case study films will be consistent with the conventions of national cinema studies, in that it will begin with an historical survey of film within the national territory under study, and subsequently rely on some degree of textual analysis. This approach assumes that the nation (whether contradictorily or not) can be read via the screen, and that in doing so national cinema may be textually 'deconstructed', or unravelled into its constituent parts, by which I mean thematic, representational, aesthetic and so on. This relies on marking out a set of criteria or characteristics of the national context and culture and applying this to a reading of the film or films. Obviously, this is a highly subjective process, although when arguing that a film may or may not be 'national' in character using a textual analysis approach such decisions about criteria need to be made. Textual analysis has often been used in preference to audience studies - perhaps because, while there are many arguments for looking at reception, this is something of a time-consuming and demanding methodological approach, and has not been a feature of most of the actual studies into national cinemas. Textual analysis, it can be argued, does not provide a full enough insight into the matrix of relationships (e.g. Sorlin's 'all relations'), most of them extra-textual, that a 'national' cinema must be involved in.

While such simple interpretations of national cinema may seem reasonably stable, even these are complicated by, for example, a tendency in the literature to ignore or skim over government involvement in encouraging and attracting foreign-based cinema production. Indeed, much of the literature makes little mention of runaway production as a significant contributor to local

²⁶ Including Barton, 2004; Hake, 2001; Hayward, 1993; O'Regan, 1996; Soila

cinema production, despite its potential to encourage employment, infrastructure and skills, and hence building cinema capacity at the national level.

The vocabulary used in recognising stakeholder interests ranges across individuals, groups, companies, institutions, bureaucrats, financiers, workers, creatives, politicians, audiences, states and state agencies, etc. Entities can be stakeholders in multiple ways and sometimes simultaneously so. For example, one may be both a film worker or bureaucrat and simultaneously an audience member. By 'stake' is meant that the individual or group has a variety of things to gain or lose with regard to national cinema, such as governments seeking to attract publicity for their territory in the hopes of increasing inbound tourism, or the hope on the part of financiers that the 'national' label (e.g. via the festival circuit) will bring increased publicity and commercial success. Material evidence to support the notion of the national cinema stakeholder's importance in all of this can be found scattered through the literature reviewed above (and will be quoted as appropriate in what follows), as well as in film reviews, publicity material, media reports and documents of government and government agencies. At stake often, over and above more particular interests, is the connection to the national culture which the films and the processes involved in the production, pre-production, funding, distribution and exhibition of the films may be perceived as providing.

It is perhaps here, across the diverse range of stakeholders and stakeholder interests, that the concept of national cinema most interestingly resides – and as such deserves more detailed attention than it has typically received. It is clear that, as contested as the concept is and as unstable as it appears to be, it continues to circulate – in policy, literature, festival programmes, popular media and elsewhere. Is it stakeholder interest – including interest in maintaining the very concept of the national in relation to cinema – that keeps the concept going despite its own inherent instabilities?

Having reviewed the relevant national cinema literature and considered the national cinema as a concept, it is now time to consider the concept in a more concrete way. However, in order to do this a framework must first be

established, and a theoretical standpoint located from which to position this consideration. The chapter which follows introduces this framework.

CHAPTER ONE: NATION AND MEDIA - THE IMAGINED AND THE BANAL

This work is arguing for a new conception of national cinema, one that acknowledges the international context and takes into account its range of stakeholders²⁷ and their practices. Thus far we have reviewed the relevant academic literature concerned with national cinema, and found that it often struggles to offer a way to discuss it both as a conceptual category (inflected by its various contexts and stakeholders), and as an object of inquiry (in terms of a national cinema). Those who write on national cinema often bring together a wide range of pertinent issues when describing national cinema, but then frequently back down by going on to discuss national cinema as a stable entity. A framework is required that will enable a more complete understanding of national cinema. The following discussion is of theory that allows for the realities of national cinema to be taken into account, including those highlighted in the previous chapter – the international, the state, and the range of other stakeholders who may consider national cinema a pertinent term.

The two approaches to the study of nation and media most immediately helpful in the current context are that of Benedict Anderson (1991) and Michael Billig (1997). These both set up some foundational ideas for the thesis by providing a starting point for formulating an approach to national cinema that can then focus on the relationships and actions of relevant stakeholders, rather than just acknowledging these in passing, as is often the case. Both Anderson's (perhaps now over-used) 'imagined community' thesis and Billig's relatively less well known formulation of 'banal nationalism' contribute to an understanding of the connections between media (as sites of shared imagining and of national 'flagging') and the perpetuation of the idea of a cohesive nation. It is this idea on which the concept of national cinema must logically depend, as the assumption of a nation underlies its

connection with cinema. Part of Anderson's argument is that the nation is a construction collectively imagined by citizens, facilitated in part by mass media. This is a useful (though not entirely uncontested) idea, and it provides a starting point from which to begin to analyse the position that media, in this case national cinema, may occupy within the national context.

1.1 Anderson's 'imagined communities'

Benedict Anderson's seminal book (1991) is well known for its assertion that nations are "imagined communities". Underpinning his inquiry into the nation was the proposal that "nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind" (Anderson, 1991, p. 4). In order to theorise these artefacts, Anderson believed it necessary to embark on an historical inquiry, in order to trace their development and the development of the emotional impact the nation maintains on its citizens (*ibid.*).

Anderson makes four assertions regarding the nation. These are that the nation is imagined, limited, sovereign and comprises a community:

It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.

The nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind.

[...]

It is imagined as *sovereign* because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm.

[...]

²⁷ This includes the state.

Finally, it is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings. (Anderson, 1991, pp. 6-7) [Original emphasis]

These four assertions are linked to Anderson's conception of the nation as arising out of particular historical conditions and form the basis of the argument for the imagined nature of the national community. This historical focus is important, as Anderson hypothesises that the nation arose from a series of historical changes that enabled its collective conception. The demise of religion and dynastic rule are key among these changes, since the common-sense nature of the belief in these orders is said by Anderson to have been transposed onto the conception of the naturalness of the idea of the nation (*ibid.* p. 12). However, over and above these developments, was "a fundamental change ... taking place in modes of apprehending the world, which, more than anything else, made it possible to 'think' the nation" (*ibid.* p. 22), within which the development of mass media, initially in the form of print capitalism, is of considerable importance.

In Anderson's work, the concept of the imagined national community intersects with the development of media, in the form of the printing press and consequent dissemination of information. Anderson's central idea here concerns the ability of mass forms of media to disseminate images and narratives that in turn help enable the image of the nation to be collectively imagined, by those inside and those outside. It is this foregrounding of the emergence of mass media in the development of the nation that is often invoked in subsequent studies that involve interrogation of nation and media alongside each other. Hence the widespread application of the notion of the imagined community in such work:

Anderson ... takes mediated communication to be of central importance in the formation of a nationalist consciousness (or, as we now say national identity)... (Schlesinger, 2000, pp. 22)

...what is highlighted is the importance of the media of communication in the construction of an imagined community ... (*ibid.* p. 23)

It is due to the importance Anderson gives to the role of media in the formation of nation that the concept of the imagined community has been often applied to media and screen studies (for example Higson, 1989; Khatib, 2006; McNeill, 2001), focusing on texts ranging from newspapers (Law, 2001) to cinema (Khatib, 2006). This has occurred with such frequency as to now seem routine, to the point that to do so is viewed by some as a cliché (for example Miller, 1999). The imagined community hypothesis has been widely used in academic work on national cinema, and has been cited as having 'provided the theoretical starting point for most recent writing on national cinema' (Schlesinger, 2000, p. 22).

Higson takes issue with Anderson's conception of the nation as limited, and highlights another potential difficulty of the model when he argues that the imagined community

...seems unable to acknowledge the cultural difference and diversity that invariably marks both the inhabitants of a particular nation-state and the members of more geographically dispersed 'national' communities. (Higson, 2000, p. 66)

This overlooks the way that Anderson's model allows for a wide interpretation of what constitutes the national; imaging, surely, exists in the imagination, and so there is room for multiple imaginings of the nation. The model is increasingly applied in studies which posit that the imagined community is not limited to nations but may also apply to other geographic territories, such as cities (for example, McNeill (2001) who applies the notion of imagined community to the city of Barcelona), which suggests an inherent flexibility.

Higson also argues that the absence of the transnational from Anderson's work detracts from its usefulness. He contends that:

The media are vital to the argument that modern nations are imagined communities. But contemporary media activity is also clearly one of the main ways in which transnational cultural connections are established. (*ibid.*)

Higson is right: Anderson's work was first published in 1983, and as such does not account for contemporary permutations of media and the increasing influence of international patterns of media ownership in the nations he theorises. New forms of media have joined, and possibly supplanted, those 'mass' forms derived from print capitalism (Miller, 1999, p. 95), and as a consequence there have been debates regarding the applicability of Anderson's work to media other than print, and as such its current usefulness. However, studies such as Feenberg and Bakardjieva's application of the imagined community to electronic media (2004, p. 38) demonstrates that Anderson's thesis may be successfully extended to include new forms of media, and Anderson himself does not preclude such extensions of his work.²⁸ Further, Appadurai's work, which deals in part with the conceptualisation of the transnational, clearly takes Anderson's imaginary as a starting point (1996) and then furthers it considerably in the context of globalisation, not least by distributing the media's power across various global 'scapes' or horizons. Inasmuch as Miller argues against Anderson's work, he also concurs, saying "The nation is a means of identification with persons and places beyond the horizon but not so far distant as to be foreign" (Miller, 1999, p. 94), meaning that the concept of the nation allows citizens to identify with others who we have never, and probably will never see. He further echoes Anderson when he makes the point that "...popular culture binds people who have never met and do not expect to do so" (*ibid.*), although one also begins to sense here processes that may depend as much on Appadurai's interacting scapes and on new forms of transnational 'binding' as on Anderson's national community (and that will include, therefore, such contemporary phenomena as online communities of film enthusiasts undefined by national borders).

Anderson's work has also been questioned in other respects; Miller makes some strong arguments against using Anderson's thesis, particularly in relation to national cinema (Miller, 1999). Miller questions the lack of materiality invoked by the imagined community (*ibid.*, p. 93), by which he means the absence of many specific and concrete examples in Anderson's own work. The imagined community is an open and unspecific idea:

²⁸ See also Khatib, 2006.

It is not entirely clear that this sense of openness, though, has contributed to a clearer understanding of national identity's impact on cultural production. (White, 2004, p. 221)

This is a potential difficulty when applying Anderson's ideas to national cinema, as the openness implicit in his work allows for a wide-ranging consideration of the ways the nation might be imagined, but offers little in terms of considering the way various citizens (and here we are leaning toward incorporating the 'citizen' with the 'stakeholder') may enact these imaginings in practice. White's concern could be interpreted as questioning the know-it-when-one-sees-it quality of the imagined community; if the community is imagined, then surely it takes different forms in different imaginations?

The openness of Anderson's model may, then, be considered both a strength and a weakness (Miller, 1999; White, 2004, p. 221). Arguably, engagement with Anderson's theory needs to take place in tandem with other theoretical perspectives. While Appadurai's approach is useful, there is also the need for perspectives which take into account more of the material manifestations of the 'imagined' nation, such as those practices that engage with national cinema mentioned in the previous chapter (and this is where Billig will prove useful).

Clearly, the notion of imagined community has continuing resonance and should not be bypassed, despite some arguments to the contrary. This is not least because the openness of Anderson's model gives it flexibility in the agency it apports to citizens to imagine the nation. Despite this, it does not provide tools with which to engage the material aspects of the imagined community, those characteristics of national cinema that involve stakeholder practice, or the enacting of the nation via cinema. It is here that Billig (and then Couldry) have much to offer the present study.

1.2 Banal Nationalism

Michael Billig's *Banal Nationalism* (1987) is an attempt to explain the ease with which national citizens assume their nationality, and asserts that

this flagging occurs every day, in sites including the mass media. Billig argues that “the national ‘we’ is constructed”, in such a way as to seem natural. He sees this with an international context, claiming that ‘national identity’ is an “international ideology” in which each nation is one among many, rather than one confined to certain regions or cultures.

Billig’s concept of “banal nationalism” in part extends Anderson’s ideas (Billig, 1987), by concentrating on everyday manifestations of a more abstract imagining. Billig’s work on nationalism grows out of the assertion that, rather than nationalism being a characteristic found only in marginal nations striving for political independence or experiencing challenges to stability from ethnic groups within the nation, it is an “endemic condition” found in *all* nations (*ibid.*, p. 6), at the level of everyday taken-for-granted actions and processes. Billig argues that a constant “flagging” of the national occurs through continual reminders that are both actual and metaphorical. These come in various forms, including those at literal as national crests (or flags), as well as those that are rhetorical such as the language of politicians or national newspapers. These flaggings have in common that they are everyday, recognisable signs of the nation. There is the possibility that the ‘national’ in national cinema arises simply from such mundane flaggings, in and around the films, as much as from any more fundamental reasons. But such flaggings, in order to be successful, must necessarily be *recognizable*, so that a constant subliminal reinforcement ensures nation and nationality operate at a barely conscious, taken-for-granted level. For Billig a kind of peripheral vision is involved, as in his example of “the flag hanging unnoticed in the public building” (*ibid.*, p. 8). Billig’s work is underpinned, in part, by the notion that:

Nationalism ... is a way of thinking or ideological consciousness. In this consciousness, nations, national identities and national homelands appear as ‘natural’.
(*ibid.*, p. 10)

This naturalness may extend to national cinema in several ways as for example, audiences within and outside the nation might unthinkingly recognise accepted signs of a nation in certain films, or might fail to question

categorisations of various films as national, accepting such attributions as natural.

Such practices as this recognition shows that we can use Billig's arguments to 'ground' the Anderson thesis in material actions and practices. The naturalisation of the national, reasoned Billig, must have some persistent basis in everyday life, and may as such "be reproduced in a banally mundane way" (*ibid.*, p. 6):

...the term **banal nationalism** is introduced to cover the ideological habits which enable the established nations ... to be reproduced. ... Daily, the nation is indicated, or 'flagged', in the lives of its citizenry. Nationalism, far from being an intermittent mood in established nations, is the endemic condition. (*ibid.*) [original emphasis]

The term 'flagging' is the most important concept in his theory of banal nationalism:

The central thesis ... is that, in the established nations, there is a continual 'flagging', or reminding, of nationhood. (*ibid.*, p. 8)

For Billig, the flagging of the national is not a geographically isolated condition, but one that circulates through the wider, global, context, appearing there as "a universal code" (*ibid.*, pp. 8; 77; 83): flaggings of Frenchness, of Irishness, of Chineseness, and so on, constantly jostle with each other in a wide range of cultural and economic forms, from advertising to fashion, from news to film. Indeed Billig argues that a notion of the wider world is necessary for local imaginings of the nation. The notion of banal nationalism also builds on aspects of Anderson's model (*ibid.*, pp. 10; 74) when Billig interrogates the processes operating beyond the formation of the nation: "what happens to nationalism once the nation-state is established?" (*ibid.*, p. 43-44). He argues that 'flagging' forms an important part of nation maintenance, suggesting that this is the way in which "notions of nationhood are deeply embedded in contemporary ways of thinking" (*ibid.*, p. 11). 'Flagging', as seen in national motifs and signs, is for Billig the mechanism by which the national is not forgotten.

The most obvious examples of ‘flagging’, aside from the national flag itself, are also such artefacts as coins and banknotes, which invariably feature some kind of official symbolism (*ibid.*, p. 41). Other examples of ‘flagging’ are such emblems as those which appear on the uniforms of national sports teams (in New Zealand an example of this would be the white fern motif against a black background), certain flora or fauna (in New Zealand this could be a picture or stylised emblem of the kiwi bird) or even graphic images of buildings (in the US, this could be the White House; in New Zealand an example of this is the Beehive). But this sort of thing is only the more apparent kind of flagging. There may be a wide range of more subtle flags of the national at work all of the time, seen in anything that identifies a national ‘us’ – from those songs which are included on ‘national’ play lists, to recipes for national dishes,²⁹ to national statistics, as these are all things that are collective, national identifiers. This can further be seen in the accepted stories, narratives and discourses which circulate in any nation, such as in the imagery of cinema. Further, it may be that while ‘national’ flags can be located *within* films, the films themselves may, in both the national and international contexts, themselves function as ‘flags’ of the nation.

It is in the identification of a language-related aspect of banal nationalism that Billig’s work connects most promisingly with stakeholder discourses regarding national cinema. For example:

... politicians, in pursuing their public trade, seek to address the nation. Because politicians have become celebrities in the contemporary age, their words, which typically reproduce the clichés of nationhood, are continually reported in the mass media. (*ibid.*, p. 11)

An example of flagging in everyday language is through the routine use of words such as ‘here’ and ‘us’: words which may take for granted a national context and the audience’s assimilation into that context and which have a

²⁹ Witness the New Zealand vs. Australia debate regarding the pavlova (Leach, 2008).

cumulative effect in reinforcing the sense that the national exists (*ibid.*, p. 174).³⁰

The media are an important element of banal nationalism, then, in that they allow for the widespread reproduction and dissemination of such flaggings; Billig claims that “[t]he media of mass communication bring the flag across the contemporary hearth” (*ibid.*). Billig takes this idea of the contribution media make to the naturalness of the imagined nation and applies it to an analysis of British newspapers, for example. He found that all the newspapers he examined

...present news in ways that take for granted the existence of the world of nations. They employ a routine ‘deixis’, which is continually pointing to the national homeland as the home of the readers. (*ibid.*, p. 11)

This application of the banal nationalism thesis to a concrete textual media analysis signals the way the theory adds a material dimension to the work previously done by Anderson and others, as well as more abstract conceptions of nation.

Billig’s method has been used in examinations of a range of media and contexts, including newspapers (Law, 2001; Yumul and Ozkirimli, 2000), broadcasting (Cormack, 2000), film (Avisar, 2005) and film policy (Hjort, 2000). Each of these studies has engaged specifically with the semiotic dimension of Billig’s work, with the way it tackles the interrogation of signs understood in various national contexts to be flaggings of that nation, whether overt or more subtle. In terms of any application of Billig’s work to studies of film, and in particular those which include national cinema in their frame of reference (see, for example, Avisar, 2005; Hjort, 2000; or Law, 2001), several themes emerge. Implicit is the assumption of *recognition* as a key phenomenon: the idea that certain elements that will be recognised as signalling the national, whether this recognition is universal or context-dependent. For example:

³⁰ An example that illustrates this is Alexa Johnston’s assertion that the Anzac biscuit is “*the iconic New Zealand biscuit*” (Johnston, 2008, p. 20)

National cinema features mythic narratives, exemplary figures, and the treatment of issues and phenomena that enunciate the national identity of the local culture. (Avisar, 2005, p. 141)

This recognition is useful for stakeholders as it assumes their role is active, rather than passive. Those cultural elements that are both taken for granted and deeply present in the daily lives of the people of a nation are examined by Hjort (2000) in particular. Here we see the notion of banal nationalism differentiated in terms of *focus*:

... the national quality of the event in question is likely to go unnoticed by Danish audiences Typically Danish elements, then, provide a banal form of aboutness, unless there is something about their mode of presentation that suggests that the film-maker intends for us to pay special attention to them. Focal attention, then, provides the key to the difference between banal forms of aboutness and the kind of aboutness that is constitutive of full-blown themes of nation. (Hjort, 2000, p. 100)

So a kind of 'unfocussed' attention – and consequent peripheral or subliminal recognition – may characterise some of the most powerful perceptions of national flagging. Hjort's work is also a pointer here in that she argues that the desire for a banal nationalism to be achieved via film is implicit within Danish cinema policy. Similarly, Nuckolls, in his study of banal nationalism in Japanese cinema (2006), demonstrates the process through which national 'recognition' becomes banal through familiar flaggings. This means that it is necessary to focus attention on the everyday, because Billig is fundamentally arguing that the banal is significant and not to be ignored; that which is taken for granted is perhaps the most important.

Despite the applicability of Billig's, there are cautionary voices:

I argue that Billig's 'banal nationalism' requires some revision in the context of Scotland. His focus on the nationalism of 'big states' does not translate straightforwardly to a 'stateless nation' like Scotland, served by a semi-autonomous media. ...[I]nternal differentiation within and between national organisms requires a more subtly dialectical analysis than viewing the

banal nation as a single genetic cell coded by big state interests. (Law, 2001, p. 300)

This reminder about 'internal differentiation', especially in relation to shifting stakeholder positions regarding national cinema, is acknowledged, as it is felt this will be particularly relevant in terms of the modes of address of national cinema, further on. Not only may different stakeholders fail to be assimilated into "a single genetic cell coded by big state interests", but their various understandings and readings of national flaggings is not necessarily identical. Thus, there is a need to allow for the possibility of multiple stakeholder positions and subjectivities. This is the case both in what they 'recognise' in those films on which the national has a claim, and what relationships such flaggings have to the actual nation.

Banal nationalism provides an excellent model with which to identify the embedded signs and symbols of the national. However, while this may prove a useful tool for examining national cinema in the sense of it being a set of films, it may not go far enough in accounting for the actions of various stakeholders in national cinema. Nor may it go far enough in recognizing that flaggings of the national are now constituent of more complex global flows of meanings. So, while the concept of banal nationalism has been judged useful in studies of national cinema and has the potential to be used to both examine flags within films and the potential for the existence of certain films to be flags of nation themselves, it does not cover enough ground to completely serve the theoretical demands of this thesis, which involve not only cinema texts but also wider processes that contribute to 'national cinema'. While banal nationalism provides an excellent theory with which to identify the embedded and taken for granted signs and symbols of the nation, it does not go far enough, into the realm of practice. Banal nationalism involves the act of recognition. Further, neither Billig's nor Anderson's models provide for in-depth consideration of movements of people and culture across national borders, and the subsequent changing nature and multiple layers of national identity. The actions, processes and stakeholders involved with national cinema, as well as the wider international context which nations exist in, call for Anderson and Billig's ideas to be complemented by an approach which

take these in. Here, the work of Appadurai (1990) and Couldry (2003) will be useful.

1.3 The Global Imaginary: Appadurai's 'scapes'

As discussed in the previous chapter, the international context is integral to national cinema; it is also integral to nations themselves. Therefore it is important to take the international context into account in the examination of national cinema(s). Arjun Appadurai (1990) provides a means to do so in his model of *scapes*, in the essay "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Economy." Appadurai posits that "the modern world ... is now an interactive system in a sense that is strikingly new" (Appadurai, 1990, p. 1), in such a way that centre-periphery models, those that are premised on a central 'superpower' engaged in a one-way flow of power and information, have been superseded by "a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order" (*ibid.*, p. 6). Appadurai's discussion centres on the global fluidity of imaginary 'landscapes', and his model of global flows and relations is an excellent tool to conceptualise the context of national, international and world cinema. Appadurai enlarges Anderson's concept of the 'imagined community', but is also engaged in coming to terms with the fluidity – the flows – of capital, people and technology in the global environment; the '*scapes*' model has been formulated in order to offer meaningful descriptions of these flows. While not a new phenomenon, he saw globalisation as moving at an increasing pace (*ibid.*, pp. 1-2) and tending to "follow increasingly non-isomorphic paths..." (*ibid.*, p. 11); that is, as very much other than Law's "single genetic cell coded by big state interests".

Appadurai's conception of the world as a fast-moving environment of complex interactions is a picture of a 'complex, overlapping, disjunctive order':

The complexity of the current global economy has to do with certain fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture and politics... I propose that an elementary framework for exploring such disjunctures is to look at the relationship between five dimensions of global cultural flow ... (*ibid.*, p. 6)

Crucial to his proposed framework of five dimensions (see below) was his assertion that existing models of global 'order'³¹ were inadequate in their reliance on a defining notion of centre versus periphery, because this failed to take into account the notion of multiple and shifting centres (*ibid.*). This contemporary phenomenon Appadurai terms 'deterritorialization', and there is no single centre but many:

The crucial point, however, is that the United States is no longer the puppeteer of a world system of images, but is only one node of a complex transnational construction of imaginary landscapes. (*ibid.*, p. 4)

[...]

These landscapes thus are the building blocks of what (extending Benedict Anderson) I would like to call *imagined worlds*, that is, the multiple worlds which are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe. An important fact of the world we live in today is that many persons on the globe live in such imagined worlds (and not just in imagined communities) ... (*ibid.*, p. 7)

Here the nation becomes one among a range 'of different sorts of actors'. The five 'scapes' (see below) will be, by their nature, 'inflected by the historical, linguistic and political situatedness of different sorts of actors', some of which are:

nation-states, multinationals, diasporic communities, as well as sub-national groupings and movements (whether religious, political or economic), and even intimate face-to-face groups, such as villages, neighbourhoods and families. (*ibid.*)

Appadurai's emphasis on actors (and by implication their actions) will prove important here. Taking Appadurai's 'complex transnational construction of imaginary landscapes' (in which is embedded Anderson's original thesis), we can note that some of these 'imaginary landscapes' will map onto national

³¹ Quotation marks are used here because Appadurai's model relies upon the notion of *disorder*.

landscapes and some will not; but that banal flaggings of the national will undoubtedly persist, not least in and around cinema as it flows through its increasingly transnational channels. Some of these flaggings we will look for in the filmic texts (in images of place and people, in theme and narrative) but many we will instead look to the contextual expressions of stakeholder interest, where stakeholders in the very idea of national cinema are among the most important actors involved in the constitution of our object of study.

Appadurai coins five terms that are employed 'to stress different streams or flows along which cultural material may be seen to be moving across national boundaries' (*ibid.*, p. 5). The five terms are *ethnoscapes*, *technoscapes*, *financescapes*, *mediascapes* and *ideoscapes*, and:

These terms with the common suffix –*scapes* also indicate that these are not objectively given relations that look the same from every angle of vision but, rather, that they are deeply perspectival constructs, inflected by the historical, linguistic, and political situatedness of different sorts of actors... (*ibid.*, p. 7)

So the 'scapes' should be helpful here in our identification of stakeholder perspectives, of how particular stakeholder 'situatedness' inflects their expressions of interest in national cinema. It also presents five sites across which to map stakeholder practices in relation to national cinema, while acknowledging the complexity of the international context.

Indeed, the model has often been used to investigate transnationalism and flows involving media, for example in Srinivas' (2005) study of 'place' in the transnational era, which takes in Bollywood cinema in the context of global flows; Athique's (2005) investigation of Australian audiences and the transnational mediascape, and Kantaris' work focusing on cinema in Latin America (2006). The 'scapes' have been applied in examinations of many socio-cultural phenomena, such as homosexuality (Waugh, 1998) and international soccer (Martin, 2005), as well as in studies relating to a variety of media including print (Osuri and Banerjee, 2004) and including film (Crosson, 2003; de Turegano, 2005; Klein, 2004). This applicability across a range of contexts is an important strength of the *scapes* thesis, as is the way the model has been used in a range of analyses of cinema, including de Turegano's

work focusing on film coproductions in sub-Saharan Africa (2005) and Athique's study of Australian audience reception of Bollywood films (2005).

There are several studies that show how the *scapes* model can be empirically applied in a range of contexts (for example Crosson 2003; Shahani, 2005; Lundby and Dayan, 1999; and Martin, 2005). Each of these studies involves media, from work concerned with a Bombay-based internet site (Shahani) to a discussion of media availability in a specific location (Lundby and Dayan). Lundby and Dayan, for instance, looking at a region in Zimbabwe, specifically examine *ideo-* and *mediascapes*, and focus on government policy and religion as elements of the *ideoscape*. Each of the researchers examines at least two *scapes* and how they interrelate, and several of them postulate new extensions of *scapes*: *memoryscapes* (Shahani, 2005), *credoscape* and *toposcape* (Lundby and Dayan, 1999), *homoscape* (Waugh, 1998) and even *soccerscape* (Martin, 2005). These widespread applications of Appadurai's thesis somewhat belie the contention that "...Appadurai gives us few clues as to how to use his 'scapes' in empirical research" (Oonk, 2000, p. 158). Appadurai's model does have applicability to a number of contexts, and this is a strength with regard to national cinema, especially when considering the range of sites across which national cinemas – and their stakeholders – operate.

To apply the *scapes* to a study of national cinema, we might trace its stakeholders across each of them. In terms of cinema, *ethnoscapes* – as the human dimension – may be considered to include film workers, particularly creatives,³² audiences and those engaged in the expression and realisation of the state's interest in cinema. The *technoscape* of cinema includes the equipment – cameras, film, software and other hardware – that makes cinema production possible. Further, technology impacts considerably on distribution, exhibition and their loopholes; so film piracy, for example, would today be part of the technoscape of cinema. Finance, of course, influences cinema not only in the pre-production and production phases, but also via marketing, both in terms of its financing and where a film is marketed to in pursuit of profit: thus

³² The term, 'creatives', is an industry jargon term intended to indicate those individuals who essentially drive cinema projects, such as writers, directors and, in some cases, producers.

the *financescape* involves the finance flowing through all aspects of cinema. What then, if anything, is added to our understanding of the people, technology and money involved in cinema by thinking of them as *scapes* in this way? The principal point is that we tend, otherwise, not to think of a director, a financier, a government bureaucrat and a viewer within the same frame of reference; or the technology on a film set and the technology used by a do-it-yourself pirate of DVDs. Not only does Appadurai's framework allow us to bring these disparate actors and things together in otherwise unrecognised combinations but, importantly, we can then more readily ask pertinent questions about what the totality of (stakeholder) practices within the ethnoscape or the technoscape add up to and how each practice influences the others.

Mediascapes incorporate the organisational processes of cinema production, distribution and exhibition, as well as the filmic texts themselves. This is the site where stakeholders engage with national cinema, involving a whole range of practices. *Ideoscapes* are where we find the historical, conceptual and ideological construction of cinema as a socio-cultural form – from the development of narrative styles through genre conventions to categorisations such as festival or blockbuster film. The notion of national cinema is itself going to be a construction of the ideoscape, self-evidently. But so too are the 'big' ideas that cinema taps into – love and freedom, individualism and community, adventure and romance, and so on – for its thematic recognisability and familiarity. At that point the national exists in the ideoscape unanchored to cinema (but 'flagged' elsewhere in multiple ways), but the connections between cinema and nation are made by various stakeholders across all of Appadurai's *scapes*.

So 'national cinema' becomes a complex phenomenon criss-crossed by these *scapes*: or more precisely is produced by these criss-crossing *scapes*. And what one sees when one sees 'national cinema' will be entirely perspectival – will depend on where within the *scapes* one is viewing things from. Here we have a framework which allows us to take into account national cinema's complex interactions and contexts. When we come to consider a selection of New Zealand films as national cinema, this will prove invaluable,

not least in avoiding the risk of essentialising the national as a supposed quality or set of characteristics.

1.4 Couldry's media rituals

So a theoretical framework is beginning to take shape here – around Appadurai's "transnational constructions of imaginary landscapes", with their construction now understood more precisely as depending on the intersection of *scapes*, which in turn render any perspective on national cinema as exactly that – a perspective. These can be considered in terms of stakeholder interests and the practices that express those interests, which can be looked to for examples of the banal flagging of the national, as can 'national' films themselves. This formulation for understanding the 'national' in national needs however to take into account the significance of the practices which are being argued here as central. It is helpful to consider this gap in the emerging framework in light of Couldry's theory of media ritual (2005).

Couldry argues that engagement with the media often takes the form of concrete, repetitive practices he terms 'media rituals'. These are often habitual actions which involve engagement with media, not only at the site of consumption, but throughout the range of media processes, from production to fan activity, and it is through such actions, he claims, that we believe we are able to access and share an imaginary social 'core' or common ground.³³ In short:

... media rituals are formalised actions organised around key media-related categories and boundaries, whose performance frames, or suggests a connection with, wider media-related values. (Couldry, 2003, p. 29)

What is particularly pertinent in this context is Couldry's acknowledgement not only of the signs and symbols of this core (with which Billig's work is

³³ It is important to note that, while Couldry discusses widespread *belief* in this core, he does not consider a 'core' to exist.

concerned), but also of the processes of engagement that people pursue in order to connect themselves ritually with the imaginary 'core'.

Drawing on a range of theoretical and empirical material, including Dayan and Katz's work on media events and the ideas of Durkheim (*ibid.*, p. 285), Couldry seeks to move the concept of ritual beyond its usual religious framework. He argues:

...we need to rethink 'ritual', including 'media ritual', and Durkheim's model of the social significance of ritual, to make room for new connections: between the power of contemporary media institutions and modern forms of government... (*ibid.*, p. 4)

Although he does not use the word, there is something distinctly *banal* about Couldry's rituals – and yet in this very banality resides a power (including political power). Couldry's formulation involves "the opposite of isolating particular moments and elevating them to special, even 'magical' significance" (*ibid.*, p. 13) but, rather, the everyday patterns, actions and processes facilitated by the media, the moments, behaviours and performances enacted within what Couldry terms the "ritual space of the media" (*ibid.*). Couldry's insistence that these actions and activities are not always profound, but are typically ordinary, adds depth to Billig's conception of banal maintenance of the nation, for example through its flagging via 'national' cinema. Media rituals in this banal sense include everything from talking about celebrities to behaving in certain ways around media technologies and the ways we use film in specific niches in our lives. In most, if not all, of these instances, our actions imply an interest in connecting with others around a common or shared practice.

Crucially, Couldry's rituals are linked to the idea of "the myth of the mediated centre" (*ibid.*, p. 2), through which "we act out, indeed naturalise, the myth of the media's social centrality" (*ibid.*). Couldry's use of the concept of 'liveness' is similar to Anderson's concept of simultaneous belonging, and involves 'an assumption of togetherness that the media work hard to construct' (*ibid.*, p. 286). Thus celebrity gossip triggers a shallow but discernible sense of togetherness, of media's centrality to our lives. Leaving the television on in the corner and talking over the top of it maintains that

electronic umbilical cord back to a shared world. Taking the family to the big Christmas blockbuster at the multiplex may have more to do with the event than with the film itself. The question building here is whether the cinematic national is ritually constructed and maintained in much the same way – involving an ‘assumption of togetherness’ but on a different level? And does this construction exist in several different modes? And is it constructed in only one mode, or in a multiplicity of ways (and, echoing Appadurai, across multiple *scapes*)?

This model of media ritual may, therefore, be viewed as intersecting with the processes of production, distribution, exhibition and reception of cinema *to create* national cinema in a variety of ways. A range of media rituals may be occurring here – for example within the recognition as ‘national’ of particular films, the attributes or the textual ‘flags’ within those films. It is at this level that Billig’s ‘flagging’ becomes useful in terms not only of textual analysis, but also of the wider processes involved in conflating those flags with the national and, by extension, in interpreting those films as incidences of national cinema. Further, media rituals must include those involved with financing, particularly in terms of state funding and support of cinema production, whereby the acts of attempting to procure funding and the application of funding criteria may both be seen as media rituals helping to produce national cinema. This occurs in the sense that specific evocations of the national are involved and that certain procedures are themselves customary. Film workers may ‘ritually’ believe – and express their belief – that their labour sustains a national cinema. Similarly, audience perception of national cinema may involve ‘ritual’ reception, and this is perhaps no more the case than when the recognition of certain symbols or narratives of the national is involved (as with the protracted presence of *The World’s Fastest Indian* on Air New Zealand’s international in-flight entertainment system). What these national cinema ‘rituals’ have in common is a common ground of nation, access to which (symbolically or otherwise) may be ‘performed’ or achieved through familiar and repetitive action.

There is a preoccupation, in much of the literature dealing with ritual and media, with *mass* media and the ritual of participation by large audiences (for example, see Liebes and Curran, 1998; Moore and Myerhoff, 1977).

There are also strategic aspects of interests, and different degrees of emotional engagement, for different participants. A crucial strength of Couldry's work is that it also encourages application to the small detail, the seemingly insignificant action: for instance, pressing the in-flight remote to watch *The World's Fastest Indian* on an international flight into Auckland is an act that produces a sense of the national, just as the public brouhaha around the latest blockbuster film with its well-publicised or even televised premiere, produces a sense of a coherent (and interested) audience. It is all too easy to ascribe ritual qualities to publicly-acknowledged 'mass' action, leaving other activities unacknowledged as rituals, which is reflective of an absence of concern with the 'small', taken-for-granted, banal actions which many national cinema stakeholders routinely engage in.

Couldry makes this important point:

...your action of turning round, and staying turned around, when a media person enters the room, is not yet a media ritual, but it *is* an action organised on a principle (media people are special, therefore worthy of special attention) that can be played out in formalised action, for example in the highly organised spaces of the television studio. (Couldry, 2003, p. 51)

So pressing that in-flight remote control to trigger a reassuringly familiar experience of New Zealandness is not yet a ritual – but is an action 'organised on a principle' (that 'national' cinema exists) and the combination of action and principle constitutes the ritual. This brings us some considerable way towards explaining the emphasis on action signposted at the start of this chapter: the equation is action + principle = ritual. Thus visiting the Hobbiton location at Matamata (action) + belief in 'The Shire' as an imaginary landscape (principle) = ritual; in this case the shared ritual revisiting of iconic 'national' achievement in cinema (even though the reality is simply a sheep farm outside the small town of Matamata). The ritual element of any action of this sort, therefore, is here found in the belief in its ability to connect the actor to some common ground, including the supposed common ground of the national.

Engaging a sense of the national when viewing films (whether of one's own nation or others') may be an example of ritualised 'actions which ... stand

in for wider values and frameworks of understanding' (Couldry, 2003, p. 35) – values and frameworks involved in ritualising the creation and observation of supposedly core values of the national as they are performed on the cinema screen. Equally media rituals may go deeper into the institutional sites of film, for example through the discourses (of government, of other media) that underline the 'national' quality of certain films. In this way, Couldry's work invites us to consider the collective *imagining* and *enacting* of national cinema. Indeed, it could be argued that the whole concept of national cinema is premised on acts of ritual – the ritual inclusion of certain signifiers, certain banalities, notions, ideas, practices within filmic texts, and the reading of these both publicly (in the media, publicity, news reports and features, award ceremonies and in conversations among audience members) and privately (as individual audience members, in knowingly engaging with a filmic text as the expression of the national). These are acts of national practice, as well as an national imagining. Further, these ideas of media ritual include government actions that encourage the identification of a film or films as 'national' in, for example, legislation and funding provision. Even dissent, derision or questioning of the 'national' quality of a film may be seen as another component in the ritual of constructing and maintaining the idea of national cinema.

It may be through mediated ritualised practices – going to or discussing a film, the knowledge that is ostensibly available about the 'national' character of the story, the theme, the crew's origins, applying for funding, granting funding, writing about and critiquing films with their 'national' characteristics in mind, and so on – that national cinema exists. When these practices involve a belief in a film's nationality, so to speak, they are participating in media ritual that can be linked to the concept of national cinema. Here, the media ritual intersects most clearly with the notion of the stakeholder, in the actions undertaken by stakeholders in relation to national cinema. But it is here, too, that this thesis needs to elaborate the notion of stakeholder, not least because Couldry's own work is so heavily focused on audience behaviours rather than stakeholder interests more generally (since the former are really a subset of the latter). This is especially important when discussing the stakeholder interests around specific films. Here, the concept of media ritual will be

applied to the widest possible range of actions as performed by those identified as stakeholders in the idea of national cinema, including policymakers, audiences, film workers and so on, as they engage with the concept of the national on the multiple levels at which it operates. This engagement will include the production and recognition of Billig's banal flaggings of the national, not just whatever more substantive or profound expressions of the national may exist in relation to cinema.

1.5 National Cinema: A Framework of Inquiry

Cinema's production of the national may be compared to what Billig calls the "flag-waving of sport" (1997, p. 123), whereby international success helps prop up a national 'spirit'. Thus, the endurance of the concept of national cinema may be read as part of a larger collective imagining that takes place partly through engagement with media, engagement enacted both through ritual uses of media and through symbolic flagging. Participating in these processes serves to remind of the existence of the national; however it is important to note that this does not account for the processes that underpin recognition and naturalisation of these flaggings as evoking the nation. What Billig's work did not account for was the way the national may be enacted, and he clearly perceives of the public as rather passive in this regard, merely catching glimpses of the national in their peripheral vision, so to speak. It is here that Couldry's work addresses the deficiencies of both Anderson and Billig.

The values found in Couldry's mediated common ground are, in the example of national cinema, those of an imagined 'national'. This can be seen, for example, in the state discourses around *Whale Rider* (2002) and *The Lord of the Rings* (2001-3), which mobilise these media 'events' in support of the continuing construction of New Zealand, even when 'New Zealand'-ness is not their sole feature.³⁴ It is also important to note that it will

³⁴ This is discussed in later chapters.

always be the relevant stakeholders³⁵ for whom these ritualised imaginings have most validity. Once again, the stakeholder perspective as constitutive of national cinema comes to the fore.

Clearly, the ideas of Anderson, Billig, Appadurai and Couldry do not, on their own, provide the depth needed to move forward the argument that national cinema is more than simply a collection of films arising from a particular production industry. But the particular combination of their ideas offered here does, it is suggested; especially the notion that *the ritualisation of stakeholder practices around national cinema involves banal flaggings of a national imaginary*.

Armed with this combination of theoretical concepts, the remainder of the thesis comprises an investigation of a particular 'national cinema', that of New Zealand. This thesis seeks to test the usefulness of the model discussed above, to demonstrate it through application. In order to 'unpack' this instance of national cinema, Chapter Three applies Appadurai's *scapes* model to cinema in New Zealand, both historically and as the industry. But there is a final cautionary note about too easily sliding from notions of a national imaginary to an essentialist and homogenising position:

... national belonging should be re-imagined with the greatest degree of flexibility possible, and it need not even be linked to a continuous, politically unified territory. Two cinematic practices, Yiddish cinema and North American Aboriginal cinema, provide examples of cinematic practices linked by a sense of non-geographically contiguous belonging. (White, 2004, p. 225)

The national must remain a fluid and open category in what follows, and consideration needs to be given to the methodologies needed in achieving this.

³⁵ Of which a Phd candidate writing a dissertation on national cinema is one.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

The exploration of what national cinema is, what constitutes it, and how the perception of national cinema continues to perpetuate, calls for examination of an instance of national cinema. Having proposed a theoretical framework within which to explore the notion of national cinema as it occurs in a material sense, the chosen context is New Zealand. The decision has thus been taken to apply the broad stance of previous studies, that is to use a film industry in the exploration of national cinema. The decisions taken with regard to the appropriate research methods will be explained here, in light of the foregoing theoretical discussions of both national cinema and of the framework developed in the previous chapter, which offers an alternative perspective of national cinema.

To restate: in examining the literature pertaining to national cinema, several conclusions were reached. These included the observation that there is no single definition of the concept of national cinema. Rather, there is a series of assertions of national cinema as involving a multitude of factors. Of these, the relationships between cinema and state, and the international context of national cinema were highlighted. There are other aspects of national cinema discussed in the literature, elements of their production contexts, finance sources and so forth, that complicate simple attribution of a 'national' label to a production industry or individual film.

A further assertion that underpins the work here is that national cinema has a wide variety of stakeholders. These range from film workers and producers to audiences and financiers, and they have a range of relationships to the concept of national cinema. Fundamental to this argument is the idea that each stakeholder position will be reflective of a certain, unique set of expectations and contexts so that the concept of national (or, here, New Zealand) cinema, becomes complicated by subjectivity. It further becomes complicated when we take into account the range of practices across which the stakeholders will be involved, in terms of New Zealand cinema.

In order that this range of stakeholders and processes be taken into account, national cinema needs a flexible definition, one that may be applied in a range of circumstances. While there is an evident lack of a singular approach to its study, there is still a widespread tendency to consider a national cinema to be straightforwardly comprised of a combination of the cinema production found within specific national borders and the 'texts' produced there. This definition is somewhat inflexible, as it inevitably leads to the obscuring of the subjective and discursive practices of national cinema, relying instead on straightforward textual analysis. The tendency here is to bypass an examination of the various ways national cinema connect stakeholders to the imagined national centre, instead taking for granted the terms of the national cinema under study.

Broadly, this thesis argues against taking such an approach, but rather asserts that the concept national cinema finds its stability not in a series of cinema 'texts' (generally feature films), produced within a particular national territory, but rather within the context of actions and processes that inform and surround their production. Such a formulation demands an examination of these actions and processes, particularly those which reflect or embody stakeholders' investment in the 'necessary fiction' of national cinema. This requires not only an examination of films produced within the New Zealand cinema production industry, but also an approach that will be sensitive to the rhetoric, relationships and actions involved in and around this cinema production, in the films themselves, and especially in terms of the industry's various stakeholders.

2.1 Context and Direction of the Research

The survey of national cinema literature highlighted the conclusion that, despite a useful lack of cohesive agreement on the exact parameters of national cinema to be found in the literature, the assertion can be made that national cinema involves stakeholders. These stakeholders are individuals and groups with a range of investments in the notion of a national cinema,

and they may be film workers, government agencies, audience members or any of a range of other constituencies that can be identified.

Alongside the assertion that the concept of national cinema needs to be extended to *processes*, rather than focusing only on *texts*, the research needs to address both aspects of this hypothesis: that too much of the previous writing on national cinema has failed to give sufficient acknowledgement to the fact it was describing an unstable object *and* that the relationships and actions of stakeholders are in fact playing a substantial role in the persistence of the concept 'national cinema'. There is a need to interrogate the parameters of national cinema as it exists in the relevant literature, but also to go beyond the limitations found there. In order to achieve these tasks, a 'national cinema' has been selected – New Zealand – for scrutiny.

From here, the decision has also been made to take this case study of New Zealand cinema and broaden it to include a selection of film texts, or case study films, with which to make the study more robust. Key to many of the assertions of national cinema found in the literature covered in the Introduction was the idea that 'national' films are able to be textually deconstructed and their national qualities thereby laid out. This idea needs to be more closely contemplated, and so five films produced within the New Zealand cinema production context have been selected. This enables a close consideration of the notion of 'national cinema' as something that may simply be 'read' from a text. It also allows for a thorough examination of the films' various stakeholders and their practices, and of the ways they may recognise (or not) the New Zealand in New Zealand cinema. The sample size of five is a small one, due to constraints of space, and so it is less a representative sample so much as a careful selection of films designed to draw out and expose the range of stakeholder interests, and of the actions and processes they represent, in terms of New Zealand cinema.

The main theoretical frameworks that will be used to expose – and explain – these varied stakeholder interests are Couldry's media rituals, here expanded to include Billig's notion of flagging alongside the assumption that processes of imagining are inherent to engagements of nation and media, as well as Appadurai's 'scapes' model, which allows the study of a national

context while simultaneously keeping in mind its wider, global context. The work of Couldry and Appadurai provide theoretical perspectives or models that help to explain how it may be that the concept of national cinema endures in the face of its inherent instability. When these two perspectives are used together an especially powerful explanatory framework emerges, as noted in the previous chapter.

Using Couldry's model of media ritual, which he applies to media-related actions, is a crucial point of difference for the current study. Employing Couldry's ideas in the context of 'national' media (and in relation to more than just audiences) is a fairly novel approach, as his work is more often used in considerations of fandom. But it offers a useful approach to the nation and to national cinema, because underlying Couldry's work is the proposal that the actions and processes that invoke a wider, imagined community. The practices involved in the various stages of the production and reception of national cinema have a particular relevance as instances of media ritual, and it is proposed that it is in the ritual dimension that national films *become* national. These claims call for such actions to be considered alongside theories (such as those of Billig) more easily applied to 'national' filmic texts *per se*.

Anderson, Billig and Couldry have in common the notion that the media can connect to an imaginary centre. Appadurai's work also takes up the idea that such 'centres' are imagined. While Anderson, Billig and Couldry's work accounts for the very local engagement of, and with, national cinema on the part of a citizenry, Appadurai's 'scapes' model helps to situate national cinema within the wider global context which permeates and inflects national cinema, as an ever-present but sometimes under-theorised context. Hence the study of New Zealand that follows seeks to situate the most typical particularities of national cinema in New Zealand within Appadurai's categories. We have already posed the question of what, if anything, is added to our understanding of the people, technology and money involved in cinema by thinking of them as *scapes* in this way. The answer offered was that we tend, otherwise, not to think of a director, a financier, a government bureaucrat and a viewer within the same frame of reference. Appadurai's framework allow us to bring disparate actors and things together in otherwise

unrecognised ways. The history of cinema production in New Zealand, and the convention of 'national cinema' as it occurs in that history, need to be considered, including the history of government support of film production. Mapping the 'scapes' is one way of structuring this around disparate actors, not just film-makers and audiences. This examination engages with the *mediascape* and the *ideoscape*, that is, the incidence of production capacity and the images arising from it, as well as the discourses and practices that locate and encourage a notion of the national in cinema production in New Zealand. Also important are the range of relationships within this context, as well as the documents, such as legislation and academic literature, that underpin and express these relationships. That is why it is beneficial to undertake an exploration of the New Zealand cinema production *ideoscape*, framed within the ideas discussed in the previous chapter. Further, this examination needs to encompass the range of stakeholders in cinema production, and especially in notions of national cinema, as they occur in the New Zealand context. Further still, the stakeholders and relationships, as well as a range of rituals involved in the production, financing, exhibition, reception and publicising of these films need to be considered.

2.2 Research Questions and Approaches

To repeat, the central hypothesis here is that the stability of the concept 'national cinema' is not to be found in filmic texts, but rather resides in processes, and that the relevant processes can often be explained in terms of stakeholders' interests and the ritualised practices or actions which emerge from these. Therefore, an approach is needed that will take into account these processes, but there is also a need to interrogate the efficacy of the hanging the label 'national cinema' of a film or number of films. The key methodological question then is, what analytical frameworks will best further an assessment of this hypothesis? If the 'scapes' afford an initial map of the terrain, will the notion of ritual (allied to flagging) take the argument far enough? We must look to actual films in order to answer these questions.

Examples of varying approaches to studies of national cinema include Higson, who examines British cinema for what he sees as typical representations of Britishness (Higson, 1995), Hayward, who asserts that the national context of a film will necessarily imbue it with national specificity (Hayward, 1993), Gittings, who is interested in colonial history in Canadian films (Gittings, 2001), and Barton, who looks for 'Irishness' across a range of films that depict Ireland and the Irish (Barton, 2004). Each of these writers approaches national cinema as though it may simply be 'read' from a set of films, an approach that demands a set of assumptions regarding just what national characteristics are being 'read'. This involves a consideration of the set of assumptions that underlie readings of the national cinema in question; if each nation is a separate entity (foregoing arguments about the impossibility of fixedness in the international context), then each will carry with it a separate understanding of its national characteristics. In order to more fully question such assumptions, New Zealand cinema is examined in terms of not only its history, but also its trends and discourses. Once we can establish what these are, the task of deconstructing a set of case study films in terms of their national qualities will become somewhat easier.

In seeking to delineate the specificities of New Zealand cinema, primary research will be placed into the wider, global context, using Appadurai's 'scapes' model, rather than searching only for the 'typical' or an ill-definable New Zealandness. Close attention has been given to the commentaries and discourses about the films and their production, so that the notion of 'reading' national qualities from the screen has been examined. This recognises that the languages used to describe and identify national cinema in New Zealand are a fundamental component in the perception of that cinema as 'national', and so underscores the alternate framework for examining New Zealand cinema discussed in Chapter One..

It is suggested, based on the argument of the previous chapter, that films are a site for imagining community, and (though 'national') are also subject to and demonstrative of the global flows discussed by Appadurai. These films will be examined to assess how certain elements – such as narratives and symbols – may be considered 'flags', part of the nationalising project. Importantly, the recognition and circulation of such flags may be

understood as part of a repertoire of media rituals. Finally, stakeholder interests (and their ritualisation) will be sought within this whole 'matrix' of textual/industrial/cultural layers. These interests are seen as the key drivers behind maintenance of the concept of national cinema.

Having decided to take the approach of deconstructing national cinema by an examination of an industry and some films produced in that industrial context, the number of films to examine in the study was an important early decision. Although the possibility exists for such a study to be carried out using quantitative methodology, involving a large sample and the use of statistical measures of such features as finance sources and labour force. However, such an approach does not take into account the nuanced and subjective nature of the stakeholder practices of national cinema that underpins the current argument. If we take an approach that privileges the intersection of stakeholder practice with media ritual, understood as a multilayered phenomenon, then there is need to use more qualitative methodology, in order to unpack and examine the films' conditions of production, reception and so on.

This points to a need for an extensive consideration of a smaller number of films, rather than attempting to focus on a larger number and failing. The assertion that fine 'layers' can be identified in terms of the films' conditions of production and stakeholder practices, they can arguably be identified in more depth in relation to a relatively small number of films. There is a wealth and complexity of materials that might be accessed in the interrogation of 'national' films – press releases, production notes, reviews, funding decisions and so forth – before even looking to the films themselves, as texts. A qualitative analysis, one that allows for the differences between the conditions of each of the case study films, is most appropriate.

Therefore, and also taking into account the restraints inherent of a doctoral thesis, a small sample has been chosen. This means a sample size that is manageable, and one which allows for subtlety and depth in its analysis. Qualitative methods are therefore the key, because they are most sympathetic to interpretivist views of reality as socially constructed, and of knowledge as context dependent and nuanced. The aim in this project is to

come to some understanding of the ways in which New Zealand continues to be imagined, through film, in the face of a range of potent challenges to the existence of a stable 'national' object.

Of the stakeholder practices that needs to be taken into account in what follows, the key set of practices should be that of audiences. Their practices are varied and depend on their position in relation to the nation. Some, for example, will be from within New Zealand, while others will not – and among these groups are nuances in the form of individual relationships to and understandings of the nation. There is a lot of tension and complexity in the non-fixed notion of national identity. Further, audiences are non-homogenous in other ways – there are critical audiences, for example, with their own sets of expectations, and even the category of 'New Zealand' audiences might take in those which are both domiciled and diasporan.

While this multiplicity among stakeholders – and the diversity of the audience is indicative of this across the field of stakeholders – is taken into account by a closely-read, qualitative approach to the films both textually and in terms of processes and practice, there are limitations to using such a small sample that need to be addressed. Though extensive in terms of the possibilities for investigating the multiple facets of the films, the overall data set is small, as it only takes in five films. This is a limitation, which translates to a need for thoroughness in the following approach, so that extrapolations can be made. The limitations of previous national cinema studies that focus on only a small sample of films are at play here. However, the approach does manage to balance the various needs inherent to the project – for a robust response to the national cinema literature, for an approach to national cinema that is not limited to a survey of films simply using textual analysis. The complexities of national cinema that the study is attempting to grasp call for such an indepth approach to a small number of carefully chosen case study films.

2.3 A Variant of the Case Study Approach

A case study approach is commonly preferred when people or institutions are the object of study. This approach is suited to both in-depth data collection and qualitative methods, which are generally used to obtain more textured material than what may often be obtained by quantitative methods (Rountree and Laing, 1996, p. 99). This type of inquiry sees 'an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured' and often involves the use of 'a wide range of interconnected interpretive practices' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p. 13). The approach should facilitate the examination of some of the discursive contradictions surrounding ideas of national cinema, in terms of stakeholders and texts.

Using case studies does not form a method in and of itself: 'Case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied' (Stake, 2003, p. 134). As such, selecting the sample forms only the first step of analysis. Deciding on the size of the sample is informed by multiple factors, not the least of which are the constraints of time and space which limit a study. These considerations were taken into account alongside the desire for a study which allowed for a thorough investigation of the films chosen. A large sample size does not lend itself to in-depth engagement with the texts. Initially, it was assumed that a conventional case study approach was to be adopted here, involving a broad examination of contextual discourses and taking in several methods of analysis – however a more nuanced form of 'case study' developed in due course, with more emphasis on those aspects of text and context that offered most potential reward in relation to the theoretical framework of Chapter One.

The choice of films is predicated on a range of considerations. Due to the importance placed on national cinema stakeholders, the case study films would require a range of stakeholder relationships to be identifiable. The question of the relationship to government is an important one, as already argued, and each of the films selected may have a relationship to the interests of the New Zealand government that is different. Films with a range of 'lives' within the global context can be selected, and the device for this

contextualisation, Appadurai's 'scapes' model, can be applied to track these. The films, too, would need not to be entirely 'unique' within the New Zealand cinema production industry, but to offer a relatively typical range of circumstances as well as textual elements, such as themes, visual style and so on, and of production circumstances, such as budgets, anticipated audience and location of shooting. So a modified multiple case study approach is feasible (Yin, 2003), involving a number of films, each unique in the context but not so much as to be especially unusual. Thus, the selection of *Kombi Nation* (Lahood 2002), *The Māori Merchant of Venice* (Selwyn, 2001), *The Lord of the Rings*³⁶ (Jackson, 2001-3), *Little Bits of Light* (Walker, 2003) and *Whale Rider* (Caro, 2003). All of these films were made in the post-1999 period, which was a significant period in New Zealand cinema production,³⁷ and provides a somewhat arbitrary, though recent timeframe within which to focus the study.

The range of cinema production in New Zealand is wider and broader than feature film production, and encompasses short films, experimental cinema and television-film hybrids, among other forms of film. However, this study assumes that features are the best place to look for a national cinema, and does so for two reasons. The first is the to clearly define the object of study, in a similar way to the delineation of a timeframe. The second reason for concentrating attention on feature films it mimic the conventions of the national cinema literature.

However, even taking in account the limitations of looking at five films (rather than a larger number), there is the possibility of compiling an exhaustive file of primary information about each film. In order to concentrate on the ways the films demonstrate fissures in the commonly-held notions of national cinema, and on the practices and rituals of stakeholders, the case study approach will be adopted in a much more focussed way. In each film we will seek to identify the specific traces of stakeholder interest, embedded in ritual, to demonstrate and expand upon notions of media ritual. So the term 'descriptive vignette' better captures the focussed approach taken here, in the spirit of the case study but without some of its peripheral baggage.

³⁶ Treated as one production for the purposes of this research.

One way of approaching this is by identifying the material *traces* of such rituals. Each film will be interrogated in order to highlight the layers constituting the concept of 'national cinema', using the techniques of semi-structured interviews, textual analysis and document analysis. The aim is first to identify the degree of consistency with the national cinema literature among the films, in relation to that material. Chapter Four examines the films in these terms, considering them in terms of the ways aspects of their production might be understood to underscore or authenticate their status as 'New Zealand' films. They are then subjected to the type of textual analysis commonly applied in studies of national cinema, before these textual features are considered with regard to stakeholder understandings of what constitutes New Zealand cinema. Using case studies allows for such a wide-ranging and thorough approach.

Subsequent to this, in Chapter Five the films are in relation to the framework of theory outlined in Chapter One. The emphasis on flagging and ritual, including the ritual reception of those textual features of the films that can be considered consistent with popular and academic readings of New Zealand cinema. This is in order to demonstrate the strength of the framework of national cinema as a collection of processes and stakeholder practices that facilitate a sense of connection with an imagined national common ground.

So, initially, an overview of the New Zealand cinema production industry is offered, using the preliminary findings from the national cinema literature review, taking in the various stakeholders and positioning the research in the global context using the 'scapes' model as a framing device. This use of Appadurai's work is valuable as a starting point because it enables the films to be viewed in terms of the larger flows to which they are subject and allows for the complex range of processes and stakeholders involved to be discussed in a non-reductive and less narrowly 'local' way. Chapter Three is concerned with the question of whether the constitution of national cinema, as put forward in previous studies of instances of the national in cinema, is enough to account for the continuing perception of the concept of national cinema as relevant; it provides a background to New

³⁷ This is discussed in the following chapter.

Zealand cinema in terms of history, context and stakeholders, foregrounding the more indepth consideration of the case study films that is the focus of Chapters Four and Five. The intention is to clarify gradually the ritualisation of stakeholder practices in New Zealand cinema and to see if this ritualisation can be 'read' in the films' production and reception.

'Every case should serve a specific purpose within the overall scope of inquiry' (Yin, 2003, p. 47). While, as outlined above, generalisation or comprehensiveness is not the aim of this project, some reflection of the range of feature film production in New Zealand is desirable. As such, films were selected that offered diverse elements in terms of production, context and 'textual' characteristics. The films themselves provide five different opportunities for examining some of the key media rituals involved in national cinema, and of the flagging the films may be understood as encompassing.

The films selected met criteria consistent with the basic arguments of national cinema. Each film, for example, has a range of significant stakeholders (such as financiers, audiences, workers, and government agencies). In terms of the variety of stakeholders involved in the films, there are areas of overlap but collectively they suggest some of the complexity of forms of practice associated with 'investing' in the idea of national cinema; for example, different personnel, funding, production, distribution and exhibition patterns. Each film provides then for a different perspective on the media rituals involved. The films each present different production practices and circumstances, for example in finance, cinematographic conventions and audiences. In short, together they expose the matrix of features we need in order to analyse the interaction of rituals and interests.

In the case of some films, access to personnel was difficult (*The Lord of the Rings* is a case in point). On the other hand, there has been a great deal written about some of the films, particularly regarding their typicality or representativeness in relation to supposedly identifiable qualities of New Zealand cinema or the New Zealand national identity – precisely a form of media ritual being argued for here. Because of such unevenness, each case study film is subjected to a mix of semi-structured interviews with key personnel, document analysis and textual analysis, as judged appropriate; choices that are based on the available documents and personnel, and on

various characteristics of the films. These choices will be clarified in the treatment of each film. For example, the wide range of written material focused on *Whale Rider*, such as reviews, critical and academic appraisals, publicity material and interviews, provides a rich source of information. Different circumstances were presented in the case of *Little Bits of Light*, a small-budget film seen by very few; here, an interview with the writer-director, Campbell Walker, provided a good source of material for analysis.

Semi-structured Interviewing

Having been granted ethics approval from the relevant university committee, interviews with key production personnel from three of the case study films were undertaken. While, for some of the films, much has been previously published (including interviews featuring directors, actors and producers – *The Lord of the Rings* is the best example of this), there was comparatively little information available for others. Hence, interviewing some of those who worked on these films had the advantage of providing more in-depth information from those deeply involved in the filmmaking process, including their own interpretation of the ‘national’ character of the film in question. In some instances, these film workers were involved in every stage of the production process, including seeking government funding and negotiating with funding providers. Further, this interview approach enabled the collection of information and opinion from a specific group of stakeholders, that of practitioners, and their interests *as stakeholders* often emerged from these interviews.

Choosing only to carry out interviews with practitioners, rather than taking the approach of interviewing audience members as well, offers advantages and disadvantages. While those involved with the production and publicity of the films provide a fertile source of information about the films and the processes involved in their production and dissemination, this is perhaps the most biased group of stakeholders, in that the success or otherwise of distinctively ‘national’ films can have positive repercussions for their careers

and, by extension, their livelihoods. As is demonstrated in the following chapter in the context of New Zealand cinema production, practitioners have a stake in the concept of national cinema, particularly in terms of government financial support of cinema production. However, the limitations involved in using this group of stakeholders are balanced by the constraints of time and space, as well as by the quality of information they provide. This study hoped, instead, to reveal other, less often examined interests at work. Toward this end, interviews were carried out with *Kombi Nation* writer-director Grant Lahood, *The Māori Merchant of Venice* director Don Selwyn, and *Little Bits Of Light* writer-director Campbell Walker.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen in preference to questionnaires or open-ended interviews. This choice was made to steer the work away from standardised interview questions, due to each film having its unique aspects. This technique provides direction and focus while allowing for “greater flexibility than the closed-ended type” (Burns, 2000, p. 424). The interviewed stakeholders’ opinions concerning their own understandings of New Zealand film and how their work on the case study films relates to that was of primary importance, in order that the relationship between media ritual and national cinema might be observed in terms of important stakeholders.

Document Analysis

A range of documents were sourced in undertaking the research. These included marketing material, critical commentaries from both popular media and academic sources, material from trade publications, reviews and interviews from various publications. Further, government documents provide essential material, including policy and legislative documents, funding body decisions, press releases and promotional material arising from government funding bodies, and in one case an especially relevant government study.

This material strengthens the research, provides a broader picture, and constitutes the “variety of sources” required to reach robust conclusions (Rountree and Laing, 1996, pp. 103-104). Much of the government sourced material, like the interviewing of practitioner stakeholders, provides biased

information and, as such, can support exploration and exposure of stakeholder interests. Further, as an alternative to 'traditional' audience research, this approach provides some indirect but clear insights into a range of audience stakeholders, via documents such as government press releases and official box office figures. In the analysis of these documents, we are looking for traces of ritual, for the motivations, scale and effect of the actions of different stakeholders.

Textual Analysis

Here the term 'textual analysis' relates to what may be read as explicitly (in some instances intentionally) and recognisably 'national' within the texts. For the purpose of defining 'textual analysis' in the context of this study, I refer to Section 18 of the New Zealand Film Commission Act. There, considering relevant elements that may be identified in filmic texts, 'New Zealand content' is defined in terms of 'the subject of the film', 'the locations at which the film was to be made' and 'the nationalities and places of residence' of a range of those involved in the financing, writing and production of a film (1978). The notion of 'subject' is here the key textual one; the element most accessible to textual analysis of the films themselves.

The focus is then on scrutinising the texts to discover how and if they might be seen to embody the construction of the national. The following chapter features a discussion of the critical understandings of New Zealand cinema, and traces of the 'national content' indicated as underpinning will be sought in the films themselves. We shall see that, as in the national cinema literature, in the body of New Zealand cinema criticism there are specific markers of national cinema perceived to exist in narrative and *mise-en-scène*, including but not limited to language and location. The same approach can be employed to identify ways in which the filmic texts fall outside of this understanding of New Zealand 'national content'. We will see that each of the films has textual elements that both underscore and undercut notions of the New Zealand nation and national cinema.

The national traces which may be read in the films concerned will be related to media ritual, which is integral to the central argument here. The funding of films with what are perceived as particularly 'New Zealand' characteristics, by funding bodies mandated via legislation to support 'New Zealand content' (here, Section 18 is again indicated) and the recognition of a variety of signs of 'New Zealand', such as landscape, language and story, comprise raw material of media ritual in this sense.

2.4 Overview

The following chapter undertakes an examination of cinema production in New Zealand, underpinned by the material outlined in the examination of national cinema literature. That is, it is examined in terms of its history, its international context and relationships, and the range of significant stakeholders it embraces. This cinema production is also discussed in terms of the commonalities it has with the themes of the national cinema literature, of the things academics have tended to say about national cinema when they study it. Further, Chapter Three contextualises the later analysis of the case study films by using the 'scapes' model to frame cinema production in New Zealand. Here, an initial 'deconstruction' of the concept of national cinema is undertaken in relation to New Zealand.

Chapter Four introduces the case study films and embarks on an analysis of cinema production in New Zealand in terms assertions made in the national cinema literature. The *mediascape* of New Zealand cinema is explored, using the routine assertion from the national cinema literature that 'national' films may be identified by examining them in terms of their 'national' qualities, such as themes, genres and the inclusion of recognisably national culture. Finally, the *ideoscape* of the films is investigated in terms of the national cinema literature and the assertions of various stakeholder in New Zealand film discussed in Chapter Three.

Chapter Five is concerned with the *relevant stakeholder practices* of the case study films, and considers them in a way that takes into account their discursive realm, with a focus on stakeholder practices of media ritual. The

conclusion drawn from this approach, which re-incorporates most fully the theoretical material from Anderson, Billig and Couldry, is that it may be here, in the realm of ritual, that 'national cinema' is to be found. Thus, the notion of national cinema, more specifically of New Zealand national cinema, will be reconstructed.

Thus far, the theoretical argument is informed by the idea that media rituals are engagements with media that connect the actor to a sense of a cohesive societal and/or cultural common ground. Further, a range of such rituals, as they may be recognised in relation to national cinema, have been sketched already, such as the categorisation of films as national cinema and aspects of the funding process. However, at this juncture the question of how these and other rituals might be more fully analysed in the context of this research requires an answer. Clearly, the identification of these rituals is but the first step in the process of analysis.

It is argued that there exists a range of media rituals that permeate the cinema production industry, including for instance the identification or naming of 'national' qualities in New Zealand cinema. The way to approach the analysis of this is to look first for its material incidence - the ways the films are spoken of as national is materially evident in legislation, publicity, criticism, and in the vocabulary of filmmakers and other national cinema stakeholders. The assumption, often repeated by stakeholders, that national cinema exists is itself, of course, taken to be evidence of a media ritual.

CHAPTER THREE: CINEMA IN NEW ZEALAND

“A New Zealand film is involved in a struggle to find space for itself, always in conversation not only with Hollywood but with its alternatives – other national film traditions.” (Joyce, 2005, p. 55)

“... film is an international concern even for a country as isolated as New Zealand.” (Reid, 1986, p. 15)

“Such are the contradictory spaces New Zealand inhabits; ever open to the world but also struggling to finds [sic] its unique place in a globalized world of corporate economics and mass-distributed media.” (Zanker and Lealand, 2003, p. 67)

This chapter begins to explore *national cinema* in light of the academic discussions examined in the Introduction, and the framework for envisaging it developed in Chapter One. Keeping in mind the first of these, the commonly accepted definition of national cinema – as a cinema production industry found within specific national borders and the texts produced there – is followed, using as the object of study the geographical, legal, social, cultural and economic entity known as New Zealand. In light of the second, the practices of stakeholders in New Zealand’s “national cinema” are to the fore. In order to make the argument that national cinema is best defined as a series of media rituals that involve the engagement of stakeholders with the *idea* of national cinema, these ideas must be applied to an actual incidence of national cinema, as that is commonly understood.

In following the conventions of previous studies, cinema production in New Zealand is initially described from an historical perspective. Because this history is extensive, the overview here is necessarily selective and focuses on what have been described in the literature as the major milestones, highlighting developments that were significant in terms of the landscape of cinema production in New Zealand. This account relies on various

stakeholders, and examines the academic studies that have extensively recounted the history of cinema production in New Zealand,³⁸ as well as material from others such as filmmakers. The argument that stakeholders, such as the academics who have written such histories, are vitally important to the understanding of national cinema is emphasised, and a significant portion of this chapter is dedicated to defining and discussing the key stakeholders in New Zealand cinema production. Further, though, taking into account the previous chapter's assertion that national cinema has a discursive quality, the following review of New Zealand national cinema will pay attention to the discursive expressions of various stakeholders in relation to their understandings of national or New Zealand cinema.

There is a need to ground this project in a time period, if only due to the sake of simplicity and constraints of space. Having reviewed the major developments of cinema production in New Zealand, the period between 1999 and 2003 is selected for particular attention - the chapters which follow are limited to this timeframe. This is partly because a 1999 change of government led to a range of policies prioritising the development and maintenance of the New Zealand screen industry, hence providing a wealth of discursive material to examine. Discursive material is important here because stakeholder practice holds much promise for the study and defining of a national cinema; consequently what is said and written by these stakeholders works to produce national cinema, as cinema-related practices. The ways New Zealand is imagined through cinema, and the forms that this imagining takes – its flaggings – form part of these practices, and this is also to the fore.

In short, this chapter is structured to give context to the analysis of individual films in the two chapters that follow, and demonstrates how contemporary national cinema theory falls short when applied to the New Zealand situation. A significant contention thus far has been that despite a lack of consensus regarding the concept of national cinema, there are a range of individuals and institutions (in this context termed 'stakeholders'), with varying levels of investment in the very notion of national cinema. Hence, this

³⁸ The history and development of cinema production in New Zealand has been extensively written on. For comprehensive accounts, see Conrich and Davy, 1997; Martin and Edwards, 1997; Waller, 1996; Shepard, 2000.

chapter engages in a brief review of cinema history in New Zealand, but chiefly concentrates on examining various overlapping facets of the industry, particularly its range of stakeholders, taking into account their positions across the range of Appadurai's *scapes*.

3.1 Overview of Cinema in New Zealand - History³⁹

The literature that deals with the history of New Zealand cinema has been, as already mentioned, largely (though not exclusively) written by academics in the form of books, book chapters, papers, reports and so forth. Typically, these have featured a large amount of material focused on the relationships between government and cinema. This is as it should be, because government is a substantial stakeholder in cinema. However, it also means that the histories of cinema in New Zealand have often been written by one group of stakeholders (academics), who focus often on another (the state). This inflects these accounts, so that there is somewhat of a lack of balance to be found in the available literature as other groups of stakeholders, such as domestic audiences, have sometimes been overlooked in discussions of New Zealand national cinema. Having said this, these accounts make up the bulk of the source material for what follows, with an emphasis on the key moments, periods of change and catalysts for change highlighted in that material. Further, consistent with the discussion in the Introduction, the international connections and state inflections of New Zealand cinema are noted.

Film came quickly to New Zealand; despite its remote geography in relation to the rest of the world, moving pictures were exhibited in New

³⁹ Cinema production in New Zealand involves a wide range of budgets, genres and stakeholders, and results in films aimed at garnering both domestic and international audiences. The historical overview which follows is deliberately selective, not least because previous examinations have been detailed and rigorous, and there is little to be gained from unnecessary repetition. Rather, it places particular emphasis on the interested stakeholders.

Zealand at roughly the same time as in other Western countries (Sowry, 1984; Churchman et al., 1997; Conrich and Davy, 1997; Martin and Edwards, 1997). The form was soon popular, and by 1910 New Zealand had its first purpose-built cinema (Martin and Edwards, 1997, p. 9; Conrich and Davy, 1997, p. 1), and cinema had reportedly become “the major form of public entertainment in New Zealand” (Hayward and Hayward, 1979, p. 34). Even at this early stage of cinema New Zealand was already part of the international flows of film.

Filming in New Zealand also began early, when in 1898 AH Whitehouse imported a camera, shot the first footage filmed in New Zealand and began to produce short films (Sowry, 1984, p. 3; Churchman, 1997, 49; Martin and Edwards, 1997, p. 1; Moran and Vieth, 2005, p. 279). The New Zealand government was also quick to become involved in filming and in 1901 contracted the Salvation Army’s film unit to record a visit to the Antipodes by the Duke and Duchess of York (Martin and Edwards, 1997, p. 9; Moran and Vieth, 2005, p. 279), and James McDonald, of the New Zealand Tourist Department, filmed a variety of short scenic and ethnographic films during the early part of the twentieth century (Sowry, 1984, p. 9; Moran and Vieth, 2005, p. 281). Other early stakeholders in cinema production were foreign film entrepreneurs, notably Gaston Méliès,⁴⁰ who took advantage of New Zealand’s scenery and the stories of the ‘exotic’ native Māori people (Martin and Edwards 1997).

By and large, the filmmakers working in New Zealand in the years to 1920 were not producing dramatic films but concentrated instead on news, scenic and industrial films (Sowry, 1984, p.3), and for the most part the filming undertaken during the early years was done so at the behest of the New Zealand government.⁴¹ There were several exceptions, the most celebrated being Rudall Hayward (O’Shea 1992:17), who made his first film, *The Bloke From Freeman’s Bay* in the years between 1919 and 1921. Hayward then

⁴⁰ Méliès, a Frenchman, came to New Zealand in 1912 and shot a series of scenic and narrative films, all of which feature Māori (Martin and Edwards, 1997, p. 9; Sowry, 1984, p. 5).

⁴¹ Much of this government-sponsored filming was produced through the Publicity Office, which from 1923 employed a staff which was during the 1920s to supply one reel a week to MGM for general release, largely scenic

went on to produce and direct a number of feature films,⁴² which he financed partly through working at the end of the 1920s on films focusing on various community where they were to be shown (Petrie, 2008, 22; Moran and Vieth, 2005, 281). These films featured local townspeople and events, such as beauty contests, made by itinerant filmmakers (Conrich and Day, 1997, p. 1). Hayward's work was underpinned by a fascination with New Zealand history (Edwards and Murray, 2007, p. 35) and his work is attributed with laying the foundation for New Zealand national cinema (*ibid.*). In Hayward, we have an early example of a stakeholder whose practices made significant contributions to New Zealand cinema production.

Hence, from very early on there were a number of stakeholders in cinema in New Zealand, including audiences, who quickly took to cinema, filmmakers, both New Zealanders and overseas visitors, and government. This last stakeholder, the government, was to continue as a key stakeholder in the production of cinema for the eighty years following the first filming. This was a period during which the bulk of filmmaking in New Zealand was at the behest of Government, comprising a mixture of newsreels (Churchman, 1997, p. 50) and scenic films (Sowry, 1984, p. 9). These scenic films were often undertaken "on behalf of the Publicity Department, to promote New Zealand overseas" (Churchman, 1997, p. 55). In 1941 there was a significant development for filmmaking in New Zealand, with the reorganisation of existing government filmmaking capacity into the National Film Unit (NFU).⁴³ This occurred under Prime Minister Fraser's wartime emergency powers (Dennis, 1981, p. 9; Sowry, 1984, p. 10), for the purpose of producing weekly war information reels (Churchman et al., 1997, p. 56; Sowry, 1984, p. 10), and resulted partly from lobbying by a group of interested filmmakers and critics (Moran and Vieth, 2005, p. 282; Martin and Edwards, 1997, p. 11) – a further group of stakeholders. One of these was Canadian documentarian John

films and tourist promotions for the domestic and international markets (Sowry, 1984, p. 9).

⁴² The most well-known of his feature films, *Rewi's Last Stand*, was later to be the first New Zealand film broadcast on New Zealand television, in 1970 (Moran and Vieth, 2005, 284).

⁴³ Dennis (1981) lists 355 government-made publicity films between 1922 and 1941.

Greirson, whose influence on the establishment of the NFU was significant (Goldson and Smith, 2008, p. 157). Audience interest in the international situation increased during WWII (Churchman, 1977, p. 55), and this was sated by the NFU's *Weekly Review*, a combination of newsreels and documentaries played "before features in local cinemas throughout the country" (Goldson and Smith, 2008, p. 157). The NFU did not produce feature films, but was to become by far the largest producer of films in New Zealand (O'Shea, 1992, p. 16), largely used by politicians and government departments to produce documentary and promotional films (Churchman et al., 1997, p. 57; O'Shea, 1992, p. 16; Shepard, 2000, p. 30).

The NFU was hugely influential: it was a major trainer for film workers (New Zealand Screen Council, 2006, p. 5) and had "a legislated monopoly on film production and processing for government departments" as well as "an effective monopoly processing for the private sector" (Churchman et al. 1997, p. 57). Further, the influence wielded over the NFU by government is seen as the source of an unrealistically positive image of New Zealand in the NFU films (Shepard, 2000, p. 54). Filmed material made available by the NFU has been criticised as unrealistic (Churchman et al. 1997, p. 57) and as having very little content intended, for example, "to reveal anything of substance about Māori affairs" (O'Shea, 1992, p. 18). So the investment of the state in cinema took the form of direct investment which (arguably) inflected the resulting images and narratives, so that a limited number of versions of New Zealand were presented on the cinema screen. Hence, from early on the state assumed a role in the construction of New Zealand's *mediascape*. The contribution of these governments in flagging to New Zealand (and, in scenic and promotional films aimed at the international audience, to the world) both the image of New Zealand but also the imagined concerns of the citizenry was profound.

In 1948 the NFU ceased being the only production house in New Zealand when independent production house Pacific Films opened for business (Conrich and Davy, 1997, p. 2). The company played a considerable role in New Zealand film production history during the period that followed

(see for example Babington, 2007). It produced the only fiction feature films made in New Zealand between 1941 and 1972 (Conrich and Davy, 1997, p. 2), of which there were three (Sowry, 1984, p. 11), and “during the late 1940s and early 1950s ... [it] became the only production centre in New Zealand other than the NFU” (Joyce, 2007, p. 83). Driving these projects was filmmaker John O’Shea, who joined the company in 1950 (Sowry, 1984, p. 11; Conrich and Davy, 1997; p. 2, Babington, 2007). O’Shea’s work directing films such as *Runaway* (1962) has been credited with establishing a significant theme in New Zealand film, that of a dialectic between New Zealand’s rural and urban environments (Joyce, 2007, p. 84). Like Rudall Hayward, O’Shea was a key filmmaking stakeholder, significant to the history of New Zealand cinema production in the role he played in establishing the expectation that feature filmmaking for the domestic audience could result in films that were popular *and* financially viable.

O’Shea’s films were made independently, without the support of the state. Limited public funds were made available for production of films other than documentaries, in the form of grants from the Queen Elizabeth the Second Arts Council (QEII Arts Council), established by Parliament in 1964. Although its initial focus was on traditional visual, dramatic and aural arts, and the Council’s brief did not specify film or provide the funding to sponsor full-length feature films, it did financially support some film making. However, so little filmmaking took place in New Zealand before the late 1970s that Joyce noted “if New Zealand filmmaking in the 1970s was a cottage industry, then previously it had been for hobbyists” (Joyce, 2007, p. 83). Joyce is partly referring to a modest feature film production boom in the 1970s, which saw the production and release of four well-received, independently-produced New Zealand feature films. These were *Solo*, *Sleeping Dogs*, *Test Pictures and Wild Man* (O’Shea 1992:35; Murphy 1992:12). Of these, *Sleeping Dogs* is the most significant, and is certainly the one most often referred to by scholars, filmmakers and audiences (Stuart, 2008, p. 81). Filmmaker and director Roger Donaldson obtained backing from merchant banker Graham Reeves, in order to make the film (McDonnell, 2007, 104). In 1977 the film was released in the US (Moran and Vieth, 2005, p. 284), and it is claimed to reflect the more politicised tone of the American films of the preceding years

(Stuart, 2008, p. 73). The popularity of the film with local audiences is thought to have been such that

The film's motifs became part of the popular consciousness of this country, and it helped break down the self-consciousness of New Zealanders in seeing and hearing themselves on the cinema screen. (McDonnell, 2007, p. 107)

However, as important as these films were, this comparative boom belies the difficulties of feature film making at that time. The expense of filmmaking, coupled with a small domestic audience, meant filmmakers had to support themselves by other routes, such as by making commercials for television (Horrocks, 1977). At that time, filmmakers often relied on the goodwill of their crew, who worked under often demanding conditions for "modest wages" (Horrocks, 1977, p. 156). Further, it was rare for a film to gain more than a modest domestic audience on cinematic release; while New Zealanders were seeing more New Zealanders on television, it was rare for audiences to experience New Zealand and New Zealanders on the cinema screen (Stuart, 2008, 73).

However, while the general domestic audience was relatively unenthusiastic, in some quarters the perceived importance of film was changing. This can be seen in the advent, during the previous two decades, of a number of local film appreciation societies and the National Film Library (Joyce, 2007, 83) – in short, a "film culture was being generated" (*ibid.*). During the 1970s this was bolstered by the development of the first university film courses during the 1970s (Edwards and Martin, 1997, 13), as well as scholarship concerned with New Zealand cinema production by those inside the universities, particularly Roger Horrocks (see, for example, Horrocks, 1977).

The early stakeholders – government, filmmakers, audiences – were developing roles and relationships, and they began to come together in lobbying for government support of the fledgling film production industry during the 1970s. In 1974 the Film Industry Working Party of the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council (FIWP) was formed, comprised of academics, government employees, and others from within the New Zealand film and

television industries.⁴⁴ The Working Party recommended government support of feature film making in New Zealand and the establishment of “an annual film fund” (Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council, 1977, p. 17), partly to provide New Zealanders with relief from a “constant diet” of “overseas product” (FIWP 1974:6). Then, in 1977, the New Zealand Academy of Motion Pictures was formed and began intensive lobbying of government and the public with the aim of seeing a film commission established (Murphy 1992:134-5). The NZMAP has been described as a group of “filmmakers who wanted to explore the potential of drama to tell distinctively New Zealand stories wanted to contribute to the creation of a new sense of national identity in New Zealand” (Petrie and Stuart, 2008, p. 23). Academics, spearheaded by Auckland University’s Roger Horrocks, were also beginning to praise the industry and encourage the public funding of film production (Horrocks, 1977, p. 159), supporting calls for change. These groups brought different sets of assumptions to the argument for a state-supported film industry, but often the belief in the contribution feature films could make to New Zealand’s cultural life underlined their intentions. In 1977 there was success, when the Interim Film Commission (IFC) was established by government to investigate the viability of supporting the production of feature films in New Zealand. The report of the IFC recommended a permanent commission be established in order to counter a dominance of overseas films, boost employment in the film industry and help develop a potential export industry (Murray, 1994, p. 5; Martin and Edwards, 1997, p. 13).⁴⁵ So we see that the idea of a film commission was being positioned within discourses of national identity and economic growth, using arguments for expanding New Zealand’s *mediascape* by increasing the flaggings of New Zealand’s imagined community in the ritual space of the media.

In 1978, despite dissent from both New Zealand politicians and on the part of Hollywood (Shelton, 2005, p. 22), a Parliamentary Act set up the New Zealand Film Commission (NZFC) (Conrich and Davy, 1997, p. 2; Murray,

⁴⁴ Members of the Film Industry Working Party are listed on page 1 of Party’s report (Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council, 1977, p. 1)

⁴⁵ These aims still inform current government film policy, and have been a feature of this policy in the years since 1999 (see below).

1994, p. 5). The Act legislates for “significant New Zealand content” (NZFC Act, 1978, mandating the NZFC to ensure the participation of New Zealanders in the films it funded. This cultural distinction was to be made according to nationality and geography, rather than by theme or subject, with preference for New Zealand-based investors. Mayer and Beattie argue that the overall aim was for “The foundation of an ethnocentric, culturally exclusionist ... film industry” (Mayer and Beattie, 2007, p. 7), one in which

national identity was to be packaged as a filmic commodity that would help to ensure the existence of a New Zealand film industry. (Mayer and Beattie, 2007, p. 7)

Funding for the Commission was to come directly from government, in the form of funds from the Department of Internal Affairs, and indirectly from the Lottery Board (Waller, 1996). The impact of the state on filmmaking in New Zealand was profound:

Until the formation of the New Zealand Film Commission in 1978 filmmakers struggled in a political environment in which governments were at best disinterested and at worst hostile to film development and a local production industry. (Joyce, 2007, p. 83)

And although the NZFC was preferably to provide finance to film projects with high potential for financial and creative success, it was also made responsible for archival maintenance, education, and “the making, promotion, distribution, exhibition of films” (Churchman et al 1997:61). These activities were predicted to have benefits in four main areas: cultural, social, employment, and international. The first two were concerned with the argument that by providing the opportunity for New Zealanders to see themselves on screen, they may come to understand “themselves” better, while the two latter predicted economic benefits of increased employment and foreign exchange in the form of feature film export earnings (New Zealand Interim Film Commission, 1978, p. 11). Various commentators have interpreted the aims of the NZFC variously as based in economics (Churchman, 1997m p. 61), or as having been charged with guardianship of the New Zealand image (O’Shea, 1997, p. 13); clearly there was a mix.

The period following the 'boom' of the late 1970s, then, was an important one in terms of New Zealand cinema production. Some success with New Zealand audiences and increased funding combined to spark a significant rise in film production, resulting in what Conrich terms a "New Wave" in New Zealand cinema (Conrich, 2007, p. 129; Conrich and Murray, 2007a, p. 2), spanning from 1977 to 1986. Other significant developments during this period included the founding of the New Zealand Film Archive in 1981 (Reid, 1986, p. 12), charged with creating and maintaining an archive of NZ-made cinema images, and of industry bi-monthly newspaper *ONFILM* in 1983. Both of these developments signalled the attribution of a new significance to the output of New Zealand filmmakers, but despite this it was not a period without struggle for filmmakers because:

As with all other New Wave movements around the world, filmmakers in New Zealand had to work within the shadow of Hollywood as they searched for a cultural distinctiveness that was part of the project of establishing a national cinema. (Conrich and Murray, 2007a, p. 2)

Independent filmmakers in New Zealand were thereby expected to fulfil the cultural criteria of a "New Zealand story" required by the Act, but they also had "to compete for talent, finance and resources with the in-house productions of television and the actuality presentations of the National Film Unit," providing for a tenuous basis for business success (Reid, 1986, p. 13). Consequently, at the beginning of the decade filmmakers were generally only able to access "modest budgets" which did not generally provide for a well-paid workforce; "Somehow, more money had to be found" (Churchman, 1997, p. 62).

More money flowed into the New Zealand film industry during the early 1980s, when a tax loophole allowing film investors a thirty percent profit at the outset of production began to be exploited by filmmakers (Murphy, 1992, p. 147; Churchman et al., 1997, p. 62). A rise in film production numbers followed. But while initially the loophole was only taken advantage of by New Zealand-based producers, inevitably this financial incentive was exploited by overseas interests (Waller, 1996). Subsequently, the tax shelter was blamed for "purely commercial films, with little or no indigenous character" (Reid,

1986, p. 16; Robson and Zalcock, 1997, p. 2), and the influx of foreign production to New Zealand brought about by the discovery and subsequent exploitation of the tax loophole was not greeted with open arms by some in the industry (Shelton, 2005, p. 53). Indeed, there was a negative view taken by some that “flocking” American companies looking for inexpensive crews and locations presented “a serious risk of an American takeover of the local industry” (Horrocks, 1989b, p. 103; also see Shelton, 2005, p. 53).⁴⁶ However, this was to abruptly slow when government concern led to the closing of the loophole (Reid, 1986, p. 13; Shelton, 2005, p. 55). During the phase-out period that followed, films could qualify for tax write-offs as long as they were granted certification as ‘New Zealand films’ by the NZFC (Roddick, 2008, pp. 44-45).⁴⁷

Subsequent to the tax legislation changes, film production in New Zealand struggled as filmmakers found it increasingly difficult to raise finance (Petrie, 2008, p. 29; Lealand, 1988, p. 95). The industry was also significantly affected by the election of a Labour government in 1984 which favoured economic rationalism over cultural growth (Petrie, 2008, p. 29), an ideological position that shaped the industry (Churchman, 199, p. 63). The administration’s preference for a model of “competitive funding” of cinema (Roddick, 2008, p. 40) inevitably influenced the NZFC (Conrich and Murray, 2007, p. 136), which began to prioritise New Zealand films reaching the international marketplace, as well as being shown domestically (Lealand, 1988, p. 109). From the mid-1980s, the NZFC placed a focus on script development (Petrie, 2008, 32), and in 1986 a co-production agreement was signed with Australia (Lealand, 1988, p. 95), as, in Petrie's words “the alarming experience of boom and bust in the 1980s prompted the NZFC adopt a more business-like approach to their operations” (Petrie, 2008, 32). Whatever the practices that led to it, there was a significant decline in feature film production activity during the second half of the 1980s (Churchman, 1987,

⁴⁶ The interpretation of the impact of the tax breaks is mixed. For example: “All the Film Commission and the tax legislation did was to enable this creative talent to be turned into film.” (Stephens, 1984, p. 3)

⁴⁷ For excellent accounts of the mechanisms and implications of the tax shelter, see Roddick, 2008; Reid, 1986, pp. 13-14; Churchman, 1997, pp. 62-63.

p. 63). But during this time of instability in film financing (reinforced by the share market crash of 1987 which furthered constrained private investment (Churchman, 1997, p. 65)), several films considered important by the critical audience were nevertheless completed. These included *Vigil* (Vincent Ward, 1984), Ward's first feature film, and the first New Zealand film to be featured in competition at the Cannes Film Festival (Conrich, 2007, p. 129). This marked a key point in the introduction of New Zealand film to international festival audiences and hence "the maturing of a national cinema" (Conrich, 2007, p. 129).

Despite a change of government in the 1990s, the ideology of that Labour administration remained prevalent and underpinned developments in government policy and activity (Murray, 1994b, p. 37). One example of this is Project Blue Sky, a scheme intended to increase films' foreign exchange run through the New Zealand Trade Development Board (Murray, 1994b, p. 37), whereby we can see the economic arguments in support of film funding coming to the fore. Government funding did increase between 1986 and 1991 (Mayer and Beattie, 2007, p. 8), but not enough to compensate for the closing of the tax loophole. Then, in 1991 there were funding cuts of \$2.5 million (or 25%) of the NZFC's overall budget (Wakefield, 1991, p. 1; Petrie, 2008, p. 35).

The 1990s are often viewed as difficult years for New Zealand filmmakers, as the NZFC demanded more of filmmakers, such as requiring that they provide their own agent (rather than the NZFC assisting with this, as was the case previously) (Mayer and Beattie, 2007, 8). In order to obtain NZFC support, filmmakers were required to prove in some way that there was "a substantial audience" for their film project, including hopefully an international one (Cairns and Martin, 1994, p. 20). This change in emphasis may be seen in light of the movement of the public sector toward deregulation, alongside such adjustments as the appointment of investment banker Phil Pryke as chair of the NZFC in 1993 (Wakefield, 1993, p. 5). Pryke had "advised Government on the sales of Telecom, Coalcorp, Postbank and NZ Steel", and allegedly claimed it was "crucial the [film production] industry wean itself off Government drip-feed" funds, including those from the Lottery Board (*ibid.*). However, the decade did see notable international

success for three films made in New Zealand, *The Piano* (1993), *Once Were Warriors* (1993) and *Heavenly Creatures* (1994).⁴⁸ Major notes the use of festivals, particularly Cannes as a marketing tool for New Zealand films (2008, p.65), and these films used this strategy. It was also the period during which the filming of two runaway production television programmes began; *Hercules* and *Xena* began filming in West Auckland during 1996-97 (Churchman 1997, p. 66), profoundly boosting the local labour force and production capacity.

The 1999 election of a new administration led to changes in the government's approach to film production. Labour Prime Minister Helen Clark was to take the Arts and Culture portfolio and in her Prime Ministerial maiden speech spoke of the perceived importance of national identity and the new government's "special interest in the promotion of arts and culture" (Clark, 1999). The following year saw the release of an 'arts recovery package' worth \$146 million (Clare, 2000; We get the full monty, 2000, p. 1), almost doubling the NZFC's budget (Shelton, 2005, p. 186), and a \$22 million Film Production Fund (FPF) intended to support filmmakers' second or subsequent feature films (Clark, 2000, We get the full monty, 2000, p. 1).⁴⁹ The rationale given at that time by the Labour government for the sustained funding of this area is similar to that given in previous arguments for support of the arts, including film. The support of "culture" is seen in terms of both creating a cultural outcome, such as the assertion of national identity to both national and international audiences, and of satisfying economic outcomes of creating local employment and generating export earnings (Clark, 2000c). These indicate a change in government attitudes toward film, underpinned by 'common-sense' arguments. Of government support of the cultural sector, Clark said:

⁴⁸ These three films are invariably highlighted in academic histories as milestones in New Zealand cinema (see for example Conrich and Murray, 2007a, p. 11)

⁴⁹ This was to be "a non-government body that develops the economic potential of the film industry and is expected to attract significant private investment" (2000). "We get the full monty." *OnFilm* 17(6): 1, p. 11. Administered through the NZFC, the fund aims to invest up to 40% of the finance for films made by directors who have already made one or more feature films, with the rest of the finance coming from private investors, specifically international investors ("Film Fund shapes up", 2000, p. 1).

We act in the belief that these activities are vital to our national life and the health of our society. In addition we see significant economic benefits flowing from a commitment to the development of New Zealand as a creative nation. (Clark, 2000c)

In short, these three terms of government saw increased involvement in the screen industries, deliberately intended to bolster (ill-defined) notions of national identity and cultural well-being.

Government involvement at that time increased to include the funding of a Screen Council, the contribution of \$960,000 to Film NZ,⁵⁰ the advent of a film location marketing agency, the establishment of a Screen Production Desk at Inland Revenue Department (IRD)⁵¹ to assist overseas productions filming in New Zealand, a \$10 million increase in the government's annual contribution to the NZFC (Tizard 2003), and a 12.5% "production expenditure grant" for productions that reach certain spending thresholds (Anderton, 2003b). This last form of support, a 12.5% grant for what is generally termed 'runaway productions', is known as the Large Budget Screen Production Fund, or LBSPF.⁵² This grant is available to film and television productions made all or partly in New Zealand, providing that expenditure in New Zealand exceeds \$50 million, or if expenditure in New Zealand is between \$15 and \$50 million and this money makes up at least 70% of the total budget of the film (Anderton, 2003a). Fundamentally, the scheme is aimed at keeping New Zealand competitive in the industry screen production marketplace (New Zealand Film Commission, 2003; Anderton, 2003a; Anderton quoted in Campbell, 2003, p. 11). And while runaway productions are generally

⁵⁰ Film NZ is a New Zealand film marketing agency, which promotes New Zealand as a filming location and assists runaway production in New Zealand.

⁵¹ The involvement of Inland Revenue in film production has been increasing. Since the 1999 change of government, the department has been developing a "new working relationship with the screen production industry" in order to "make tax easier for those involved in the film, television or video industries" (Inland Revenue, 2003). Several initiatives have been developed in consultation with screen industry practitioners, including an online guide to taxation for the screen production industry, and various changes to tax targeted at those in the industry (Inland Revenue, 2003).

⁵² This loophole effectively allowed offshore film investors to claim twice for production expenses (Campbell, 2000, pp.20-22); its implementation came after "intense lobbying" (Campbell, 2000, p. 22, , 2001, p. 24).

international film projects originating from one of the major Hollywood studios, however it is not only Hollywood productions that become located in New Zealand. Since 2000 there have also been some 80 film and video crews from India filming in New Zealand, worth around \$6 million annually to the New Zealand economy (Nathan, 2003, p. 30). It has been claimed that these films are responsible for a threefold rise in Indian tourists to New Zealand, a key reason why these productions are encouraged by government agency Trade New Zealand (Nathan, 2003, p. 31). These productions are apparently attracted to New Zealand because of “its scenery, but more particularly with its flexible (read non-union) film crews” (Drinnan, 2002). Such attractive features of the local production climate are considered a major factor in New Zealand cinema production, as have been co-productions (Waller, 1996).

However, as well as schemes such as the LBSPF, New Zealand government’s film funding and support includes initiatives aimed at filmmakers making small-budget and original work, particularly in light of the belief in the need for “A strong domestic sector ... to underpin New Zealand’s viability for large budget productions” (New Zealand Screen Council, 2006a, p. 2). In this case, filmmakers can apply to the Screen Innovation Production Fund (SIPF), a partnership between Creative New Zealand (CNZ) and the NZFC that makes available small (up to \$25,000) grants intended “to provide grants to emerging and experienced moving-image makers for innovative and experimental moving-image productions” (Creative New Zealand, 2006) – hence aiming to increase the diversity of New Zealand’ *mediascape*.⁵³ The Clark government was significant in attempts to boost cinema production in New Zealand, in that it was “committed to a transformation of the nation in which culture was to play a central role” (Williams, 2008, p. 183). This administration has often been viewed as consciously exercising its ideological power in relation to film, for example:

⁵³ Although it is not exclusively aimed at feature film, a number of features have received grants from the fund, including *Little Bits of Light* (Walker, 2003) and *Woodenhead* (Habict, 2003). Most of these films are distinctive for having been shot on digital video.

The Clark government set itself a programme of promoting national identity by encouraging a positive sense of belonging through the arts. (Williams, 2008, p. 184)

By the mid-2000's, there were several ways the state funded and supported film, involving "at least nine government-funded organisations" (Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2003, p. 7). Alongside those outlined above (including the NZFC, SIPF, FilmNZ, and the IRD), there are further agencies involved with screen production. The Ministry for Culture and Heritage is an important one, as it administers a range of funding, including to the NZFC. Further, there is involvement, primarily in attracting and maintaining overseas production to New Zealand, via Tourism New Zealand (which was involved in the leveraging of New Zealand's image in the wake of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy), the Ministry of Education (which monitors tertiary screen qualifications), the New Zealand Film Archives, and the Ministries for Economic Development and Foreign Affairs. These "multiple funding streams administered by separate agencies add up to a complex system" (Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2003, p. 17). However, these are inevitably driven by the same agenda as noted above, and focus on specific kinds of film practices, although within the context of nurturing the career trajectory of local filmmakers through the support of different film forms.

The Lord of the Rings, directed by Peter Jackson and filmed between 2001 and 2003, was a monumentally significant production project for the New Zealand cinema industry. It might be viewed as a runaway production with local input, bringing "Hollywood capital into happy conjunction with New Zealand scenery and talent" in "the first serious industrialisation of cinema in New Zealand" (Williams, 2008, p. 182). In 2003, the Pinfold Report (Pinfold, 2003) concluded that New Zealand film industry workers were firmly positioned within the global context as part of an industry with a small domestic market that needs to look to global markets to even attempt to recoup costs (*ibid.*, p. 48). New Zealand was characterised as a 'provincial location' for film production, a training ground for New Zealand workers (who often move to larger markets with more lucrative opportunities, usually Hollywood), and the site of runaway productions "with an international orientation" (*ibid.* pp. 27 ,55). The first of these has a domestic market focus

(*ibid.* p.27), while the other is a service export industry, servicing the needs of international productions (*ibid.*).

Clearly, the New Zealand cinema industry is small, with little money and a relatively tiny domestic audience on which to rely for recouping of investment. Hence, this industry relies on the state for support and on international investment and reception as part of a global system of film investment, production and exhibition. The industry has a high level of government involvement and a wide range of stakeholders who have contributed to the development of cinema production in New Zealand.

If we view the foregoing in terms of the national cinema literature, we see significant similarities. Cinema in New Zealand is clearly subject to a multitude of factors and relationships, not least of which are those involving various institutions within the state and the international cinema industry. Further, New Zealand cinema production is substantially impacted by the ideological underpinnings of whichever government administration is driving the mechanics of state at any time. One such shift in government policy direction can be seen during the 1980s, when economic aims came to the fore, underpinned by the monetarist ideology that underpinned subsequent administrations, through into the 1990s. In consequence, the cultural maintenance impetus that underpinned the establishment of the Film Commission became more explicitly conflicted with a profit motive. As Reid wrote in 1986:

The tension between entertainment (or art) and profit as aims for a film-industry; the dichotomy of culture and commerce – these are not issues unique to New Zealand. What is peculiar to this country is the degree to which the government's attitude towards tax incentives influences the productivity of the film industry. (Reid, 1986, p. 13)

These factors have remained significant, as we see from Conrich and Murray twenty one years later:

The current state of the New Zealand film industry is not an unproblematic one – there are clear tensions between the

huge budget features of recent years and the need to continue to support small-scale productions, especially those that are more obviously about the lived experiences of New Zealand life... (Conrich and Murray, 2007, p. 16-17)

During the period after 1999, this was perhaps even more so, as *The Lord of The Rings* elevated New Zealand's cinema production capacity significantly (Mayer and Beattie, 2007, p. 9) – and, as we shall see, with state approval. New Zealand cinema is complicated by government involvement in encouraging and attracting foreign-based cinema production. This is important in terms of national cinema, as runaway production is often glossed over in the literature⁵⁴ when it is a significant contributor to local cinema production with potential to encourage employment, infrastructure and skills, and hence to build cinema capacity at the national level. However, the complications of state agendas and the demands of the international industry also emphasise the need for a model of national cinema that allows for its multiple contradictions, one that takes into account the international context and the many stakeholders. This is the approach argued in the previous chapter. To consider this in more detail, there is a need to examine the various *stakeholders* cinema in New Zealand, to tease out their various interests, practices and discourses, keeping in mind the ways they might use cinema in ritual imaginings of the national.

3.2 Cinema Production in New Zealand: Stakeholders

So we see that this is an industry in which many stakeholders were involved from very early on, each with different agendas. There are a range of individuals and organisations involved and interested in feature film making in New Zealand, including audiences, filmmakers, investors, academics and government. Of these stakeholders, the New Zealand government has played the most significant role, from its early involvement to its continuing and significant contributions to cinema production. Government has also heavily

⁵⁴ This is not entirely the case; O'Regan certainly emphasises these contradictions in his account of Australian cinema (O'Regan, 1996).

influenced the fluctuating fortunes of the industry, increasing and withdrawing support at various times.⁵⁵

Investment New Zealand lists some of those involved with cinema production in New Zealand:

Any one production, from the initial generation of the idea through to its delivery to domestic and overseas markets, will involve many players: writers; producers; directors; actors; technicians; agents; distributors; cinema chains; and television networks. (Investment New Zealand, 2005, p. 3)

While this list scratches the surface of defining the stakeholders in New Zealand cinema production – it does not, for example, include critics and reviewers – it does indicate the great many points along the chain of relations of any film at which stakeholder interests come into play. The stakeholder groups examined here are investors, government, film workers and practitioners, and audiences (with a particular focus on the critical audience). Clearly, New Zealand cinema does not exist in a vacuum, and the changing agenda of stakeholders can have significant impact on the industry. These groups of stakeholders will now be looked at in turn.

Investors

Investors in film production include production companies, investment firms and government agencies, some of which are occasional investors in film production and others, such as certain New Zealand-based production companies⁵⁶ and the New Zealand government, which are continuing investors. Information concerning the precise levels of funding for feature films is difficult to obtain, partly because the relevant data collated by Statistics New Zealand is assembled under the broad category of the 'screen

⁵⁵ Two examples of this are the closing of the tax loophole in the 1980s, and the significant increase in industry support in the post-1999 period.

⁵⁶ For example, South Pacific Pictures.

industry'.⁵⁷ However, we do know that foreign investment has been a continuing feature of the local production industry, in part because of encouragement of producers by the NZFC to use private investment (Shelton, 2005, p. 53).

Fluctuations in the New Zealand dollar have precipitated ebbs and flows of this foreign investment, so that at times New Zealand has been an attractively low-cost location for international productions (Watkin, 2005, p. 18), due to "accessible locations, a non-union film crew and a favourable exchange rate" (Fitzgerald, 2003). Alongside this international investment in filmmaking is the "high percentage of New Zealand-produced feature films ... made with the help of government funding" (Film New Zealand, 2006), but despite the availability of finance from government sources, film production in New Zealand has "one of the lowest funding-to-revenue" ratios (Statistics New Zealand, 2006, p. 3). Investment sources for cinema production in new Zealand, then, are diverse but can clearly be seen as dominated by government sources.

The NZFC is foremost amongst government film funding agencies. This finance "is provided as investment, not grants" (Harley, 2004), as a loan or equity investment, often alongside investment from other sources (NZFC, 2006a, p. 3; 2007a; 2007c). There have been various approaches and schemes, such as Project Blue Sky (above). Since 2002, this has been reflected in the Large Budget Screen Production Fund (LBSPF) initiative, which provides tax assistance to film projects that have high investment from other sources, and this impetus sees many films receiving financing from

⁵⁷ 'Screen industry' (also sometimes 'screen industries') is the term used by New Zealand government agencies, such as Statistics New Zealand, the New Zealand Screen Council and the Inland Revenue Department (IRD) to define those industries related to the production, post-production, distribution, exhibition and broadcast of film, television, commercials, and non-broadcast filmed material (for example, training materials).

'The screen production sector can be broken down into five major sub-sectors: film, television, commercials, animation and post-production. The sectors are interdependent and rely on each other for business, skilled staff and a successful finished product.' New Zealand Screen Council (2005). *Overview of The New Zealand Screen Production Sector*. Wellington.

multiple sources. Indeed, a majority of feature films made in New Zealand receive finance from sources other than the NZFC,⁵⁸ which is indicative in part of the continuing high level of involvement of foreign investors. Overall,

[...] most films and TV programs made in New Zealand are produced by privately owned companies that raise the necessary financing from a multiplicity of arms-length sources and then rely on third-party businesses to market and distribute the finished film. In this regard, New Zealand is not different to Australia, Canada, the UK and even a significant portion of the US production. (Investment New Zealand)

An investor, the government is somewhat of a special case, as recouping of finance is not the only investment priority:

Unlike any private sector investor government doesn't have to rate financial viability as a primary condition of continuing in any business it might invest in. Instead a range of other far more grand measures are touted as being important to the 'stakeholders' it represents, and which the government trots out to justify its expenditures. (Morgan, 2001, p. 23)

While the recoup of investment has been and inevitably remains a factor for the state, any film's success in achieving funding is necessarily contingent on balancing a range of factors. Of the films the NZFC invested in during the years until 1987, four went into profit (Drinnan, 2002).⁵⁹

While the 'New Zealand' label may itself be a selling point in terms of the international market, it is also imperative that films do not alienate

This category includes all film production, including short, documentary and experimental films, as well as material filmed for television and non-broadcast purposes.

⁵⁸ Admittedly, this information is somewhat unreliable in terms of those receiving funding from the NZ government – while the NZFC is taken into account, other government sources, including the SIPF (administered by Creative NZ on behalf of CNZ and the NZFC), are not included.

⁵⁹ According to Drinnan, these films “are *Bad Taste*, Lee Tamahori's gruelling *Once Were Warriors*, Jane Campion's biographical *An Angel At My Table* and the Gibson Group's horror *The Irrefutable Truth About Demons*” (Drinnan, 2002). Further, “For every dollar the commission has invested in films, it has got back 27 cents...” (*ibid.*).

audiences and other stakeholders by being too 'different'. Indeed for investors, having the 'national' label attached to a film probably translates more often into tax breaks and other forms of government support to supplement their investment, rather than necessarily offering a point of radical difference in terms of a film's subject matter or audience appeal. It is important to note here, however, that it is difficult to access the general attitude of offshore and other non-government investors toward New Zealand 'national cinema'.

Government

It required an act of political will to construct a [New Zealand] cinema capable of reflecting national identity.
(Buscombe, 2003, p. 3)

The New Zealand government's history of involvement in the cinema industry has been outlined above.⁶⁰ As we have seen, New Zealand governments have supported cinema production going back to the first decade of the 1900s (Conrich and Davy, 1997, p. 2), as "government was not slow in recognising the potential of film" for nation-building (Churchman, 1997, p. 49). Extensive government influence on cinema production can for example be seen in the influence government exercised over the NFU (Shepard, 2000, p. 54), and the New Zealand government, despite changed agenda, remains a key and influential stakeholder in New Zealand cinema production, with an important role as a funder and supporter of both 'pure' New Zealand production and the runaway production that has an increasing presence in New Zealand.

Government involvement in cinema production currently takes many forms, including film production assistance available through the Inland Revenue Department (IRD), The Ministry for Culture and Heritage,⁶¹ the

⁶⁰ Further to the above, the New Zealand government has also influenced cinema in New Zealand through regulating foreign film imports (Lealand 1988; Churchman, Cain et al. 1997), censorship legislation, and developing and implementing policy frameworks for the distribution and exhibition sectors (Churchman, Cain et al. 1997).

⁶¹ Which administers a range of funding, including to the NZFC.

NZFC, Tourism New Zealand,⁶² the Ministry of Education,⁶³ the New Zealand Film Archives, and the Ministries for Economic Development and Foreign Affairs. Each of these bodies may themselves be considered stakeholders in New Zealand national cinema, with various objectives and stakes in cinema production.⁶⁴ Of these the NZFC is perhaps the most important because it has the most direct influence over filmmaking activity in New Zealand, as we see from the above. It is also the largest state organisation (with the largest budget) mandated to support cinema production, and has a special relationship with the state provided by the NZFC Act (1978). Section 18 of the Act requires the NZFC extend support only to films it judges to have "significant New Zealand content" and sets out the qualifying criterion for the Commission to declare a film "a New Zealand film" (NZFC, p. 2007). This is useful here, because it is a mandate for the type of stakeholder practice, the funding of cinema, that helps to construct and imagine national (New Zealand) cinema.

The Act provides a good indication of state hopes and expectations of funding for film production, in the form of rhetoric or the discursive trace of stakeholder practice. Examination of the rhetoric of various of the politicians, state organisations, bureaucrats and their media units and so on, provide *discursive evidence* of their various goals and aspirations in relation to cinema. In order to examine government involvement in and relationships with cinema, particularly production, we can look to the language and discourse concerning it, which can be seen in government press releases, speeches, statements, and in the Act itself.

We might, for example, begin to examine such discursive evidence in relation to the justifications given by the Interim Film Commission for the launching of a film commission. The following quote demonstrates a rhetorical engagement with the *idea* of New Zealand cinema as a cultural force:

⁶² Which was involved in the leveraging of New Zealand's image in the wake of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy.

⁶³ Which monitors tertiary screen qualifications.

⁶⁴ In the example of Tourism New Zealand, the aim is clearly to leverage tourism, and hence foreign exchange, from internationally-successful films filmed in New Zealand; examples of this include particularly *Whale Rider* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

We would like to provide a means whereby New Zealanders were helped through motion pictures to come to a better understanding of themselves. (New Zealand Interim Film Commission, 1978)

The rest of the world, too, will be better able to see New Zealand as it sees itself. (*ibid*)

The IFC's 1978 report argues for government funding of a permanent film production support body, one which will flag New Zealand's identity as a form of cultural maintenance. The two quotes above neatly highlight the identity arguments often found in the rhetoric of national cinema stakeholders: the notion that cinema has an important role to play in maintaining and even defining the national character in an illustrative and illuminating way. Cinema is here seen as strategically important both nationally and internationally. Such ideas are fundamentally (though not explicitly) underpinned by the idea of media ritual – the idea that media can connect us to an imagined cultural centre (in this case, the cultural centre of the nation).

Such discourse changes over time. For example, by the late 1980s, the idea of government looking favourably on the cinema industry over others were expressed (partly by emphasising economic goals), as seen in the words of then-Prime Minister David Lange and then-Arts Minister Peter Tapsell:

Good New Zealand feature films can make statements about New Zealand overseas which are worth immeasurable amounts to us in focusing attention on New Zealand. New Zealand will be the poorer if it does not have a feature film industry. (Lange cited in Lealand, 1998, p. 104)

[Filmmakers] help to give us a look at the cultural picture of New Zealand. Films are the third dimension in our foreign policy. (Tapsill cited in *ibid.*)

The arguments here, for flagging New Zealand in the international *mediascape*, are essentially the same, although Tapsell's is underpinned by the notion of cultural maintenance. We also see that various stakeholders,

even state stakeholders such as a government-funded board (the IFC) or politicians (Lange and Tapsell), hold different positions in relation to cinema at different times: the definitions of 'New Zealand cinema' shift according to a range of factors. There is no stable definition of New Zealand cinema; even among state stakeholders, it is necessarily a shifting concept.

The aspiration of balancing foreign-derived film images with (perceived) examples of a New Zealand national culture on cinema screens (for example, Hobbs, 2000) is a recurring theme. A desire for the creation and exhibition of local images is combined with the belief that to present locally-derived alternatives to global images will have a strengthening effect on New Zealand's national culture:

As a small nation New Zealand is particularly vulnerable to cultural globalisation. We are surrounded by the images and perceptions of others. But we are not a suburb of Los Angeles, London, or Sydney. We can express our differences, our uniqueness, so positively through our creative people. Film, like all parts of our arts, cultural, and creative sectors, has a big role to play in that, and in promoting New Zealand's distinctive identity to a wider world. (Clark, 2000e)

This statement was made by Helen Clark, then in the early years of her time as Prime Minister, as a particularly vocal advocate of the New Zealand cinema production industry – perhaps the most supportive political figure in the long history of cinema in New Zealand. The quote is typical of the language employed by Clark in support of film production. Clark emphasised the notion that cinema has a role to play in expressing the uniqueness of New Zealand culture – whatever that may be understood to be – on the world stage. This is a key argument for support of the 'creative sectors', including film, repeatedly made by the Clark government.

This push for film images that reflect or represent 'New Zealand' may be seen as part of a broad strategy of cultural and national identity maintenance. Claims made at the time of the NZFC's establishment are remarkably similar to more recent ones:

Film taps all disciplines and all the media, it is the people's art and communication form. It's the country's most powerful tool of self expression. (Bill Sheat quoted in Lealand, 1988, p. 98)

As Minister for Arts and Culture in New Zealand, I know how important film is in expressing the uniqueness of national identity and culture. (Clark, 2003; see also Clark 2000a, 2000d, 2004)

This perceived link between creativity in the arts and New Zealand identity-maintenance is evidenced in, for example, the requirement that the Film Fund "will also give consideration to ... [the c]ontribution to New Zealand's national cinema" (New Zealand Film Commission 2006). Precisely what constitutes this contribution is not defined but it continued to be emphasised by members of that administration, such as senior government Minister Steve Maharey:

As you all will know, this government has made an ongoing commitment to defining and strengthening New Zealanders' perceptions of their own cultural identity. That identity is reflected in the stories we tell, through visual arts, music and song, writing and film and television. (Maharey, 2004)

Again, important in such claims is the argument that these stories and images are significant not just in terms of New Zealand audiences, but within the wider, global framework. This is seen in the words of then-Deputy Prime Minister, Jim Anderton, NZFC CEO Ruth Harley and senior government Minister Mark Burton:

Film is one of the most powerful forms of expression in popular culture. Our art tells our story. It tells the world about us as a people, a nation and a place. And the more we tell our story, the more confident and successful we will be in the world. To put it simply, it's a powerful way to assert our New Zealand identity. So the film industry contributes more than simply its own economic earnings. (Anderton 2003)

...expanding the possibilities of what [local filmmakers] can achieve and this in turn will bring enormous benefits to New Zealand's visibility in the world. (Harley, 2002, p. iv)

... beyond the obvious economic benefits such as the effects of raising our tourism profile internationally, New Zealand is also seeing the effect that quality film making can have in communicating our stories to the world. (Burton, 2003)

So film has been viewed by successive governments to be important to the image of New Zealand both domestically and internationally. This points again to a tension between promoting the production of 'New Zealand' stories – the cultural imperative – and producing cinema that is easily accessible to the global audience⁶⁵ – the economic imperative.

Because filmmaking is usually an expensive activity, government support of film is also underpinned by the aim of using international finance to help develop the local industry. Government seeks to foster what it terms positive cultural outcomes with the assistance of international producers, which can be seen in the earlier quote from Mark Burton linking film to potential economic benefits. This also works in the reverse, so that the range of initiatives aimed at small-budget and 'original' work are partly informed by the belief in the need for 'A strong domestic sector ... to underpin New Zealand's viability for large budget productions' (New Zealand Screen Council, 2006, p. 2). The revenue-producing potential of these larger, generally international productions however is to the fore, alongside the capacity of such productions to enrich the local industry and in terms of production skill and potential, and hence to produce the 'national' images argued for in many of the quotes above. Chief Executive Officer of the NZFC, Ruth Harley, contends that these smaller films complement larger-budget films, not least in that they are a training ground for practitioners:

While it is essential to retain opportunities for experienced filmmakers to make larger-scale features, the NZFC must also continue its focus on the smaller features which have launched the careers of so many New Zealanders with exceptional talents. (Harley in New Zealand Film Commission, 2006, p. 2)

⁶⁵ We should note that this audience is largely left unconsidered and undefined.

Hence, while positive outcomes of a cultural nature are envisaged, these are part of an industry development strategy which also aims to attract international finance:

The core mission of the Film Commission is to seek out talented New Zealand filmmakers and to give them an environment within which to work and develop. We will continue to encourage the development of creative entrepreneurs because it is the creation of projects within New Zealand that is the best way of ensuring that more major film projects will be made here. (Harley, 2002, p. iv)⁶⁶

What we see is that the New Zealand government's aims in supporting cinema production fall broadly into two categories – cultural and economic. These twin aims underpinned the initial arguments for a film commission (Beilby and Murray 1980) (also as in Harley's statements above). These were reaffirmed by the Commission in 1986, while emphasising its hopes that New Zealand films would reach the international marketplace and hence present a positive image of New Zealand to the rest of world (quoted in Lealand, 1998, pp. 79-80). Without a doubt these three aims – cultural identity, economic benefits and international image – form the basis of government involvement in screen production, and are especially clear in the importance government ascribes to international finance and runaway production. The pursuit of runaway production signals a slightly different framing of these same principles, so that the development of policy and guidelines has shifted over time but is nonetheless informed by recurring principles.

In terms of the 'stakes' the New Zealand government has in national cinema, then, these are varied and clearly change over time. We see from the historical overview of cinema in New Zealand that funding has shifted as government ideology has changed over the decades. We see, also, that different administrations are more and less sympathetic to supporting film production than others. This leads to shifts in rhetoric and emphasis; much more was said and written about the New Zealand cinema industry by various

⁶⁶ Of course, as CEO of the NZFC, Harley must defend the Commission's use of public money; it is best that government funding does not look as though it is being thrown into a hole

government officials and agencies during the three or four years after the 1999 change of government than had been previously.

We also have seen that government support for film in New Zealand is undertaken for both economic and cultural reasons. Regarding the economic impetus, government stands to gain in terms of revenue, by way of inbound tourism and, in the case of runaway production, increased economic activity within New Zealand's borders. On the other hand, the cultural stakes for government enhance those economic drivers. Hence, the positive image that government seeks to portray to overseas audiences is intended to contribute to New Zealand's tourism industry, while the practical advantages of international investment are hoped to contribute to the continued production and perpetuation of positive, 'New Zealand' film images. In short:

In New Zealand, government has played a key role as mediator, manager and funder of both 'creative' and 'economic' imperatives in the local film industry... (Jones and Smith, 2005, pp. 929-930)

A further interest in the industry for the New Zealand government is self-promotion, particularly via linking the government (either as a whole, or certain high-profile individuals, such as Clark), to the success of a number of individual films. This links to the possibility of using cinema production to boost government popularity – or perhaps to a hope that a buoyant national identity might be beneficial. The hoped-for foreign exchange earnings may also be seen in these terms, since a sound economy is a government aim which may result in increased government popularity. Most significantly at stake, however, is a return on investment, both cultural then economic,⁶⁷ and the New Zealand government clearly recognises benefits of being seen to be supportive of local culture.

Practitioners and Film Workers⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Taking into account historically low returns for the NZFC as an investor.

⁶⁸ The distinction is made here between *practitioners*, those who drive film projects, both creatively and in other ways, such as directors, writers,

Another key stakeholder group is comprised of those who work within the New Zealand production environment: the practitioners and film workers from New Zealand and overseas, including ‘the creatives’, who are employed in the film production industry. This group includes film producers, writers, cinematographers, composers and set, costume and sound designers and during the last ten years their numbers have grown (Statistics New Zealand and Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2005, pp. 67, 70). These industry workers may be employed in a range of ways, including:

- Locally based production companies, which may be one-offs set up for the particular project;
- Co-production teams, which are joint projects between local and foreign partners who share creative control and finance;
- Foreign production companies, which are based overseas but who produce films and programmes in New Zealand;
- Television broadcast companies; and
- Educational institutions, and community groups. (NZ Institute of Economic Research, 2002, p. 9)

Hence, film practitioners and workers form a stakeholder group with a wide, and probably diverse range of interests, subject to the impact of industry demands for a flexible workforce (Yeabsley et al., 2004, pp. 3-5), as well as the vagaries of government policy. These stakeholders are further subject to the unpredictable ebb and flow of runaway production, a conspicuous feature in recent years, which demonstrates the often crucial role of New Zealand cinema’s wider, international investment context. This group has relationships with a number of other stakeholders, including production companies (film and television), financiers and the myriad of government agencies and regulatory bodies (NZIER, 2002, p. 10). The influence of government on practitioners is

producers, etc, and *film workers* who, while not necessarily involved at the initiation stages of film projects, nonetheless (along with practitioners) derive wage income through working in film production. The use of the term ‘practitioner’ is similar to Conrich and Murray’s use of the term ‘filmmaker’: “We take ‘filmmakers’ to mean not only directors but also those key figures whose talent and drive often animates film product...” including “actors and figures whose work in photography, scripting, and production is as important to the films they make as their direction.” (Conrich and Murray, 2007, p. 1).

particularly strong as without government support far fewer films would be made in New Zealand (Robson and Zalcock, 1997, p. 3), and with this support comes cultural mandates and expectations about content (*Ibid.*).

The ebb and flow of finance which filmmakers rely on has meant that many workers have sought work overseas, including a majority of the most successful filmmakers. Having made several films in New Zealand they have then moved abroad in search of more opportunity (Thompson, 2006, p. 435).⁶⁹ This ebb and flow can be seen in the rising number of people employed in the film production industry in New Zealand during the decade to 1995 (Statistics New Zealand and Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2005, pp. 67, 70), which a decade later has been paralleled by growth in the skill base of those working in the industry (Yeabsley et al., 2004, p. 6) as runaway production has increased.

An exceptional filmmaker in the New Zealand context (and beyond), one often singled out by other stakeholders and responsible for some of the increasing number of workers in the industry, is director and producer Peter Jackson. Having made four small budget films, Jackson went on to attract international financing to make films in New Zealand, first with *The Frighteners*, but most significantly as the director of *The Lord of the Rings* film trilogy. In 1998 Jackson purchased the former NFU film laboratory, which he subsequently brought up to international post-production standard (Pryor, 2003, pp. 293-294). Jackson has been responsible for attracting an enormous amount of financing to the country, and the subsequent international success has meant an elevated status among New Zealand filmmakers. In 2005, Jackson, who remains living and working in New Zealand, was named “the most powerful man in Hollywood” by film magazine *Empire* (Watkin, 2005, p. 17), a significant claim given the small-market constraints usually experienced by New Zealand-based filmmakers. Publicly, Jackson has been very vocal about the industry:

⁶⁹ This has been labelled a “Talent Drain” (Conrich and Davy, 1997, p. 8), and has at times occurred to such an extent that, according to filmmaker Duncan Sarkies, “New Zealand became known as a kind of kindergarten for great filmmakers” (Sarkies in Petrie and Stuart, 2008, p. 241).

I am committed to international filmmaking driven creatively from New Zealand and I look forward to many other New Zealand filmmakers making their films here using the best talent New Zealand and the international filmmaking community have to offer for the benefit of New Zealand as a whole both economically and culturally. (Jackson, 2002, p. iii)

Jackson's career has been considerably influenced by the New Zealand government's role as stakeholder in national cinema. It was "with the early support of the New Zealand Film Commission" (Hobbs, 2000) that his first feature films were completed. Jackson has emphasised this relationship:

My own development as a filmmaker was strongly assisted by the New Zealand Government through the NZ Film Commission. (Jackson, 2002, p. iii)

This highlights both the importance of the government in supporting film in terms of fostering the development of emerging filmmakers, and the inevitable *dependence* of many New Zealand filmmakers on such assistance.

In practical terms, *The Lord of the Rings* project involved significant upskilling of the New Zealand film worker base, a substantial rise in international awareness of this country as a cinema production and post-production location, and the development of world-class production and post-production facilities in Wellington (Jones, et al., 2006). However, others working within film production have had mixed responses to the presence of runaway production in New Zealand. This group of stakeholders experiences the volatility of the production industry, as activity fluctuates with both domestic and particularly international productions, which in turn demands the workforce is flexible in the face of market volatility (Yeabsley, et al., 2004, pp. 3-5). The argument has been made that the presence of international productions drive up labour and studio costs, because these productions have access to more funds, and that this creates difficulties for New Zealand producers trying to hire film workers and find studio time (Dave Gibson quoted in Campbell, 2003b, pp. 23-24). Gibson, a screen producer, also argues that it is generally more lucrative for workers and creatives to freelance on international productions than to generate New Zealand productions (*ibid.*), Filmmaker Vincent Ward agrees, saying:

Everywhere the American industry has gone, the domestic industry has, in almost every case, collapsed except as a service industry for incoming productions. (Ward quoted in Hansen, 2003, p. 17)

Filmmaker Gaylene Preston also claims that any advantages of international production coming to New Zealand tend to be dramatic but short lived:

It goes into a boom until someone else introduces a better incentive and suddenly we will be left with a lot less jobs and no core business. (Preston quoted in Knight, 2004, p. A4)

This signals conflict, or deep ambivalence, within this stakeholder group, between international producers and those based locally on a more permanent basis.

This group of stakeholders does however hold common interests, not least of which is in seeking government support for cinema, as demonstrated in the later involvement of independent feature film makers in lobbying government for the establishment of the NZFC (Murphy, 2002, pp. 134-135). The belief on the part of practitioners in the necessity for a New Zealand film industry to be deliberately and carefully nurtured is both historically-rooted and ongoing. In 1984 filmmaker Peter Wells asserted that such an industry is important because "[it] is the only one that can be the keeper of New Zealand's identity" (Peter Wells quoted in Lealand, 1988, p. 99). These filmmakers often feel they have a long-term investment in making films for a New Zealand public (Horrocks, 1989, p. 103). They therefore have a significant interest in seeing the right circumstances prevail for such films, as they see them, particularly given the small domestic audience. This in turn places increased importance on the role of government support for film; clearly, stakeholder interests and desires are often interrelated.

A variety of industry groups exist in New Zealand, made up of various members of this stakeholder group. The Screen Production and Development Association (SPADA) is perhaps the most vocal, with membership ranging from directors and producers to lawyers and accountants. Other groups include the Screen Directors Guild of New Zealand (SDGNZ), Actors Equity,

Women in Film and Television (WIFT) and Ngā Aho Whakaari Māori in Film, Video and Television, most of which actively lobby government, government agencies and others on behalf of their members. Influential individual members, such as Peter Jackson in the case of the Screen Directors Guild, have given some of this lobbying and advocacy extra weight in recent years. And, as with any large stakeholder group, there is also the potential for tension between these different stakeholders, which can be seen in the differing attitudes to runaway production in New Zealand.

Film workers rely heavily on the ebb and flow of investment in the industry, on which international investment has long had a significant impact, in terms of bringing employment opportunities and widening the pool of film workers and the skill base. This is demonstrated in the six-year location shooting in New Zealand of television series *Hercules: the Legendary Journeys* and *Xena: Warrior Princess* by American-owned production company Pacific Renaissance (New Zealand Screen Council, 2005, p. 5; Pryor, 2003, pp. 240-141). These productions have been credited with contributing significantly to the awareness and attractiveness of New Zealand as a production location for overseas projects. Fundamentally, "...filmmaking is international, and ... it is becoming less and less common for local films to be made without some input from overseas personnel" (Cairns and Martin, 1994, viii). So this group works in the face of fluctuating global trends and fortunes, and has multiple stakes in the industry, including livelihood. Further, as has been demonstrated in the historical discussion, above, this is a group who will lobby for state support that will enable creative freedom, an additional and important stake, particularly for those grouped here under the label of 'practitioners'.

Audiences

... movies have several lives, and at each stage they can touch the public, get discussed and – perhaps a role of the bigger movies – act as something of a ritual. (Petrie, 2008, 25)

Given film production's profit motive, it is the cinema audience that is the stakeholder largely responsible for deciding a film's success or failure. This is a broad group, including any audience, local and/or global, for New Zealand films. Further, audiences experienced films in a widening range of ways not limited to the cinema – audiences also experience film through broadcast television (pay and free), in flight, on DVD and via the internet. Hence, 'the audience' is not simply a homogenous group, but is rather a series of groups and individuals, including the general audience, the domestic audience, the international audience, the art house audience, the academic audience, and so on. We are really talking about 'the audience' in the sense of both the individual and the plural, across the national and the international, as a group with a range of roles to play in terms of the maintenance of national cinema, and with a diverse understanding of what 'New Zealand cinema' is.

The first of these, and the most immediate in most instances, is the domestic audience.⁷⁰ This is a relatively small audience with a consequently limited capacity to enable full recoupment of a film's cost (NZFC in Lealand, 1988, p. 109). Historically, New Zealand film made up only a small proportion of the overall amount of cinema viewed by this audience, perhaps in part due to the long period during which production in New Zealand was at all but a standstill; for many years it was a rare occasion when cinema audiences experienced New Zealand onscreen (Stuart, 2008, p. 73). Alternatives to the popular Hollywood fare came to local audiences in the form of film societies in the 1940s (Churchman, 1997, p. 30; Shelton, 2005, p. 5) and international film festivals first held in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Horrocks, 1989a, p. 110; Shelton, 2005, p. 9). These found their way to audiences, despite protestations by exhibitors that they wouldn't be popular (Shelton, 2005, p. 9), however organisers of the first Wellington film festival in 1972 were unable to

⁷⁰ Even to group this audience together is somewhat problematic; Sarkies argues that New Zealand's audience is not homogenised, but is varied and that this is somewhat reflective of "a long thin country which is very different at the bottom than the top" (Sarkies in Petrie and Stuart, 2008, p. 96).

source New Zealand films to include in the programme (*ibid.*). It would be another two years before New Zealand films were included (*ibid.* p. 10).

A study commissioned by the NZFC in 1986 indicated enthusiasm on the part of local audiences, as “72 per cent of those polled⁷¹ considered it ‘Very Important’ or ‘Quite Important’ that New Zealand had its own film producing industry” (Lealand, 1988, p. 99). However despite indications that local audiences were “enthusiastic” about the development of the industry, “many seem[ed] more interested in the idea than in the actual films” (Horrocks, 1989a, p. 111). New Zealand audiences have over the years even been seen as “ignorant” (Reid, 1986, p. 10) and “fickle” (Shelton, 2005, p. 77) when it comes to films made in New Zealand.⁷² This lack of a sizeable New Zealand audience perhaps begs the question of whether film can be ‘national’ when it lacks a national audience, but the practices of the films’ audiences have not yet been considered.

Research into New Zealand audiences has been scarce, but a recent study by Petrie and Stuart (2008) sought to address what was argued was “little interest” by film scholars “in the perspective and opinions of the film-goer” (Stuart, 2008, p. 48). The authors stated that their study took

the unusual stance of asking film-going New Zealanders to assess the broad sweep of local movies in a bid to pinpoint how we see ourselves reflected in cinema and to identify just what gives New Zealand films their distinctiveness. (Stuart, 2008, p. 48)⁷³

The study took the form of two online surveys, commissioned by the NZFC, of over 1300 people, seeking to reflect the New Zealand population in terms of age, gender and ethnicity. Despite the relatively low number of respondents (in proportion to the New Zealand population), only a small margin of error is claimed as inherent in the data (Petrie and Stuart, 2008, p. 60). The study

⁷¹ Of a sample of one thousand people.

⁷² Shelton claims that New Zealand audiences have historically been “hypercritical of local movies” (Shelton, 2005, p. 77).

⁷³ They go on to say: “The difficult job of defining and explaining culture has historically been the domain of artists, critics, commentators and academics, with the voice of those who actually constitute the audience, normally measured by the box office, hardly ever been sought.”

indicates strong opinions about New Zealand cinema on the part of the domestic audience, rather than the ambivalence attributed to this audience by early studies and writing. Petrie and Stuart claim “a highly positive response towards New Zealand films” on the part of the domestic cinema audience, rather than “embarrassment or ‘cultural cringe’” (Petrie, 2008, p. 16).

A positive correlation between national identity and audience attitudes toward New Zealand-made films indicates that cinema makes the kind of contribution to New Zealand culture hoped for by government:

In short, seven out of ten adult New Zealanders said that local movies have helped them think about what makes this country unique. (Stuart, 2008, p. 100)

...almost three quarters of adult New Zealanders reported they have seen local movies that have made them feel proud to be a New Zealander. (*ibid.*, p. 109)

Even taking into account the constraints of the survey – the limiting of respondents to those with internet access and the small number of respondents – these are rather extraordinary results, because they indicate a strong relationship between the New Zealand audience and New Zealand-made cinema that has not been shown in previous similar studies. There is no doubt that New Zealand-made film has evoked some strong and sympathetic responses from some members of the national audience; perhaps this is where ‘national cinema’ may be located most strongly, in the perceptions of these stakeholders toward their local cinema.

The difficulty of recouping financial investment from the small domestic audience, however, means filmmakers must also (and perhaps primarily) look to the international audience (NZFC quoted in Lealand, 1988, p. 109). In terms of economies of scale, the importance of the international audience is considerable and the positive reception of the international audience can be significant for a New Zealand-made feature film:⁷⁴

Over the past 30 years a strong overseas performance has often enhanced the domestic appreciation of a local film’s

⁷⁴ Pursuit of this audience has been mandated over time. For example, in 1988 the top priority of the NZFC was ‘All feature films achieving a cinema release in New Zealand and North America’ (Lealand, 1988, p. 109).

quality and significance. external affirmation is still a potent force, as well as proving to be an invaluable source of revenue for film-makers. (Petrie, 2008, p. 138)

Positive international reception of a New Zealand film is important, not least because it inevitably results in increased interest in the film *in New Zealand*. This is the case particularly when films are first screened in international festivals, such as the Cannes and Sundance Film Festivals. This generally creates favourable publicity in the domestic media, fed further if the film in question gains the praise of international media or wins festival awards, and these films generally then go on to do very well in the domestic market.⁷⁵ And while international audience reception can be very important in terms of encouraging the domestic audience to see a film,⁷⁶ increased foreign earnings in the form of foreign investment and tourism have also been sought.⁷⁷ This was evident in early arguments favouring state support for the film industry, and can also be seen in the NZFC's expectation that international audiences will be sought by filmmakers (see Petrie, 2008, pp. 140-7). Strategies toward this have included the release of a film under a different name in overseas markets⁷⁸ or the use of different publicity images in various territories.⁷⁹

Amongst all of this, the international audience has been most likely to view New Zealand films in two ways: on the 'art' or 'festival' circuit (Reid, 1986, p. 12), or via niche television broadcasts of New Zealand films (Shelton, 2005). Further opportunities to view New Zealand films, also in a 'art film' context, include the international retrospectives of New Zealand cinema which have occurred around the world since 1981 (Petrie, 2008, p. 152).⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Films which have been shown at such festivals *before* general release in New Zealand include *Whale Rider*, *Eagle Vs. Shark* and *Once Were Warriors*. All of these films have been New Zealand box office successes.

⁷⁶ Also see Petrie and Stuart, 2008.

⁷⁷ A strong presence in international markets has been linked to overseas investment (Petrie, 2008, p. 155).

⁷⁸ *Scarfies* (Dir. Robert Sarkies, 1999), released in the US as *Crime 101*, is an example of this.

⁷⁹ Examples of this are *Once Were Warriors* and *Whale Rider* (Petrie and Stuart, 2008, pp.150-151).

⁸⁰ These have been held in places including the UK, Europe, the US and Australia.

A further subset of the international audience is New Zealand expats living overseas. In research based on interviews with London-based New Zealanders, Thornley (2009) found that New Zealand films are important to this group, who often make a particular point of viewing New Zealand made films. This group uses these films both as a method of connecting to New Zealand and as a form of cultural translation when sharing these films with members of their adopted homeland. Thornley describes the importance of New Zealand films to this audience:

...Kiwi expatriates create and sustain a feeling of belonging when they are away from a physical 'home/land' through films that speak about their country and the lifestyle that they miss. (Thornley, 2009, p. 106)

So, for some members of this audience, New Zealand films perform a particular role as cultural touchstones. This is an example of media ritual, the use of media to connect to a perceived cultural centre.

The New Zealand critical cinema audience, comprised largely of academics and film critics, is another key subgroup of the audience stakeholders, and was an instrumental part of their late-1970s lobbying of government (see also Horrocks, 1977). This is the group that has been largely responsible for written accounts of the history of filmmaking in New Zealand,⁸¹ and represent a particular audience that has developed and grown alongside the New Zealand production industry, continually in sustained criticism (and celebration) of the New Zealand film industry and its products. This subset of the audience is, in the context of this thesis, considered to be a key stakeholder because of this vocal interest in New Zealand cinema production.

The 'audience', then, is an important stakeholder group for a variety of reasons. For different audiences, there are a range of things at stake, not least of which is the simple pleasure of enjoying a film or the recognition of a

⁸¹ While some practitioners (for example John O'Shea) have written on the history of cinema in New Zealand, it is the critical audience who have done this most prolifically.

homeland in the form of familiar geography and culture.⁸² More specialised members of this stakeholder group, such as reviewers, commentators and film academics, engage with New Zealand cinema in a range of more specific ways, and each member of this group will have their own ideas about what New Zealand film is, and of its importance.

3.3 Stakeholder Practice and New Zealand Cinema

At this point we can begin to answer the question of what New Zealand cinema is. It is clearly many things: a film industry, a cinematic expression of national identity, a national marketing tool. It is also a concept that shifts according to stakeholders' positions, desires and mandates; it is conceptually dependent on the opinions and practices of stakeholders, which shift over time.

Various members of what we might term 'stakeholder groups',⁸³ outlined above, often have clear opinions about what New Zealand film is. Those who finance, make and view films often feel strongly about what this term means and at times have been vocal in their opinions (although, as we saw in the historical review above, this is not always the case). We can look to publications about cinema and New Zealand – to relevant legislation (primarily the NZFC Act⁸⁴), policy documents, speeches, press material, interviews, reports, papers, books, government publications,⁸⁵ reviews and so on – for the discursive traces of their shifting national cinema practices. While some of this material was touched on above, it needs to be examined in more detail in order to more clearly understand what *New Zealand cinema* may mean, and to demonstrate the usefulness of the framework of national cinema developed

⁸² As we see in Thornley's analysis members of the expatriate New Zealand audience in London (Thornley, 2009), and indicated in Petrie and Stuart's work, which indicates that this is also the case for the domestic audience (Petrie and Stuart, 2009).

⁸³ Various broad headings under which we might categorize general groups of stakeholders, such as *audience* or *investors*, for the sake of simplicity. Clearly there are too many to examine individually.

⁸⁴ See Section 18, reproduced in Appendix I.

⁸⁵ Including the publications of government departments, ministries, bureaucrats and politicians.

in Chapter One, one which privileges stakeholder practices. The following examination of the shifting definitions of national cinema also informs the examination of case study films in the two subsequent chapters.

If 'national cinema' is variously described in the national cinema literature as a geographically-based film industry, linked to government policy and support, we can see some consistency with the historical development of cinema production in New Zealand. But having established the range of stakeholders and some of their motivations and roles, we look now to the stakeholders' definitions of New Zealand cinema, because it is by examining a specific geographically-based example of national cinema that we might be able to judge the efficacy of the notion of national cinema. The concrete definitions of New Zealand cinema provided by its stakeholders give us a means with which to do this, keeping in mind the contrasting nature of these definitions, indicative as they are of differing agenda.

So we turn now to the definitions of the key stakeholders, first looking to the investors. Of this group, it is the New Zealand government that has the most easily-read interpretation of New Zealand cinema, because government expectations of what constitutes a New Zealand film are enshrined in legislation. This legislation, the NZFC Act (1978), specifies a range of conditions under which a film may receive government funds, and basically is where the state's interpretation of New Zealand cinema for the purposes of film funding is located. The conditions set out in the Act are "For the purposes of determining whether or not a film has or is to have a significant New Zealand content", and are largely concerned with the location of various elements and personnel involved in the film's production, such as the film's shooting and the place of residence of those who work on and stand to profit from the film. Another consideration is "the subject of the film" and although it is difficult to define what 'subject' means, we may take it to include the storyline of a film, its themes, plot and basic narrative, extending perhaps to details such as the setting of the film. The Act also stipulates the consideration of "the locations at which the film was or is to be made", as well as the "the nationalities and places of residence of" those people who work on, own or profit from a film, presumably to give preference to New Zealand locations and nationals.

Government definitions of New Zealand film can be read in material including press release, statements, speeches and reports. Many of the quotes discussed above, including some from Clark, Maharey, Anderton, Burton and Tapsill, are taken from these sources and indicate a belief that cinema has a role to play in the maintenance of New Zealand's national identity. NZFC CEO Ruth Harley holds similar views:

Our culture is the well from which filmmakers draw their inspiration to create unique cinematic images that are also internationally accessible – universal stories told against a culturally specific background. (Harley, 2004)

For this group of stakeholders, then, film is a tool in cultural preservation and maintenance, evidenced by the impetus to support 'local' stories and workers. In this context, a New Zealand film is one that contains and communicates New Zealand-specific cultural truths, although due to the subjective nature of defining national culture, this is extremely vague.

One measure of what constitutes a 'New Zealand story' is constructed by Petrie and Stuart's study of audience attitudes to New Zealand film. Reviewing the responses from their surveys, Petrie and Stuart found that:

In order, the six major features that distinguish a 'New Zealand film' are:

- 1 The role of the landscape.⁸⁶
- 2 Kiwi humour.
- 3 The distinct cultures within our movies
- 4 The offbeat the inventive nature of our film-makers: a certain darkness.
- 5 Authenticity: the way New Zealand movies 'keep it real' and capture our culture.
- 6 The degree of talent, particularly behind the camera. (Petrie and Stuart, 2008, 101)

The most important feature here is New Zealand's geography, the most irrefutable fact of New Zealand. This is the same privileging of place found in

⁸⁶ This is consistent with Thornley's study of members of the London-based expatriate audience: "The most compelling thread running throughout all the focus group discussions revolved around the participants' recollections of, and continued connections to, the New Zealand landscape" (Thornley, 2009, p.

the NZFC Act, the same underlying assumption that a New Zealand film is one made in New Zealand and featuring the New Zealand landscape, so this is clearly an important factor to multiple stakeholders.

The remainder of the list is largely underpinned by cultural concerns, which are difficult to specify. For example, in terms of the second item on the list, “Kiwi humour”, Petrie and Stuart put forward “four core traits” of humour in New Zealand cinema. These are:

1. It is quirky, droll, and seldom goes for the obvious laugh.
2. It accompanies deeper emotions – during an emotional crisis, for example. It is a bit edgy in this respect.
3. It takes the piss – it functions as an egalitarian tool to cut self-important people down to size, and cut ourselves down to size at the same time.
4. [It] has a cultural dimension. Pakeha humour is more laconic, Pasifika humour is more openly funny. Because it is identifiably Kiwi, it gives us an ownership of our movies. (Petrie and Stuart, 2008, 111)

In short, New Zealand films allegedly “allow the humour to emerge through character and story” (Petrie and Stuart, 2008, 111), and use a comedy particular to, or perhaps more accurately recognised by, the domestic audience. It is easy here to discern the reinforcement of well-established national stereotypes here. This very generalised set of descriptions is very similar to the know-it-when-we-see-it definition of New Zealand film observable in Section 18’s stipulation of “subject”; it would be a difficult task to delineate this any further, without looking at specific films.

Thus far we might interpret New Zealand film to be physically located in the geographic space that is New Zealand, and to be contributed to and profited from by largely New Zealand residents. It also may be seen to depict the lifestyles and cultures of those who live in New Zealand, to have a certain and specific humour, to be off beat, dark and, given the notion of “talent”, above, somewhat innovative. However, in terms of publicly defining of what a

110). Also: “The most wide-ranging theme, occurring across all the groups [interviewed], was the role of the landscape...” (Thornley, 2009, p. 113).

'New Zealand film' may be, the most vocal group is the critical audience, those who seek publicly to define or celebrate what a New Zealand film is.

The critical audience is a significant stakeholder group that extends beyond national borders and has written and spoken extensively on New Zealand cinema. The question of what might constitute a New Zealand 'style' has been raised by many members of the critical audience (for example Horrocks, 1989, p. 103; Moran and Vieth, 2005), and their opinions can provide some significant clues as to the socio-cultural and discursive construction of New Zealand film. For example:

So what is a New Zealand film? A film written by New Zealanders, financed in New Zealand, with New Zealanders as cast and crew, and shot in New Zealand can fairly be called a new Zealand film. In such a film some of the flavour of our culture will emerge through its storyline, characterisation, settings and ideas, whether the story is realistic and down-to-earth or imaginative and fanciful. (Cairns and Martin, 1994, p. viii)

...a working definition of a New Zealand film is one in which the production is principally controlled by New Zealanders and which in some form or other reflects the culture of its creators. (*ibid.*, p. ix)

We see that even for this group, the notion of what constitutes New Zealand cinema is somewhat fraught. Martin and Edwards, for example, encountered difficulties when drawing the line between international and domestic films, deciding to include some

which were financed from overseas but set and shot in New Zealand ... which were shot overseas but financed and produced from New Zealand ... which, although not a New Zealand story, had input from New Zealand money and personnel and was partly shot in New Zealand. (Martin and Edwards, 1997, p. 3)

This seems to be a shared view, if a broad one. It is similar, too, to some of the interpretations outlined by the state, indicating some sense of consensus across stakeholder groups. This is shown, too, in Martin and Edward's decisions to inform their view with "the description in the Film Commission Act (1978)" (Martin and Edwards, 1997, p. 3).

There are, as already noted, contradictions of international involvement and aspirations, leading to Martin and Edward's suggestion that "the entity called New Zealand film ...[is] an outmoded paradigm". They argue that 'New Zealand cinema' struggles to stand alone and to be distinctive in a constantly globalising context:

As with all cultural productions any New Zealand film is a hybrid of influences, with overseas input including such diverse contributions as the make-up brought to New Zealand by Lee Hill and used in *The Wagon and the Star* in the mid 1930s; the influence of overseas training institutions such as the Australian Film, Television and Radio School (formerly the Australian Film and Television School); the presence of 'imported' actors ... and production personnel ... and the models provided by imported genres, as can be seen in such films as *Bad Taste*, *Wild Horses* and *Goodbye Pork Pie*. (Martin and Edwards, 1997, pp. 2-3)

Because of this overlap of international interests, demands, relationships and expectations, the idea of the existence of a distinctive kind of New Zealand cinema has sometimes been critically rejected (for example Moran and Vieth, 2005), and this is the view here. Even describing the industry is fraught with difficulty:

Describing a 'New Zealand film industry' means engaging with a complex field of activity with no obvious national or even industrial boundaries, and with difficulties in definition and in the availability of data. (Jones and Smith, 2005, pp. 928-929)

The reaction of the critical audience to the films made during the tax shelter years is typical of such commentary, with some claiming these films have little or no national character (for example, Robson and Zalcock, 1997, p. 2),⁸⁷ as is the outright rejection of some of the idea that a runaway production such as *The Lord of the Rings* is patently "not a New Zealand film" (Zanker and Lealand, 2003, p. 67). Indeed, the question of how a New Zealand film might

be defined in the globalised film environment is inevitably raised: “defining a New Zealand film is becoming increasingly more difficult, as the industry becomes more international” (Moran and Vieth, 2005, p. 290; see also Williams, 2008, p. 193; Reid, 1986, p. 22; Cairns and Martin, 1993, p. viii).⁸⁸

It is true that films made in New Zealand are often very similar in structure and convention to the dominant Hollywood-derived models (Lealand, 1988, p.80; Joyce, 2005, p.55), despite some of the thematic peculiarities or preoccupations that have interested the critical audience. Indeed, Reid believes there is no “peculiarly New Zealand type of film”, as while the small budgets typical of New Zealand-made films “may impose a certain raggedness upon many New Zealand films but this cannot be mistaken for a ‘style’” (Reid, 1986, pp. 22-23). New Zealand films have been said to have borrowed from standard international narrative practices (Lealand, 1988, p. 101) and the generic conventions of international films, although to have used such conventions in innovative ways (Horrocks, 1989b, p. 103). While acknowledging a tendency among New Zealand filmmakers for “open-ended narratives, unconventional often passive protagonists and paradoxical endings” (Joyce, 2005, p. 56), Joyce argues that despite claims for New Zealand national cinema being a category of its own, the most successful New Zealand-made films are those that are “a result of coupling New Zealand particularities with Hollywood paradigms” (*ibid.*, p. 55). Lealand argues that “New Zealand-made films cannot ... be divorced from Hollywood” (Lealand, 1988, p. 106), as the dominance of Hollywood necessitates a constant referral to its dominant conventions, concluding that whatever ‘New Zealand’ content a film may have, it will ultimately “result from re-invention or re-interpretation of long-standing conventions; a New Zealand ‘subtext’ is created from an international ‘super-text’” (Lealand, 1988, pp. 101-102). This notion of hybridity is shared by others in the critical audience (see Martin and Edwards, 1997, pp. 2-3; Joyce, 2005), and this surely forms part of the difficulty in

⁸⁷ There were alternative points of view regarding the tax shelter films, for example, Stephens: “All the Film Commission and the tax legislation did was to enable this creative talent to be turned into film” (Stephens, 1984, p. 3).

⁸⁸ For a discussion of the impact of foreign investment on the ‘New Zealand’ quality of cinema production, see Robson and Zalcock, 1997.

ascribing just what textual or thematic characteristics a 'New Zealand film' might have.

However, themes have been identified by the critical audience, some of which are less vague than the broad characterisation of having a 'rootedness' in New Zealand (Horrocks 1989)⁸⁹. Specific characteristics attributed to New Zealand film by this stakeholder group are themes of race and images of Māori, a dark or broody atmosphere, and the image of the road. The first of these, themes of race specifically relationships between Māori and Pakeha (Reid, 1986, pp. 23-24; Moran and Vieth, 2005, p. 295), is not surprising given that Māori have been captured on film since the first early filmmaking in New Zealand. This has been viewed as a feature of films made in New Zealand (Conrich and Davy, 1997, p. 5), and Petrie has posited that "the presence of Māori is ... fundamental to the distinctiveness of New Zealand film" (Petrie, 2008, 166). Blythe (1986) and Keown (2008) interpret the Māori -Pakeha love stories of early 1900s cinema and fiction as "a fantasy of bi-racial integration" (Keown, 2008, p. 197), whereby the two races were discursively knitted together.

The critical audience has persistently identified 'a particular preoccupation with the landscape' (Robson and Zalcock, 1997, p. 6) as a recognisable theme of New Zealand cinema. This is sometimes thought to arise from a Pakeha preoccupation with the 'strangeness' of New Zealand landscape which stems from the Pakeha's status as relative newcomer (Conrich and Davy, 1997, p. 3). The landscape has featured in many films made by New Zealand, and considered by some to be "the main defining element" of New Zealand films in Petrie and Stuart's analysis of their audience study (Stuart, 2008, p. 103). Landscape is seen as both underlining a sense of New Zealand identity (*ibid.*, p. 109), and as an emotional and psychological presence in New Zealand-made cinema:

In almost all New Zealand films the physical landscape makes its presence strongly felt not only as a scenic background but as an influence shaping the lives of the

⁸⁹ This is somewhat similar to the interpretations of national cinema made in much of the literature discussed in the Introduction to this thesis.

characters. Certain emotions seem to grow and flourish in this landscape. (Horrocks, 1989b, p. 102)

It has been argued that the position of Pakeha New Zealanders in relation to the landscape is as “resident tourists”, observable in cinematic filmic landscapes which posit an emotional standoff between the countryside and White New Zealanders (Conrich and Davy, 1997, p. 3). Joyce describes this emotional link between Pakeha and the landscape using the final scene in 1962’s *Runaway*, in which the protagonist is seen literally disappearing into the landscape:

It encapsulates the danger and desperation inherent in the landscape, the ultimate hopelessness of both intimate and political relationships, and the emotional intractability of the Pakeha male archetype. (Joyce, 2007, 88)

The importance of the landscape is such that it was not until 1993 when a film was made by New Zealanders “entirely in a studio” (Conrich and Davy, 1997, p. 3). Further, despite the majority of New Zealanders living in urban areas, a disproportionately large number of New Zealand-made films have been set in rural areas setting. This is held to have contributed a certain emotional quality to the body of New Zealand film (*ibid.*; Reid, 1986, pp. 24-25), creating a mythic pseudo-historical image of the country (Reid, 1986, pp. 24-25). Such images of the landscape see it taking on virtually anthropomorphic characteristics, a ‘Kiwi gothic’ style featuring “fragile, eccentric or disturbed” characters “trapped within a landscape that appears ‘alive’” (Conrich and Davy, 1997, p. 6).⁹⁰ The theme of “the troubled male at odds with community and landscape” (Conrich and Murray, 2007a, p. 87), an “alienated, emotionally cut-off protagonist” (Pryor, 2003, p.307) has been highlighted by many (for example Sam Neill’s documentary, *Cinema of Unease*), particularly in relation to the films of a so-called New Wave of local filmmaking (Conrich and Murray, 2007a, p. 6).

Those darker characteristics, a “brooding quality” of films featuring “sparse dialogue and wide, barren shots” (Stuart, 2008, p. 123), may be

especially evident within the 'art film' tradition as it has developed in New Zealand. This has been linked to a particular New Zealand literary tendency, preoccupied with 'a concern for the inner life and subjective perception' (Jones in Read, 2002, p. 11):

...the films which can be identified as belonging to the art cinema tradition are mostly made by women, emphasise mood and the psychological state of the characters rather than the film's action, have a character-driven plot and are associated with 'high art', especially literature. (*ibid.*)⁹¹

These films have been described as having several common elements, including a frequent focus on childhood and adolescence, character-driven narratives and a lack of external action. This is consistent with the characteristics of New Zealand cinema described in the 1995 documentary *Cinema of Unease*, noted above, which argues "that New Zealand's national cinema is a reflection of our troubled psyche" (Read, 2002, p. 11), arguing that there is a tradition of the 'art' film, one that "emphasise[s] mood and the psychological state of the characters", rather than focusing on action, (Read, 2002, p. 11).

Among the characteristic images viewed as common to numerous New Zealand films is the image of the road, termed "a central signifier of New Zealand film" (Moran and Vieth, 2005, p. 298; see also Mayer and Beattie, 2007, p. 6). The road movie has been identified by some in the critical audience as itself a significant genre (for example Conrich and Davy, 1997; Moran and Vieth, 2005, Neill, 1995) in films "in which the Kiwi appears to be perpetually mobile, unable to settle" (Conrich and Day, 1997, p. 3). Such use of road movie conventions has been seen as part of a general reworking of established, international genres by New Zealand filmmakers (Grant, 1999, p.2). Rather than there being a New Zealand genre, Pryor argues that there is

⁹⁰ *The Scarecrow* (1982), *Vigil* (1984), *Mr Wrong* (1985) and *The Piano* (1993) were characterised in this way.

⁹¹ Read continues: 'They include Vincent Ward's *A State of Siege* (1978) and *Vigil* (1984), Jane Campion's *An Angel at My Table* (1990) and *The Piano* (1993), Alison MacLean's *Crush* and Nicky [sic] Caro's *Memory and Desire* (1998). Christine Jeff's *Rain* belongs to this primarily feminine filmic tradition.' (*Ibid.*)

a tendency for New Zealand-made film to “straddle multiple genres at once” (Pryor, 2003, p. 306).

3.4 Conclusions

So, can we take away a concrete or stable definition from this discussion of stakeholder interpretations of New Zealand cinema? With such a lot of sometimes contradictory material available, this seems unlikely. There is a lack of consensus in the opinions of stakeholders, a lack of typicality and no formula for deciding what a New Zealand film is. There is some certainty from some quarters as to what is *not* a New Zealand film - for example, the tax shelter films of the 1980s were not seen as New Zealand films by some of the critical audience. There is also a competing idea, seen in criticism of the NFU films (for example Shepard, 2000), that onscreen representations of New Zealand are not necessarily consistent with the realities of New Zealand culture.⁹²

Interpretations of New Zealand cinema in academic literature are dependent on the interests of the writers so that, for example, Campbell (2008) offers an examination of trends in representation of Pakeha male hero in New Zealand films, while Williams (2008) examines New Zealand films in relation to his own understanding about New Zealand nationalism. Smith (2008) looks at “New Zealand’s cinematics of disability” (p. 225), while Shepard’s (2000) history of women in New Zealand cinema seeks to fill a lack of such writing in the past.

There are, however, recurring themes. Of these themes, an important one is not an issue of style or theme, but rather is the idea that a New Zealand film is one that has the involvement of New Zealanders. This can be seen in the notion of a “degree of talent, particularly behind the camera” (Stuart, 2008, p. 101), which is a feature of Petrie and Stuart’s audience survey results. It is also evident in Section 18, which is concerned with

⁹² For example, Reid, in 1986: “New Zealand films so far have come close to perpetuating a dated image of New Zealanders as a sturdy race of laconic country-people.” (Reid, 1986, p. 25)

practical considerations of employment and finance flows and the nationalities of those most likely to gain from the making of a film, and which place importance on the “nationalities and places of residence” of those who work on and profit from films. Further, although it is not directly discussed by the critical audience, it is taken for granted that film workers, and particularly key creatives and practitioners, will be New Zealanders.

Of the stylistic factors argued to be features of New Zealand film, it is the landscape that is the most common. The idea that a New Zealand film will feature, and perhaps even showcase the country’s landscape is one held by the general audience, the critical audience and in Section 18. Part of this, for some members of the critical audience, is the presence of Pakeha in the landscape, and the theme of darkness, or the presence of a gothic or hysterical aesthetic.

The third, and perhaps the key feature of New Zealand cinema, as stipulated by the various stakeholders, is the presence or evidence of recognisable, New Zealand culture. This is seen in the “distinct culture” and “authenticity” of the general audience’s conception of New Zealand cinema (Stuart, 2008, p. 101), even in the idea of “Kiwi humour”. Some members of the critical audience concurs, as seen for example in the argument that “the flavour of our [New Zealand] culture will emerge through [a film]’s storyline, characterisation, settings and ideas” (Cairns and Martin). It may even be seen in the stipulation of “subject” in Section 18, and indicates an approval of popular conceptions and understandings of the New Zealand culture.

This third feature, the presence of recognisable, New Zealand culture, is similar to assumptions found in the national cinema literature that a national film is one that communicates or evidences the national character. As noted earlier, this is a difficult principle to critique, as what constitutes the national character is subjective. However, if we take as a given that a New Zealand film does feature ‘recognisable New Zealand culture’, then the assumption is that, whatever this culture is, it must be recognisable to the audience. Which leads us back to the idea of a ritual engagement, a connection to a perceived cultural centre, one that is recognisable, in perhaps a variety of ways, to the audience.

Implicit in the assumption that New Zealand films will contain New Zealand culture is the recognition by the audience of certain cultural flags. Here, we look to Billig's work, as a way of understanding the importance of such flags to the stakeholders who interpret them. Here, also, we add this idea to the notion that media, in this instance cinema, can provoke a feeling of connection to the culture the flags signal. With no perfect definition of New Zealand national cinema, no one-size-fits-all interpretation of what this phrase even means, the argument that national cinema is in reality the ritualisation of stakeholder interests and practices involving banal flaggings of a national imagining, is furthered. New Zealand cinema has much in common with the assertions regarding national cinema discussed in the Introduction. It is very much inflected by the international context and by its relationships with the state.

There are also a range of stakeholders with a variety of interests in New Zealand national cinema, who have shifting definitions of what constitutes it. Of these stakeholders, the New Zealand government has been key. The fortunes of cinema production in New Zealand have fluctuated alongside government attitudes, particularly in relation to funding. In relation to the latter part of the historical survey (the period since 1999) the desire on the part of government to continue supporting cinema production was based on the need to maintain domestic culture and attract positive international publicity.

The notion of common stylistic and thematic elements which are linked to the nation within which they are produced is one which 'New Zealand cinema' seems to hinge on. On the other hand, there are deep contradictions as to what qualifies as authentic in terms of New Zealand cinema, even within stakeholder groups. And some stakeholders are bigger than others – they are not equal. In short, what constitutes New Zealand cinema seems to depend on which stakeholder is doing the talking, and this in turn is reliant on a range of factors – what they have at stake, for example, or what motivates the speaker.

Having established this instability in 'New Zealand cinema', and having examined New Zealand cinema in a general historical sense, we now further the project of considering national cinema by looking to examples of what

might be considered to be New Zealand cinema; films made within the New Zealand cinema production context.

CHAPTER FOUR: EXAMINING THE CASE STUDY FILMS

The aim of this thesis is to re-theorise the notion of national cinema via an examination of five case study films. This is informed by the assumptions found in the national cinema literature, and the discussion in the previous chapter, with regard to 'national' or 'New Zealand' cinema.⁹³ Having discussed the accepted definitions and parameters of national cinema generally, and of New Zealand cinema particularly, the groundwork has been laid to apply and demonstrate these ideas against the realities and complexities of five films that in various ways are consistent with New Zealand national cinema as it was discussed in the previous chapter.

The five case study films are *Whale Rider* (dir. Niki Caro, 2003), *The Lord of the Rings* (dir. Peter Jackson, 2001-2003 – taken here as one film), *The Māori Merchant of Venice* (dir. Don Selwyn, 2002), *Kombi Nation* (dir. Grant Lahood, 2003) and *Little Bits of Light* (dir. Campbell Walker, 2002). Each of the films was made, to varying extents, in the New Zealand film production context, although they do not provide us with uniformity, or even typicality. Rather, they provide five specific case study examples with which to explore the national cinema theory and, in the following chapter (Chapter Five), the theoretical framework developed in the Introduction.

Framing this examination of the five case study films is Appadurai's *scapes* model. As we saw in Chapter One, this is a model of global flows and relations, one which can be usefully employed in an interrogation of media, such as cinema. Studies such as those of de Turegano (2005) and Crosson (2003) indicate that the *scapes* model allows for the discussion of media that is located in a specific physical and cultural location, while simultaneously being heavily implicated in the global context. The *scapes* model is appropriate here because it allows for a comparison of the films alongside

⁹³ Much of the material discussed below will be revisited and reframed in Chapter Five, with a focus on media rituals and stakeholder practices.

each other, so that we are able to compare features as diverse as finance flows, themes and labour pools. Hence, the *scapes* model allows for both the diversity and the similarities of the films, which is useful because each of the case study films has different combinations of these features. Using the *scapes* model allows for a more robust and productive discussion than simply listing their various conditions of production, reception and so forth.

At the same time, the *scapes* model foregrounds the notion of flows, which is useful given the international movement of finance, labour and audiences, and the international aspirations of many stakeholders in cinema production in New Zealand. These flows are important because of the integration of “New Zealand” cinema within the wider global context. This is demonstrated in the case study films but also undercuts the very notion of national cinema. So the *scapes* model is used both practically and theoretically, providing the means to discuss the many complex relationships and features of the films with a degree of sophistication, and allowing an examination of the intersections of stakeholder interests and groups across national borders.

Two key features of national cinema were identified in the review of national cinema literature. These are that government involvement is a common feature of national cinema, and that national cinema exists within an international context. As we have seen, both are features of New Zealand cinema. We also have seen that the common approach to national cinema assumes that ‘national’ films will have common stylistic and thematic elements, which are linked to the nation within which they are produced. In the New Zealand context, this was demonstrated in the previous chapter’s consideration of various relevant ‘New Zealand’ themes. In what follows, these points – the international context, the importance of stakeholders (particularly the state), and the notion of stylistic or thematic consistency – are taken into account.

So the involvement of the various stakeholders and stakeholder groups and institutions will be considered across the *scapes*. Importantly, the contention of thematic and stylistic elements consistent with the relevant (New Zealand) national context is specifically considered under the rubric of the *mediascape*, the *scape* that describes media images. The *mediascape* is

defined by Appadurai as the milieu in which the films are made and then circulate and this context (the New Zealand cinema production context) was examined in the previous chapter. Those textual features alleged by stakeholders and highlighted in the previous chapter – such as the dark and brooding quality of New Zealand cinema – inform a textual analysis of the films. Here the characteristics often thought to make a film ‘national’ – namely, the translation of national characteristics, values or themes onto the cinema screen (as seen in, for example, Hayward, 1993; O’Regan, 1996; Street 1997) – is privileged. The notion of common themes in national cinema has been explored in terms of the critical audience’s identification of characteristics of New Zealand cinema, in the previous chapter; here these characteristics are discussed in relation to the selected films. Then, in the following chapter, the theoretical framework put up in Chapter One will be used in an analysis of the case study films, which along with the material discussed below will underscore the argument that the typical approaches to national cinema – as examined in Chapter One – are enhanced by taking into account the notion of stakeholder practice and its role in the construction and maintenance of the concept of national cinema.

In short, this chapter undertakes the not insubstantial task of assessing the wide range of assumptions regarding what constitutes New Zealand’s ‘national cinema’, using five case study films.

4.1 Selection of Films

The case study films that have been selected are a diverse group, with a range of stakeholders that come to the fore in different ways. There is commonality and difference among the films’ stakeholders, and in the conditions of their production and post-production. We need to take into account each film’s distinctive conditions, as each demonstrates a particular intersection of production practices, expectations and reception. Collectively, they reveal the complexities of contemporary filmmaking, although they are not intended to be representative of all the possibilities of New Zealand film production. These films provide the opportunity to explore a range of

stakeholders, interests, subjects, background stories, filming locations and audiences (both actual and intended), as well as a range of conditions of funding, production and exhibition, providing much material with which to locate 'national cinema'.

Before an in-depth discussion of the films takes place, they need to be reviewed in terms of some of their synopses and some key features of their production, to inform the reader of some very basic facts about each of the films. This will provide some clarity for the discussions that follow, but does not go in depth, so as to not repeat the same information needlessly.

Whale Rider

The story of *Whale Rider* is based on the Ngati Konohi iwi's legend of Paikea, the ancestor who travelled to the East Coast of New Zealand from Hawaiki, the Māori spiritual homeland, and was the first to settle there. Each Māori iwi (tribe) traces ancestry back to a canoe, and Ngati Konohi believe that when Paikea's canoe turned over he was rescued by a whale who carried Paikea on his back to Whangara, the settlement where *Whale Rider* was filmed and set. The film tells the story of Paikea Apirana (Pai), a twelve-year-old descendent of the first Paikea. Although she is the firstborn of her generation, and as such the leader of her people, Pai is unable to take up the mantle of leadership because she is a girl. The character of Pai is challenged in her status as a destined future leader by her Grandfather, Koro Apirana. The film focuses on this relationship. Director Niki Caro adapted the screenplay for the film *Whale Rider* (2002) from the 1989 book of the same name by Witi Ihimaera. This film provides us with an opportunity to examine a story with very specific and local roots, but which also circulated quite extensively in the wider, international *ethnoscape*, particularly in terms of its wide international audience, which was crucial to the film's success right from the early state-provided production seed money.

Te Tangata Whai Rewa O Weneti (The Māori Merchant of Venice)

Te Tangata Whai Rewa O Weneti (The Māori Merchant of Venice) is a Māori language version of Shakespeare's play 'The Merchant of Venice', based on a translation by Dr Pei Te Hurinui Jones during the 1940s. The play has perhaps not been very popular in the more recent past, as it has anti-Semitism as a key characteristic; however, this was taken as a theme of prejudice that director Don Selwyn thought appropriate, of discrimination against a particular ethnic group ("The Bard in Te Reo", 2002). The dialogue of the film is all in the Māori language,⁹⁴ and it is both the first full-length feature film made in Māori and the first Shakespeare play to be made into a film in New Zealand (He Taonga Films, 2002, p. 11). The rehabilitation of the Māori language was a central aim of Selwyn in driving this project ("The Bard in Te Reo", 2002). The original Venetian setting of the play is kept, except for that of Belmont, or, as it is called in this translation, Peremona (*ibid.*). In the scenes set in Peremona, even more than in the rest of the film, the Māori style is most present, including moko, koru and the use of traditional Māori music in the soundtrack ("Māori Merchant strong", 2002, p. 3). The film combined various traditional Māori elements with a range of other elements, including 17th century costumes, opera and dance (Smith, 2002, p. 2). The *ethnoscape* is also important for this case study film, as it a film with a very specific

⁹⁴ The history of the Māori language in New Zealand is similar to that of many colonised indigenous peoples. By the 1860s policies of not speaking Māori in schools were widespread (King, 2003, p. 474) and are seen as a contributing factor to the decline of the use of the language, a decline which accelerated sharply during the 1930s (King, 2003, p. 359-60).

New Zealand government legislation echoed the general and mistaken sentiment held by non-Māori that assimilation, including speaking only English, would naturally lead to success by Māori in New Zealand society. Activism by Māori during the 1960s and 1970s led to what is colloquially termed the 'Māori Renaissance', which included the rise of initiatives and policies aimed at revitalising the language. These were cemented in legislation in the Māori Language Act 1987, which made the Māori language an official language of New Zealand and established the Māori Language Commission which has among its functions, 'generally to promote the Māori language, and, in particular, its use as a living language and as an ordinary means of communication'.

audience, which somewhat begs the question of what we might interpret 'national' cinema to be.

Kombi Nation

Kombi Nation is a mockumentary, a fiction film which takes on the conventions of a documentary. It tells the story of four Pakeha New Zealanders in their twenties, who travel across Europe in a kombi van accompanied by a documentary crew in tow. They take a trip as part of what is generally and colloquially known in New Zealand as an 'OE' or 'overseas experience', typically undertaken by New Zealanders in their twenties (Bell, 2002). *Kombi Nation* was shot in Europe in 1999 over the course of a month, and it is the question of whether a film made outside of New Zealand might still be seen as a New Zealand film, that is at the heart of the consideration of this film.

The Lord of the Rings

Based on JRR Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, the cinematic trilogy is made up of the films *The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001), *The Two Towers* (2002) and *The Return of the King* (2003). These were financed by internationally-based sources and filmed concurrently in New Zealand during 1999-2001, under director Peter Jackson, with further digital work and pickups continuing until the end of 2003, when *The Return of the King* was released in cinemas worldwide. *The Lord of the Rings* provides us with a complex example, because of the possible contradictions of viewing as a piece of national cinema a film project made with a great deal of input and goodwill from New Zealanders that was nonetheless aimed at the international market. For the purpose of this thesis, "*The Lord of the Rings*" is treated as one film, as the trilogy was financed and produced as a single project. This is also a film which seems to reverse the national project by converting the

contemporary nation into a fantasy world of alternate cultures, peoples and histories – a fantasy world that was already known world-wide.

Little Bits of Light

Little Bits of Light (2005) tells the story of a Pakeha couple in their mid-twenties, Helen (Nia Robyn) and Alex (Robert Jerram), who are staying in a house in rural Taranaki. Helen and Alex are the film's only characters, and between them are attempting to deal with Helen's at times debilitating depression. The film was directed and edited by Campbell Walker, and was written by Walker and his partner, Grace C Russell, and based on their own relationship and experiences (Cabin Fever Productions, 2005). This example is at the other end of any New Zealand film making continuum from *The Lord of the Rings*, as it is a film with a very small audience, barely viewed even in New Zealand, and one made cheaply (for a film project).

The case study films are five very different films. Each has significant involvement with New Zealand and international stakeholders, and as they are examined they reveal diverse aspirations, reflected in for example their wide range of budgets, cast and crew numbers. Each film has commonalities and inconsistencies with the national and New Zealand cinema material discussed to this point, and so each might simultaneously be considered to both a New Zealand film and *not* a New Zealand film. As the chapter unfolds, we shall see that the concept of national cinema as outlined in the academic literature examined in the introduction does not account for the relationships and processes – for the diversity – of the realities of 'national' (here, New Zealand) cinema production.

4.2 Analysing the Films: The films and the 'scapes'

'National cinema' is embedded in the international context in terms of industry, finance, production practices and audiences. The various locations of the setting, shooting and premieres of the selected films often (but not always) invoke the global flows of Appadurai's 'scapes' model, whereby the films are embedded in global flows of people, technology, finance, images and imagination. For example, *The Lord of the Rings* involved flows of film workers and cast, and of the technology and equipment needed to undertake such a huge project, but also the global 'flow' of recognition and interest evoked by Tolkien's fictional world. The 'scapes' can help to distinguish the way these flows of people, ideas, images and so on interconnect materially and discursively.

The missing location

The *scapes* model allows for a thorough examination of an artefact or phenomena, within the global context. However, the model has a missing dimension: location. Appadurai is largely concerned with the increasing interconnectedness of global markets and so forth, and a strength of his model is that it transcends notions of physical geography and the fixedness that are inherent in location. In doing so, however, it takes the landscape for granted, which is problematic for a discussion of national cinema, as one of the criteria for defining national cinema is physical location. In discussing 'national' cinema, the location of production needs to be taken into account because much of the national cinema literature (though not all, see for example Barton, 2001) presupposes that production of a 'national' film takes place within national borders. This is implicit in much state support of cinema, and in the New Zealand example such criteria underpins relevant policy and legislation. Section 18 of the NZFC Act specifies a range of conditions under which a film may receive government funds, largely concerned with the location of various elements and personnel involved in production, such as the location of the film's shooting. The equivalence which various

stakeholders make between New Zealand landscape and New Zealand as a nation are echoed in Section 18's stipulation that the NZFC takes location into account when considering film funding. From Section 18:

For the purposes of determining whether or not a film has or is to have a significant New Zealand content, the Commission shall have regard to the following matters:

[...]

(b) The locations at which the film was or is to be made:

[...]

(e) The ownership and whereabouts of the equipment and technical facilities that were or are to be used to make the film.

Any assessment of a film's location for this purpose includes a number of factors, such as the geographical location of the filming and production, and the setting of the film (the location of the filmic world); it might even be extended as far as the location of the films' premieres. A distinction is being made here between setting and location, as these are not always consistent. They are consistent in, for example, *Whale Rider* (which is set in and was filmed in Whangara), but not in *The Lord of the Rings* (in which the New Zealand landscape appears in the guise of Middle-earth). *Location* is the physical aspect of a film, the place of its production, but *setting* is concerned with the world of the film, which will be considered in a discussion of stakeholder readings and practices, across the *ethnoscape* and the *ideoscape*, below. At this point, however, it is necessary to examine the physical location of the films, because of its established importance, and so that this knowledge can underpin the subsequent discussion of the case study films in relation to Appadurai's *scapes*.

The production of the case study films took place in a range of locations, mostly in New Zealand: The filming of *Little Bits of Light* took place in Taranaki (Cabin Fever Productions, 2005), while *The Lord of the Rings* was shot at a wide range of locations all over New Zealand (New Zealand Institute of Economic Research, 2002). The majority of the post-production on *The*

Lord of the Rings also took place in New Zealand (*ibid.*). *The Māori Merchant of Venice*, like *The Lord of the Rings*, was filmed (although not set) in New Zealand, and filming took place at locations in Auckland and the surrounding region (Birch, 2001, p. 19). As already mentioned, *Kombi Nation*, unlike the other films, was neither set nor filmed in New Zealand, except for a few establishing scenes at the beginning of the film.

Ownership patterns of the films are also various in terms of their locations. The equipment and technical facilities used in the production of the films were owned and located within New Zealand. Despite the financing coming from a US company, the production headquarters of *The Lord of the Rings* was located in Wellington (New Zealand Government, 2001), and shooting took place entirely in New Zealand. Over 100 locations were utilised in the filming of *The Lord of the Rings* (Investment New Zealand, 2002) at places as far apart as Te Anau, Takaka, Tongariro National Park and Mt Victoria (New Zealand Government, 2001; Brodie, 2003), however the extensive use of miniatures and digital effects rendered many of these places difficult to recognise in the final films (Pryor, 2003, p. 251).

Kombi Nation is a particularly interesting case, because it was filmed outside of New Zealand's borders, but when the subject matter of the film is taken into account, the contradictory nature of the legislation and, at a wider level, of the devices used for attributing the nationality of a film is highlighted. So while location is evoked as another predisposition for 'nationalness', it is not sufficient to determine it.

4.2.1 Positioning the films in the *Technoscape*

The *technoscape* of cinema includes the equipment that makes cinema production, distribution and exhibition possible. Unsurprisingly, the case study films are part of a wide web of technological capacity, which takes in the globe. And as already noted, the practice of using foreign-sourced technology in film production is mundane. All of the selected films utilised technology developed overseas. This is to be expected, as New Zealand has historically

had a barely existent capacity for the development or manufacture of any specialist filmmaking equipment. The *Lord of The Rings* project and the continuing development of filmmaking capacity that sprang from it has marked a serious shift in this situation, but generally this aspect of cinema production has been taken for granted; for example, technology is not considered under the relevant New Zealand legislation that relates to film.

Two of the films, *Kombi Nation* and *Little Bits of Light*, were shot using digital cameras. *Kombi Nation* director, Grant Lahood, maintains that the film could not have been improved by the use of film cameras partly because the more mobile digital cameras allowed for the use of real throngs of partying kombi travellers as background and extras (Lahood, personal communication, July 4, 2006; Lahood, 2003b). This style of shooting was facilitated by a small crew and light equipment. Shooting on location is an important aspect of the film, and the authenticity this is believed to add to the film is frequently referenced in publicity material (for example, Lahood, 2003b). This offered the obvious advantage of being able to shoot amongst New Zealanders undertaking their own OE (*ibid.*). By comparison, *The Māori Merchant of Venice* was shot on film, partly due to Selwyn's objective of achieving an international standard of production, in relation to the conventional technological production values of the international industry (Davies 2006).

Little Bits of Light was also shot on video (Dass, 2005; New Zealand International Film Festival, 2005) and its visual style is the result of the use of hand-held video technology. Walker's work on digital feature films, variously as writer, director, cinematographer, editor, producer and actor (Campbell, 2003a), has been relatively well-documented (Matthews, 2003; Daud, 2005), particularly given that his films have had very small audiences; digital cameras and equipment is important to Walker's work. Digital filmmaking is on the rise in New Zealand, due in part to the limited finance available to emerging filmmakers (Connor, 2003; Daud, 2005; Thompson, 2006, p. 442), and the use of digital technology in New Zealand filmmaking can be viewed as part of a wider trend (Connor, 2003) that positions Walker's film on the international filmmaking *technoscape*.

The technical pre- and post-production work on all the selected films was almost entirely undertaken in New Zealand, using New Zealand facilities

and workers. The exception to this was *Whale Rider*, which was partially post-produced in Germany (Doole, 2002, p. 5). The technical production capabilities, including post-production, of the New Zealand filmmaking industry were enhanced by *The Lord of the Rings* (New Zealand Institute of Economic Research, 2002, vii), as, typical of runaway production in countries with relatively small film industries, the film brought with it not only financial investment but new technology, gains in technical experience for film workers and improvement in filmmaking facilities (Thompson, 2006, p. 427).⁹⁵ The facilities left in the wake of filming *The Lord of the Rings*, part of Jackson's capacity-building strategy including the purchase of the NFU facilities in 1998 (Pryor, 2003, pp. 293-294), have been made available to other New Zealand filmmakers at reduced cost (Thompson, 2006, pp. 250-251). Further:

Ken Saville, second unit sound recordist for *Rings* and head of the Wellington branch of the New Zealand Film and Video Technician Guild, estimates that the skilled labor available for film in New Zealand had increased tenfold in the course of the project. Selkirk reckoned that the trilogy's biggest impact on the nation's film industry is 'definitely the talent pool'... (Thompson, 2006, pp. 455-456)

So the *technoscape* reveals the local/global dynamic. The flow of technical equipment and skills speaks of the non-national nature of the larger flows that are involved. The crucial point here is that the films are all embedded in the technological matrix of international filmmaking which has the potential to 'flow' to New Zealand and to stay – and is seen in the example of *The Lord of The Rings*. This in turn can become part of the texture of the local and allowing other filmmakers to access international-standard technology, so the flows are not necessarily one-way.

4.2.2 Positioning the films in the *Financescape*

The *financescape* is where we position the financial stakeholders in the films, those who financially contribute to and profit from them. These are

positioned within the wider financial flows in which films are embedded, flows that further underline the international context in which the films are created and operate, a point to which we shall return.

Three of the case study films were wholly funded by the New Zealand government: *The Māori Merchant of Venice* through Māori broadcasting funding agency Te Mangai Paho (TMP); *Little Bits of Light* via NZFC-Creative New Zealand (CNZ) fund, the Screen Innovation Production Fund (SIPF); and *Kombi Nation* through NZFC-funded digital film project, the Kahukura initiative, although the fallout from the collapse of this scheme meant that *Kombi Nation's* financial situation became messy and involved, and writer/director Grant Lahood was forced to invest his own money into marketing the film (Lahood, personal correspondence, 2006).

One of the two other films, *Whale Rider*, was partially funded by government, as the first film to receive investment money from the Film Production Fund (South Pacific Pictures nets, 2001, p. 10; South Pacific Pictures Productions, 2002). Of its \$10 million budget, 35% came from the government (\$2.5 million of this from the fund), with 55% from German investors and the remaining 10% coming from the production company, South Pacific Pictures (Donoghue, 2003, p. 9).⁹⁶ The government investment was bought out by the New Zealand investors for a ten percent profit prior to the film's New Zealand release, which meant the government forfeited its entitlement to copyrights and profits (*ibid.*).

The Lord of the Rings was financed by overseas interests, although the trilogy received a range of indirect funding from the New Zealand government, including an international promotional campaign that linked *The Lord of the Rings* to the New Zealand location and was designed to have positive publicity spin offs for both. The initial decision to situate filming of *The Lord of the Rings* in New Zealand was partly motivated by tax incentives offered by the New Zealand government (Pryor, 2003, p. 290; Campbell, 2001). The contribution of the New Zealand government through the tax incentive has

⁹⁶ Of this, twenty five percent was from the Film Fund, five percent each from the NZFC and NZOA, for a total of thirty five percent government sources (Donoghue 2003).

been estimated to be between NZ\$200 and NZ\$400 million dollars (Pryor, 2003, p. 290).

The Lord of the Rings was a very expensive film, made for an estimated US\$270 million (Smith and Matthews, 2004, p. 98). As well as a high overall budget, the film had the greatest financial contribution from the New Zealand government of all the films selected here. This came in a variety of forms, such as the use of the New Zealand Army as extras (Jones, 2003, p. 63), assistance from the New Zealand Department of Conservation (DOC), and permission for filming to occur on the public estate, in New Zealand National Parks (Sibley, 2001, p. 23). Further, an international promotional campaign, undertaken by the New Zealand government in combination with the production company, and known as *The Lord of the Rings* 'leveraging project', involved a series of tourism initiatives incorporating a 'global marketing campaign'⁹⁷ (Ministry of Tourism, 2004, p. 7) integrating the film across New Zealand's tourism marketing (Tourism New Zealand, 2004).⁹⁸ So the New Zealand government contributed a great deal of money to *The Lord of the Rings* in a variety of ways, an investment in much more than just the three films as films.⁹⁹

The Māori Merchant of Venice was made with a budget of \$2.4 million (Vos, 2002, p. 19; Birch, 2001, p. 19). Initially, the film was refused funding from the NZFC which, according to Selwyn, claimed that the project and

⁹⁷ It has been proposed that as a result of this marketing campaign, 'New Zealand has become synonymous with *The Lord of the Rings*' in 'an effective re-branding coup' The Ministry of Tourism (2004). *The Lord of the Rings* Trilogy - Leveraging 2001-2004 - Final Report. Wellington.

⁹⁸ Local tourism operators were advised about how to take best advantage of the trilogy. A CD-ROM about the trilogy was distributed to readers of British newspaper *The Mail on Sunday*, alongside the hosting of international media in New Zealand, Tourism New Zealand (2004). *Impact of the Lord of the Rings Film Trilogy*. Wellington.

⁹⁹ Beginning with the tax regime which underwrote the trilogy. The amount of money committed to the leveraging project alone has been given by the Ministry of Tourism as follows:

2001/02 - \$1,468,500

2002/03 - \$1,470,000

2003/04 - \$4,600,000" (Ministry of Tourism, 2004, p. 5). However, information on the New Zealand government website puts the sum contributed by government in 2003/4 at \$4,080,000, which points to some discrepancy in the figures.

language of the translation were 'too archaic' (White, 2002, p. 114; Selwyn, personal communication, July 18, 2006). The project only found favour with the Māori-language funding body Te Mangai Paho after repeated applications in the wake of being turned down several times by the NZFC (*ibid.*), although it was later to receive additional marketing funding from the Commission (He Taonga Films, 2002, p. 3). The funding of the film by Te Mangai Paho (TMP) is unusual, as the agency is a Crown entity focussed on the support and promotion of Māori broadcasting and as such does not usually fund filmmaking, concentrating rather on funding Māori-language and Māori-focussed projects intended for radio and television. Selwyn asserted that because "Te Mangai Paho were promoting the language and the rehabilitation of the Māori language they should really address this" (Selwyn, personal communication, July 18, 2006); clearly this argument was successful, though it has not set a precedent that has been followed.¹⁰⁰

Little Bits of Light was also funded by government, though not directly through the NZFC, which partially funds but does not administer the SIFP.¹⁰¹ The film was made for under \$40,000, with \$25,000 funding from the Screen Innovation Production Fund (SIPF), and a further \$8,000 from the New Zealand Film Commission for post-production (Walker, personal communication, 18 July 2006; New Zealand International Film Festival, 2005). This was the smallest budget of the case study films, by quite some margin, although *Kombi Nation* was also made with a small budget by international (and New Zealand) filmmaking standards. Financed by the NZFC, *Kombi Nation* received funding from the now-defunct Kahukura Initiative. As noted above, this scheme was developed by producer Larry Parr, who in 1997 proposed to the Commission that he could, using digital video technology rather than the more expensive film stock, deliver four films using only a

¹⁰⁰ 'Te Māngai Pāho was established in 1993 under the Broadcasting Amendment Act giving life to the acknowledgement of successive governments that te reo Māori is a taonga (treasure) warranting its active protection and support.' (Te Mangai Paho)

¹⁰¹ As detailed in chapter 3, the SIFP is funded by the NZFC and Creative New Zealand and administered by Creative New Zealand, with the available funding aimed at filmmakers making small-budget and original work (termed 'innovative moving-image productions', rather than to mainstream feature film productions, which are provided for via the NZFC.

million dollars of NZFC funding and no other financing (Kaye, 2000, p. 20). The scheme was underpinned by a conviction that the films he produced would be focused on script and character development, rather than high-end technology and equipment (*ibid.*). By using the 'mockumentary' genre, the film was able to be made on a very limited budget (Lahood, personal communication, July 4, 2006), and the film was shot very cheaply, despite the location work in Europe, with a cast of four and 'tiny crew of six' New Zealanders (Cardy, 2003, p. 8).

The ownership of the production companies and the technical facilities involved, though largely in the hands of New Zealanders, was somewhat varied in the cases of our selected films. The rights to *The Lord of the Rings* and *Whale Rider* were owned wholly or in part by people with national affiliations other than to New Zealand. This is important because the finance source(s) of a film are considered to carry considerable weight when determining the national lineage of a film. Further, the decisions that underpin film financing are based on the interests of the financial stakeholders and these interests comprise a mix of cultural and economic imperatives.

From Section 18:

For the purposes of determining whether or not a film has or is to have a significant New Zealand content, the Commission shall have regard to the following matters:

[...]

(c) The nationalities and places of residence of -

[...]

(d) The persons who own or are to own the shares or capital of any company, partnership, or joint venture that is concerned with the making of the film; and

[...]

(iii) The persons who have or are to have the copyright in the film.

This aspect of the legislation is focusing explicitly on the people who will financially profit as a result of a film's success – and/or from holding the rights

on an ongoing basis. Of the case study films, *The Lord of the Rings* is the only one which does not have as the copyright holders New Zealanders or New Zealand institutions.¹⁰²

The criterion of finance in Section 18 is concerned with the destination of profits, rather than with the original sources of finance. However, it is the sources of finance that largely dictate the subsequent distribution of any profits made by films. What is interesting here is the relative degree of straightforwardness involved in prioritising certain of the Section 18 criteria over others – not because they are inherently more significant in determining or quantifying the ‘national’, or in triggering a film’s acceptability on such terms, but simply because they are relatively *unproblematic*. The inconsistency in the impact of the various *scapes* on the films pointed to this uneven balance of interests. Section 18’s ‘finance’ criterion is a case in point, inevitably leading to a prioritisation of financial stakes over others because the former are so relatively easy to delineate and adjudicate.

A particularly complex situation regarding finance is seen in the case of *The Māori Merchant of Venice*, which was made for a budget of \$2.4 million (Vos, 2002 p. 19; Birch, 2001, p. 19). Initially, the film was refused funding from the NZFC which, according to Selwyn, claimed that the project and language of the translation were ‘too archaic’ (White, 2002, p. 114; Selwyn, personal communication, July 18, 2006). The project only found favour with the Māori-language funding body Te Mangai Paho after repeated applications in the wake of being turned down several times by the NZFC (*ibid.*), although it was later to receive additional marketing funding from the Commission (He Taonga Films, 2002, p. 11). The funding of the film by Te Mangai Paho (TMP) is unusual, as the agency does not usually fund filmmaking, concentrating rather on funding Māori-language and Māori-focussed projects intended for radio and television. Selwyn asserted that because ‘Te Mangai Paho were

¹⁰² The copyright for *Little Bits of Light* is shared between the director and CNZ, similarly, *Kombi Nation*’s copyright is shared by the NZFC and the film’s director, also the case for *The Māori Merchant of Venice*, co-owned by TPM and the director. The rights to *Whale Rider* are owned, subsequent to a buy-out of the government share in the film, by New Zealand production company South Pacific Pictures, and the profits from the film are shared between the production company and German investors.

promoting the language and the rehabilitation of the Māori language they should really address this' (Selwyn, personal communication, July 18, 2006); clearly this argument was successful, though it has not set a precedent that has been followed.¹⁰³

Little Bits of Light was also funded by government, though not directly through the NZFC, which partially funds but does not administer the SIPF.¹⁰⁴ The film was made for under \$40,000, with \$25,000 funding from the Screen Innovation Production Fund (SIPF), and a further \$8,000 from the New Zealand Film Commission for post-production (Walker, personal communication, 18 July 2006). *Kombi Nation* was also financed by the NZFC, through the Kahukura Initiative (Kaye, 2000, p. 20). By using the 'mockumentary' genre, the film was able to be made on a very limited budget (Lahood, personal communication, July 4, 2006; Lahood, 2003b), and was shot very cheaply, despite the location work in Europe, with a cast of four and 'tiny crew of six' New Zealanders (Cardy, 2003, p. 8).

The finance for *Whale Rider* was raised by New Zealand production company South Pacific Pictures. The film was made for \$10 million, of which fifty five percent was sourced from German investors, twenty five percent from the Film Fund, five percent each from the NZFC and NZOA (for a total of thirty five percent government sources), and ten percent from South Pacific Pictures (Donoghue, 2003, p. 9). The government share entitled it to copyrights and profits, but in May 2003 the New Zealand government signed an agreement with South Pacific Pictures, which bought out the government rights for the original sum plus ten percent (*ibid.*).

The selected films of course may also be positioned in the *financescape* by virtue of their profits. For example, the majority of box office grosses for *Whale Rider* came from audiences outside of New Zealand

¹⁰³ 'Te Māngai Pāho was established in 1993 under the Broadcasting Amendment Act giving life to the acknowledgement of successive governments that te reo Māori is a taonga (treasure) warranting its active protection and support.' (Te Mangai Paho)

¹⁰⁴ As detailed in chapter 3, the SIPF is funded by the NZFC and Creative New Zealand and administered by Creative New Zealand, with the available funding aimed at filmmakers making small-budget and original work (termed 'innovative moving-image productions'), rather than to mainstream feature film productions, which are provided for via the NZFC.

(Donoghue, 2003, p. 9; Chalmers, 2003, p. 5), which is also the case for *The Lord of the Rings: Whale Rider* was partially financed by a combination of New Zealand and German investors, partly due to the nature of the Film Fund investment received by *Whale Rider*, which aimed to balance cultural imperatives with the pursuit of international success and revenue (New Zealand Film Commission, 2006), and the profits went to both NZ and German sources. In the instances of *Little Bits of Light*, *The Māori Merchant of Venice*, and *Kombi Nation*, little financial benefit to the New Zealand economy can be claimed, beyond the wages paid to cast, crew and other contributors. On the other hand, *The Lord of the Rings* made a substantial financial contribution to the New Zealand economy and, although not in the form of profits per se, this has been quantified in a scoping report which examined the impact of the trilogy (New Zealand Institute of Economic Research, 2002).

However, the difficulties of definition remain. The financing history of *The Māori Merchant of Venice* raises the suspicion about what constitutes enough New Zealand content to be considered a New Zealand film – or who might constitute the most important audience. There is a further complication presented by Selwyn's suggestion that the film was considered too 'difficult' by the NZFC and TMP, because of its use of the Māori language. Further, this film was funded in an unusual way, through a Crown entity that does not make a habit of funding feature films, which raises the question of whether this finance source precludes the film being classed with other New Zealand feature films from the funding perspective. So positioning the films in the *financescape* reveals some fairly complex flows, which operate across national boundaries, but the latter none the less can be seen as central to the negotiation of a film's place within these flows.

4.2.3 Positioning the films in the *Ethnoscape*

The *ethnoscape* is the human dimension of the *scapes* model, and includes film workers, creatives, audiences, relevant bureaucrats. This definition of the *ethnoscape* of New Zealand cinema is augmented by the inclusion of the state or any relevant institution as a stakeholder – in the case,

for example, of the NZFC as an investor in several films. Each of the films under consideration has a variety of these stakeholders, with some more prominent than others dependent on the production conditions, budgets and marketing strategies of the films. Each 'angle' from which the films are viewed in relation to the *ethnoscape* simultaneously positions them in both the wider international *and* the local, national context.

Further informing any discussion of the *ethnoscape* of the case study films is Section 18 of the NZFC Act 1978, which outlines government expectations in terms of those people involved in the life of a 'New Zealand film'. The relevant sections of the Act read as follows:

For the purposes of determining whether or not a film has or is to have a significant New Zealand content, the Commission shall have regard to the following matters:

[...]

(c) The nationalities and places of residence of –

[...]

(i) The authors, scriptwriters, composers, producers directors, actors, technicians, editors, and other persons who took part or are to take part in the making of the film; and

[...]

(e) The ownership and whereabouts of the equipment and technical facilities that were or are to be used to make the film.

The assumption here is that any 'New Zealand' film should be predominantly filmed in New Zealand, with the majority of personnel being New Zealanders. Each of the case study films had a majority of New Zealand citizens working on them. However there was also noteworthy input from non-New Zealanders in some instances.

What follows is a consideration of the various stakeholders involved in the case study films, from those who worked on them to the audiences who viewed them.

Investors

Although we examined the finance flows of the films, above, it should be noted that the investors in the films are also stakeholders. The stakeholder who comes to the fore as an investor most often in the case study films is the New Zealand government, through a range of its agencies including Tourism New Zealand, the NZFC and Te Mangai Paho. There are also private investors involved in the films, most notably in *The Lord of the Rings* and *Whale Rider*, although *Kombi Nation*'s tenuous financial position at the end of the Kahukura scheme meant that director Grant Lahood was forced to invest his own money in the marketing of the film (Lahood, personal communications, July 18, 2006).

Practitioners and workers

In terms of production teams, two of the films, *The Lord of the Rings* and *Whale Rider*, had both New Zealanders and overseas people on board. Due to its German finance sources, one of *Whale Rider*'s three producers was German Frank Hübner (Wakefield, 2002, p. 2), while *Lord of the Rings*' high budget by world standards demanded experienced producers. All of the films had New Zealand directors, all of whom drove the respective projects. Each of these directors has followed a different career path, often with the assistance of the state through various initiatives and mechanisms.

Lord of the Rings director Peter Jackson secured the rights to film *The Lord of the Rings* in 1995, having written and directed four films with assistance from the NZFC,¹⁰⁵ and one film financed by a Hollywood studio.¹⁰⁶ It was due to Jackson that production was based in Wellington, as he 'was determined from the beginning that if he was going to make it, *Rings* would be made in his home country' (Pryor, 2003, p. 241).

¹⁰⁵ *Bad Taste* (1987), *Meet the Feebles* (1989), *Braindead* (1992) and *Heavenly Creatures* (1994).

¹⁰⁶ *The Frighteners* (1996).

Kombi Nation director Grant Lahood came to *Kombi Nation* having followed a reasonably typical career path for a New Zealand director, including directing a series of short films, some of which were funded by Creative NZ and the NZFC (Lahood 2006). His first feature, *Chicken* (1996), was funded by the NZFC, partly on the strength of the success of his short films (Lahood, personal communication, July 4, 2006). Following a different career path, *Little Bits of Light* director Campbell Walker's earlier work was partly or wholly self-funded (Walker, personal communication, 18 July, 2006).

Don Selwyn, director of *Māori Merchant of Venice*, worked hard to get the film made (Selwyn, personal communication, 18 July 2006). In 1992, with producer Ruth Kaupua Panapa, he formed He Taonga Films, a production company with the explicit aim of giving 'Māori and Pacific people the technical skills to enable them to tell their own stories' (2002). Selwyn spent a large portion of his working life training Māori and Pacific filmmakers, and in establishing the company. Panapa and Selwyn were hoping to provide opportunities for the graduates of the course, and operate the company using principles of kaupapa Māori (He Taonga Films, 2002).

Clearly, all of the directors have driven these projects. Interestingly, also, they each have had a career which has been greatly contributed to by state mechanisms for film funding and professional development. This means that the input of the government to the production of the case study films is broader than simply directly funding or investing in the films, because each of the directors bring the legacy of this state support to the production process.

All of the films had New Zealanders in their casts, and although *The Lord of the Rings* featured very few in speaking roles the film employed 20,000 New Zealanders as extras (Investment New Zealand). The lack of New Zealanders in key roles was seen as due to pressure from the studio, which preferred seeing internationally recognised actors up-front in order to protect its investment (Pryor, 2003, pp. 249-250), which suggests that overseas interests took priority. The film had the largest pool of workers, employing over 3,000 production personnel, 90% of whom were New Zealanders (Investment New Zealand, 2002), so although the main actors were not, this film employed a vast number of citizens, a possible argument for the trilogy as an example of New Zealand cinema. The demands placed

on the New Zealand filmmaking workforce by *The Lord of the Rings* contributed rapidly to the development of the national filmmaking skill base (Harley, 2002, p. iv), another possible argument for its inclusion in the category of New Zealand film. It should be noted that because the trilogy was set in the fictional Middle Earth, where 'New Zealand' does not exist, it is the only one of the case study films in which the New Zealand actors are not playing New Zealanders. In this sense, *Whale Rider* is a very different film, set and filmed in a small, remote and specific New Zealand location, Whangara, with an unusual mix of an almost entirely Pakeha crew and Māori cast (Caro quoted in Matthews, 2002a, p. 19; Bagnall, 2003). This film had substantial involvement from the local iwi (Doole, 2002, p. 5), with locals making up most of the extras (Stuart, 2002, p. 11). Consultation with the kaumatua (elders) of the local Ngati Konohi iwi was a feature of the filmmaking process (Murdoch, 2003, pp. 98-99), all of which contributes to an argument for *Whale Rider* as a New Zealand film.

Of the other three films, *The Māori Merchant of Venice* had an entirely Māori cast, with the exception of Pohia's suitors, who were played by actors from the countries of the characters they were playing (Sykes, 2002; Birch, 2001, p. 19). The crew and key creatives were also largely Māori (Sykes, 2002, p. 3), in line with Selwyn's aims of developing film and television skills among Māori (The Bard in Te Reo, 2002; Selwyn, personal communication, July 18 2006). The two digital films had miniscule casts and crews; *Kombi Nation* had a cast of four people and a crew of six, while *Little Bits of Light* employed only two and six, respectively (New Zealand International Film Festival, 2005). So all of the films employed New Zealanders in their casts, consistent with criteria contained in Section 18.

Audiences

A key characteristic of the *ethnoscape* is the range of audiences who view a film and at whom a film is aimed, which is implied by marketing and exhibition decisions, such as the audience before which a film premieres. Some of the films were explicitly intended for a broad international audience,

such as *Whale Rider* (Murdoch, 2003, p. 102), which premiered at a prestigious international festival (Doole, 2002, p. 5), and ‘sold to almost every territory in the world’ (Riding the winning, 2004, p. 5). Similarly, *The Lord of the Rings* was conceived from the beginning as a film that would be internationally distributed in order to return any profit at all, due to the record-breaking size of its production budget. Whether the potential audience, or the audience which a film is aimed at, is taken into account when assessing whether a film is a national film is up for question, because although this is not generally considered in the national cinema literature, surely a ‘national’ film aimed an international audience is perhaps something of a contradiction.

The films had varying premiere strategies, which highlight the differing degrees of importance placed on the various conceptions of audiences, as well as the contradictory nature of ‘national’ cinema. These range from the intrinsically local and regional premieres of *The Māori Merchant of Venice*, through the mixture of the local (Gisborne) and global (Toronto) premieres of *Whale Rider*, to the higher profile national and international premieres of *The Lord of the Rings*. In the example of *Whale Rider*, the trend of New Zealand films being premiered overseas before exhibition in New Zealand is evident.¹⁰⁷ This practice is now widespread in New Zealand cinema, and it could perhaps be taken as an indication that any notion of focusing on the national audience is weakening, within the flows of the audience *ethnoscape*. Additionally, *Kombi Nation* is a film almost totally inappropriate for international audiences, as the extensive use of New Zealand vernacular renders much of the dialogue incomprehensible,¹⁰⁸ and this singularity of potential audience could be used as an argument for the film as a singularly New Zealand film. *Kombi Nation* puts the people of the film – and, symbolically, New Zealanders – into a wider *ethnoscape*, placing the characters in Europe, amongst similar tourists there. As such, the characters themselves form a moving *ethnoscape* of sorts.

¹⁰⁷ Examples of this include *Once Were Warriors*, *Eagle Versus Shark*, *Out of the Blue*, and many others.

¹⁰⁸ This will be apparent in a later section of this chapter, which examines aspects of *Kombi Nation* as filmic text.

After it won the People's Choice Award at the 2002 Toronto International Film Festival of (Doole, 2002, p. 5; Wakefield, 2002, p. 5; Matthews, 2003, p. 19), *Whale Rider* garnered international publicity and a presence beyond the national audience in excess of what its marketing budget, small by international standards, could have achieved. As already noted, the small local audience is financially restrictive, so that international audiences are important for the financial viability of films made in New Zealand, but again we need to consider how a film aimed at an international audience might be considered as a national film.

Little Bits of Light had a tiny audience in New Zealand and a practically non-existent international audience, with its New Zealand theatrical release being limited to showings at the New Zealand International Film Festival in several of New Zealand's main centres (Walker, personal communication, 18 July 2006). Walker was conscious that it was not destined to be a commercial hit and was only going to attract a small audience (*ibid.*). This highlights another contradiction when assessing whether a film is national cinema, which is how a film might be considered national when very few people in the nation actually saw it. Similarly, *Kombi Nation*, despite Lahood anticipating a relatively large New Zealand audience (Lahood, personal communication, 18 July 2006), was seen by relatively few New Zealanders, partly due to the way in which the completed film languished for a very long time during the financial dispute around Kahukura Productions.

The use of *The Lord of the Rings* as a promotional tool for New Zealand tourism (Thompson, 2006, pp. 461-2) assumed an international tourist dimension to the audience *ethnoscape*. The initiatives to promote New Zealand using the trilogy involved coordinating the efforts of specially appointed government minister, Pete Hodgson, along with a ministerial committee which made specific spending decisions, the focus of which were 'to showcase the best of New Zealand and have benefit for New Zealand' (New Zealand Government, 2001). Government agencies involved in these initiatives included Tourism New Zealand, Trade New Zealand and Industry New Zealand (*ibid.*). *The Lord of the Rings* was to prove so influential to the *ethnoscape* of New Zealand that it is claimed, in its wake, tourism became New Zealand's single biggest export industry (Thompson, 2006, p 466), with

evidence of direct correlation between the release of each film in the trilogy and increased interest in visiting New Zealand (*ibid.*, p. 467). This direct relationship between *ethnoscape* and *financescape* is clearly rare but still exposes the way the *scapes* interlock at a subterranean level, so to speak. The seeking of international tourists is also consistent with the early aims of the NZFC and state support of filmmaking, and the use of the trilogy to showcase New Zealand to the global audience puts the questioning of the role of this audience in assessing national cinema in a more positive light.

Although the opinions of the audience belong, with the opinions of other stakeholders, in the *ideoscape* (being the realm of ideas), it needs to be acknowledged that this audience forms an important stakeholder group. This group has a range of relationships with each of the case study films, as there are some films that the critical audience talked about a lot – *Whale Rider*, *Lord of the Rings* – and some they talked about a little – *Kombi Nation*, *Māori Merchant of Venice*, *Little Bits of Light*. In terms of the critical audience, this audience, if taken at a whole, is more or less aware of the individual films. It should be noted that there is a distinction between the critical audience and reportage, that is, commentary on the filmmaking, on the finance arrangements, on premieres and so forth, and the opinions of the critical audience regarding the merits of the films.

4.2.4 Positioning the films in the *Mediascape*

Appadurai's *mediascapes* and *ideoscapes* are 'closely related landscapes of images' (Appadurai, 1990, p. 9). *Mediascapes* refer to the production and distribution of media, 'and to the images of the world created by these media'. *Ideoscapes* are also made up partly of images, but are typically even more 'directly political', serving specific ends through the narrative and thematic incorporation of values and ideas (*ibid.*). The *mediascape* consists of the conventions used and the set of conditions under which a film is made, the particular mix of practical context and content that goes into producing media. The *ideoscape* comprises the ideas, particularly

the set of political circumstances, that underpin and contextualise a film's production.

Everything discussed to this point, in terms of the New Zealand cinema production context, goes toward making up the *mediascape* of the films. The *mediascape* of the films, in terms of the milieu in which the films are made and then circulate, has already been outlined in the previous chapter. This includes technical capability, financial considerations and labour force characteristics, which come together with aesthetic and cultural conventions, narrative structure and so on, to make up the *mediascape* of New Zealand cinema production. These of course are not discrete, but range over the *scapes*, so that for example the technical capacity and conventions involved in cinema production are part of both the *mediascape* and the *technoscape*. The *mediascape* is thus the wider context of the films.

In short, we can borrow Appadurai's term and go so far as to say that the *mediascape* comprises "the images of the world created by these media", and the industrial and financial capacity required to create them. However, having already explored and considered the wider political economy the films operate in, and the industry from which they come and which informs and enables their production, re-examination of this material at this point would be needlessly repetitive. However, the aspect of the *mediascape* of the case study films that has not yet been discussed is the film themselves, as texts.

So, while the *mediascape* is not only comprised of discrete film texts, in what follows it is this aspect of it that will be examined. Therefore, what follows is an examination of the case study films in terms of their *content*. The political *context* of the films, particularly, the way that the films stand up against stakeholder interpretations and assertions regarding New Zealand cinema, is discussed in the next section, a consideration of the case study films in terms of the *ideoscape*.

In order to begin an examination of the films' content, we might look to the basic elements of storyline and narrative. Some indication of the textual features that could usefully be taken into account here are found in Section 18:

For the purposes of determining whether or not a film has or is to have a significant New Zealand content, the Commission shall have regard to the following matters:

- a) The subject of the film [...]

For the purpose of this chapter the rather problematic notion of ‘subject’ is taken to be the storyline of the films, their themes and basic narratives, extending to details such as the setting of the film. These categories can then be used to draw some conclusions regarding the New Zealandness, or whether and how a film conforms to dominant *imaginings* of New Zealand.

The stories of two of the films, *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Māori Merchant of Venice*, have foreign origins. In the case of the former, the film is based on ‘*The Lord of the Rings*’ written by JRR Tolkien, as published in three parts (1954 and 1955). Set in the imagined world of Middle-earth, which resembles in many ways the worlds found in Germanic and Norse mythologies, the grand themes of this popular work include friendship, immortality, forgiveness, power and war. The trilogy sees the forming of a group of allies who travel through many challenges and adventures to return the Ruling Ring to the fires of Mordor, where it was forged. This film depicts a journey, using the New Zealand landscape as a recognisable backdrop and setting, an irrefutable flag of New Zealand, in that it directly depicts New Zealand’s geography. But while the film was filmed in New Zealand, it is set in Middle Earth. This is the case to the point that disparate locations appear in the film to be contiguous or adjoining – so that even a most irrefutable flag of ‘New Zealand’, physical geography, is not ‘New Zealand’ as it exists in the physical world.

The second film with a subject sourced from outside of New Zealand is *The Māori Merchant of Venice*, the Māori -language version of Shakespeare’s play. The film is thematically concerned with greed, law, mercy and, ultimately and particularly, race. The film keeps the play’s original setting, Venice of the 17th Century (Birch, 2001, p. 19), with the exception of Pohia’s (Portia’s) home of Belmont, or as it is called in this translation, Peremona (The Bard in Te Reo, 2002). The film’s costumes and sets combine elements of the clothing

and architectural styles of that place, as well as opera and dance (Smith, 2002, p. 2), with Māori design elements such as the incorporation of harakeke (native New Zealand flax) weaving into the costuming. As part of this mixture of flags, Peremona is located

... in New Zealand by incorporating Māori art, music and culture in the design and staging of events. For example, when the Prince of Morocco arrives in Peremona to seek Portia's hand in marriage, he is given a ceremonial Māori welcome with conch shell, and karanga ... counterpointed by Moroccan trumpets and song. (He Taonga Films, 2002, p. 9)

The hybrid world depicted in the film, which fuses European and Māori cultural elements, such as opera and Māori musical instruments, could also be read as representative of an alternative to the colonising history of New Zealand. Conversely, it may also be read as a response to this colonisation, as a reverse-colonising of the European high culture texts which have been taught in New Zealand schools since colonisation. These elements may be readily, if somewhat superficially, viewed as contributing visually and materially to the 'New Zealandness' of the film's subject matter, and perhaps therefore contributing to an argument for the film as New Zealand cinema, setting aside for the moment the complex thematic interweaving of cultural references that is being attempted. On the other hand, the positioning of Māori in 17th Century Venice adds a hint of fantasy to the film, as an imagining of an impossible cultural reality.

The subject of *Whale Rider* was sourced, as we have seen, from the very specific location of Whangara, home of the Ngati Konohi iwi. The film's story arises from this very specific setting, taking its basis from the legend of the first Paikea. Like *The Māori Merchant of Venice*, however, this film incorporates contemporary themes, in the underpinning threat of the outside world, into which many of the local young people are disappearing. The film deals with the struggle of older, established ways of life, exemplified in the character of Koro, to survive in a climate of cultural threat from the outside, 'modern' world. The specificity of the film's origins underscore the New Zealand character of the film, but so do the expression of this latter concern.

However, as in *The Māori Merchant of Venice*, the presence of New Zealand's indigenous people are a further flag of the geographical space that is New Zealand.

The story of *Little Bits of Light* focuses closely on the young couple on holiday in a remote area of Taranaki, on the West Coast of the North Island. In an almost-empty pastoral landscape the couple struggle with the effects of depression. However, the themes of struggle and depression are not identifiably 'New Zealand' themes or subject matter.¹⁰⁹

In terms of subject, *Kombi Nation* is somewhat of an anomaly among these films. The story of the film is based on what is often asserted to be a very distinctively 'Kiwi' story which, by its nature, takes place in Europe. The story, based on the practice of going to Europe on an 'overseas experience' (OE) common among relatively well-off New Zealanders, primarily Pakeha, in their mid-twenties, has been described thus:

OE is a young adult's rite of passage: a life stage that is not inevitable, but extremely common and popular with young middle class adults. The OE is a journey overseas, usually the first major trip away from New Zealand. Certainly an overseas holiday with one's parents is not an OE. An OE is generally undertaken just after tertiary study or, for non-students, just as long after entering the work force that it takes to save enough money to travel. (Bell, 2002, p. 143-144)

Significantly fewer Māori and Pacific Island New Zealanders partake in the OE (*ibid.*, p. 155) – it is primarily a Pakeha ritual. This fact, and the origins of the journey itself, may be traced back to the historically strong relationship between New Zealand and Britain.¹¹⁰ The democratisation of travel afforded by globalisation has seen the OE become a normative social experience for young New Zealanders (*ibid.*, pp. 143-144), one which is omnipresent in New Zealand popular media, such as advertising and news reports, and 'is also present in everyday conversation' (*ibid.*, pp. 146), such is the level of public

¹⁰⁹ Equally, though, films that have such universal themes are still presented in many histories as part of the New Zealand cinema canon (for example, *Once Were Warriors*' theme of poverty).

recognition of the phenomenon in New Zealand culture. So the OE, and the version of it depicted in *Kombi Nation*, is imagined as *typical*, despite the fact that it is *more typical* for Pakeha than for other New Zealanders. This sense of typicality is emphasised by Lahood:

Everybody knows somebody who has been to Europe on their big OE. I've heard story on story over the years of, 'We got into a Kombi van. They were five or six of us, we got to somewhere in Italy on the way to the Greek Isles and the thing broke down'. (Lahood quoted in Cardy, 2003, p. 8)

Despite the film's setting in Europe, like *Whale Rider*, it arises from and depicts a very specific cultural story, which suggests that the film is a New Zealand film.

In *Whale Rider*, the story of the girl Pai coming to be recognised as a leader by her Koro (grandfather) and the wider community, maintains a familiar narrative structure which may be considered that of 'heroic quest story' (Matthews, 2003, p. 23) or 'a universal triumph-over-adversity' (Message, 2003, p. 86). From the opening sequence featuring the difficult birth of Paikea intercut with whales swimming underwater, through to Koro's acknowledgement of Pai as a 'wise leader' and the subsequent return to the bay of her father, Pourorangi, the film centres on the conflict between Koro, who unflinchingly keeps to the traditional values, and Pai, whose existence and obvious fate as the next leader (obvious to the viewer) belies the value of the old ways. Pai represents the possibility of a new tradition, and her careful manner is at odds with Koro's ill-tempered, moroseness. However, the clichés inherent in the narrative arc of the story, and the framing of the original novel in this way, do not contribute particularly New Zealand qualities to the film in the same way as, for example, the New Zealand case.

The conflict between Koro and Pai, and Pai's eventual recognition as a worthy leader, is at the centre of several important, recurrent themes featured in *Whale Rider*, most prominent of which are leadership, working together, and the importance of whanau (family, in the most extended sense), culture

¹¹⁰ As in Edward Gibbon Wakefield's 'Britain of the South'. (King, 2003, p.

and turangawaewae (ancestral home). These are communicated through, for example, the motif of a rope, which is first described by Koro as a metaphor for the tying together of ancestry and the importance of working together. Later in the film, the rope being used in the attempt to un-beach the largest whale breaks, symbolic of the fragmentation of the community which results from Koro's inability to recognise Pai as the new leader. It can also be seen in the large number of whanau and community gatherings in the film – first, to mourn the death of Pai's mother, Muriwai, and brother, then later at key points in the narrative, such as for the opening of the school, Pai's speech about leadership, and the community attempts to save the beached whales. It is the use of such gatherings, symbolic of the value of traditional community ties, which underlines the 'New Zealand' qualities of the film.

Telling the story of young Venetian merchant Antonio, Jewish moneylender Shylock, and an assortment of other characters, the central themes of the original play 'The Merchant of Venice' include justice, mercy, racism, love and money. In its principally literal translation of the original script, *The Māori Merchant of Venice* sees these themes largely kept intact, but with a stronger focus on race relations, as found in the courtroom scene where Christians and Jews are pitted against each other in a racial struggle, a public event in which the two groups call out insults aimed at each other.

On the other hand, *Little Bits of Light* thematically communicates the redeeming power of love, as it tells the story of a couple struggling, and in many ways succeeding, with depression. The film has a very distinctive style, one that is clearly the result of the use of hand-held video technology, and uses very few cuts, no non-diegetic sound and only natural light. This combination of thematic factors contributes to the claustrophobic quality of the film, reflective of the experience of depression of the female lead character. The film depicts the emotional world of Helen and Alex. The soundtrack consists only of the sounds they make, the sound of the wind and the rain outside, and a very few songs by US rock group The Mountain Goats, which the couple play as a soundtrack to their lives. As such, the world they inhabit is small, and made smaller by virtue of Helen and Alex being the only

characters in the film. However, there is a case to be made for the landscape, particularly the rural landscape, occupying a position as a third personality, such is the emphasis placed on it in the editing of the film. It is this positioning of the landscape that contributes to the New Zealand quality of the film, more than other aspects of the film's style.

While Helen and Alex rarely go outside (and this is a point of contention in their relationship), shots taken from the inside of the house looking out through a window are common transition shots between scenes, and the landscape lingers peripherally throughout the film. It seems to be raining for at least half the duration of the film, and the clouds often hang low over vivid green paddocks. The use of natural light emphasises this greenness, as the bright whiteness of the sky is untempered by filters, giving the rural New Zealand landscape an immediacy. The only signs of other human beings in the film come in the form of one of these shots out of a window, where a long freight train rumbles past through a neighbouring paddock, or when a car passes by as Alec stands outside the house in the dark night, throwing light on his lurking figure. The road cuts a grey path through the green, but Helen and Alex are only shown using it twice, once when Helen teaches Alex to ride a bike, and again when they take an aborted day trip. They only leave the house at Alex's suggestion, and even then they barely leave the road. Helen finds herself overwhelmed to the point where she wants to sleep almost all of the time. While Alex constantly attempts to get her to go outside, Helen craves sleep, bargaining with him that she will get up soon. She is shown in the bathroom applying makeup that she will only wear inside; the viewer is privy to some of Helen's actions which Alex does not see. In one instance she secretly cuts her arm while Alex paces outside by the railway tracks. However, he is clearly aware of the danger that presents itself in such everyday objects and afterward Alex hides the knives, wrapping them in cloth and stowing them in the piano.

The road features, too, although in a very different way, in *Kombi Nation* which thematically explores the impact of travel on the individual, or rather, suggests that one remains essentially the same independent of location. Although the film was shot there, it includes very few shots of recognisable flags of Europe, in terms of European landmarks or scenery,

focusing rather on the development of the relationships of the four characters. The shots which do focus on the European countryside are often part of montage sequences, designed to illustrate the movement of the characters through the landscape, hence emphasising through the visual style a combination of the movement of the characters and the minor significance attributed to the setting in terms of the overall story told in the film. An example of this is in Spain, when the character Sal asks – in English – an ice cream vendor for a hokey-pokey ice-cream (a flavour closely identified with New Zealand), and in response to his incomprehension abuses and ridicules him, assuming he does not understand what she is saying. This brings the New Zealand background of the characters sharply into focus, and it is these characters which contribute significantly to the film's New Zealand quality. Here, hokey-pokey is a flag of the characters' New Zealandness as they move through the European countryside. Sal's oafishness is a further flag, as she represents the typically uncultured colonial romping blindly through the landscape, a very particular imagining of New Zealand. The scant non-English language used in the film underlines the flagging of the characters' position as tourists, and hence as more authentically New Zealanders. For example, when Liz attempts to order a dairy-free paella in a Spanish restaurant only to have Sal suggest that the uncomprehending man behind the counter "give her a cream bun". However, outside of scenes designed to demonstrate the characters' cultural authenticity, there are in fact few scenes of them interacting with locals, beside transactions involving food or petrol.

Not inappropriately then, perhaps the prevalent theme in *Kombi Nation* is that of 'strangers in a strange land' – the film is essentially a road movie and travel story, although the scene at the end, when Maggie sets the van alight, demonstrates the importance of friendship, rather than travel. Despite the arguing and bickering between the characters during the journey, it is in this scene that the friendship between the three female characters is reasserted. Although the film features travel thematically, it is more about an expression of 'New Zealand' culture, or of asserting that culture, than the places they travel through. The final scene shows the female characters are indeed gutsy New Zealand Sheilas, which is more important than the French countryside that surrounds them. The characters are not explicitly on the road

to anywhere in particular – beyond taking in the Munich Bier Fest and the running of the bulls at Pamplona, they could be anywhere. Instead, they are going to “do the Europe trip, you know”, as Sal says in the film’s opening scene, but their behaviour does not take into account the changing settings and they show little interest in local landmarks, beyond tourist spots, such as the Eiffel Tower. There also seems to be little desire on the part of the characters (with the exception of Maggie, whom the others make fun of) to waver from the routine of drinking and a commitment to campsites full of other similar travellers.

One consistent strand among the selected films concerns the trope of the absent/present Pakeha. Although *Whale Rider* depicts a near-absence of Pakeha, it could be argued that the film still has overwhelmingly implicit themes of colonisation. For example, the settlement in the film is dwindling, which may be read as symbolically, if not explicitly, expressing something about Māori-Pakeha relations. The almost complete absence of Pakeha, when seen in the context of the close-knit Māori community depicted in the film, stands in stark contrast to the Western convention of 'showing in order to represent' (where, even in their absence, Pakeha are insistently present by way of contrast). Similarly, it could be argued that in the very absence of Pakeha in *The Māori Merchant of Venice*, their presence is evoked, particularly in light of the racial themes of the film. The Pakeha’s absence from Shakespeare is really no absence at all. But there is more to it than that. In its own variant of the absent/present Pakeha, *Little Bits of Light* evacuates the landscape eerily, leaving the two central characters on the verge of disappearing themselves. That this is also, in some ways, a result of financial constraints – of the smallness of New Zealand economically and demographically – means that the film has thematically encoded its own material reality. Perhaps we could construct an interesting argument about the efficacy of this proposal – of the positioning of the absent/present Pakeha – but this does not push forward the agenda here, as to say a New Zealand film is one that has Pakeha in it or not is a statement of fact for *all* cinema.

The themes of the selected films range from fraternity and bravery (*The Lord of the Rings*), leadership, family and community (*Whale Rider*), the futility of revenge (*The Māori Merchant of Venice*), the idea that one is never more

themselves than when not at home (*Kombi Nation*), and the themes of depression and love that underpin *Little Bits of Light*. Themes of the redemptive power of love are strong in *Little Bits of Light* and *Whale Rider*. In this latter film, family is important, and although this could be said for *Kombi Nation*, the relationship between the two sisters in this film is more the source of dramatic tension than a theme of familial bonding. None of these themes is particular to New Zealand, but are found in films the world over.

Two of the case study films depict physical journeys, through Middle Earth and Europe, and both these films have themes of fraternity, although this is stronger in *The Lord of the Rings*. In *Kombi Nation*, fraternity (or, in this case, sisterhood, as two of the main characters are sisters and three are women) is largely an undercurrent that is clearest in the final sequence, when the kombi van is burning by the roadside, and the three women have been brought together by their triumph over the devious Scott. The theme of friendship, closely related, is also part of *The Māori Merchant of Venice*, because in this film, as in many of Shakespeare's plays, each main character has their intimate associates and each are loyal to the other. Another theme underlying this film is that of the futility of revenge, which is closely linked to the redemptive power of forgiveness; *Kombi Nation* also features revenge, (although this film depicts it in a different, more satisfying light), but forgiveness is not a theme of this film. A clear delineation of good and evil is a central feature of *The Lord of the Rings*, to an extent not seen in any of the other films; while *Kombi Nation* has a good/bad dichotomy, it has nowhere near the grandeur, or the central narrative impetus, of the trilogy.

There are shared themes in the case study films, but none that all of the films share, save for that they are all in some way about emotional transformation. Admittedly, this is true of perhaps every fiction feature film made in the Western world, ever. So to point to this as a binding thematic feature of the five case study films is somewhat of an empty claim. The narrative style of the films is not dissimilar to that of any film released on the international market. Even *Little Bits of Light* retains a normative narrative structure, whereby the central problem of the story, Grace's depression, is beginning to be resolved by the end of the film. In *Whale Rider*, the key moments of the film carefully move toward the narrative closure brought about

by the unlikely event of Pai riding on the back of the largest beached whale in the climatic scene of the film. The emotional quality of this sequence is prefigured by the careful narrative structure, which builds up toward 'maximum emotional impact' (Gauthier, 2004, p. 70). The familiarity of the narrative lies in the typicality of its 'mythic' structure, whereby 'a little child comes out of the darkness to fight ignorance, own her destiny and lead her people' (Murdoch, 2003, p. 100). This application of 'Hollywood models of storytelling through the adoption of generic features and a restorative act based narrative structure' (Joyce, 2005, p. 56) is interwoven with non-Western (Māori) cultural referents (Gauthier, 2004, p. 70). The theme of *turangawaewae* is further underlined by the visual style of the film, whereby the link between Pai and the ocean are underscored and, at a key point of the film, when Pai is travelling away from Whangara with Pourorangi, with the intention of living with him in Europe. As they drive along the coast, Pai suddenly asks her father to stop the car, stands on an overlook and looks out at the ocean, saying that she needs to go home now. The implication here is clear: Pai cannot leave the ocean and she cannot leave Whangara, which symbolically works to link the story to its location. The mythic quest-based narrative structure is also seen, of course, in *The Lord of the Rings*, which combines the now conventional structure with the stylistic features of the epic film genre (especially in the visual style of the film, which features many panoramic landscape shots and sweeping images of scenery). So 'myth' is clearly a mainstream story format these days, not specifically an acknowledgement of local narrative traditions, although clearly local interpretations of universal stories are possible.

Visually, *The Māori Merchant of Venice* is the most interesting of the films, with its combination of period Venetian and Māori elements in the style of the set and costuming of the film. This is most evident in the set design of Pohia's realm, which is clearly positioned in the Māori world and has an emphasis on Māori protocol and dance. This results in a rich visual design, and the visual style of the film also features sustained long takes which allow the audience to take in these details of the set and costumes. In such shots, the film's Māori design elements and visual motifs are highlighted, flagging to the audience the involvement of Māori and the values that underpin the film.

However, it is the theme of oppression that perhaps is the strongest 'message' of *The Māori Merchant of Venice*, and this operates more on the level of oppression against Shylock, as the symbol of minority, rather than around the oppression attempted by Shylock against Antonio in the original play. There is a moment in the film which highlights this element, specifically to the New Zealand audience. This occurs during the scene where Antonio pledges a pound of flesh as collateral. The scene in the film takes place in an art gallery, with Māori artist Selwyn Muru present in his portrayal in the background as a painter, and in examples of his artworks incorporated in the set; artworks which depict one of the historical struggles over land Pakeha waged against Māori during the early years of colonisation (He Taonga Films, 2002, pp. 47-48). During this scene, the camera cuts away from the main characters and alights on the work Muru is engaged in, a painting which features the word 'Holocaust'. In the context of a play in which a Jewish character is prominent, this may be understood as a clear historical reference. However, for the New Zealand audience there was certainly a more specific resonance, resulting from the use of the word 'holocaust' by national politician Tariana Turia, a Māori member of Parliament, to describe the impact of the processes of colonisation on the Māori people, and which was at the centre of much public debate. There are perhaps few clearer instances than this of the constant balancing of super-text and subtext, global and local, which maintains the question of the 'national', not as an alternative to something else, but as a site of just such perpetual balancing. All of the films as described balance the specificities of the New Zealand context against international standards and expectations.

The New Zealand landscape is important to the films. In *Whale Rider*, the ocean and the land both emphasise the underlying themes of the film, while the farmland in *Little Bits of Light*, devoid of people, stands in for the psychological fear experienced by the character Helen. Both films 'activate' the landscape in recognisable ways. However, while *The Lord of The Rings* emphasises the New Zealand landscape, it has been argued that the landscapes used in the *Rings* is often not indigenous, but rather "the product of Pakeha settler pastoralists" (Jones, 2003, p. 63). Hence a question hangs over the nature of *The Lord of The Rings'* activation of landscape imagery,

rendering this perhaps more a matter of the imagined landscape of colonial reminiscence in that brief instant before it becomes Middle-earth.

Kombi Nation conforms in many ways to the category of the Kiwi road movie, but the landscape is not that of New Zealand. Conversely, there are many flags of New Zealand to be found amongst the European scenery, such as shots of young men in Pamplona performing the ‘Ka Mate’ haka, and a multitude of shots of recognisably-from-New Zealand clothing, food and beer. A plastic tiki hangs from the van’s mirror, and a soundtrack featuring extensive use of music performed by popular New Zealand artists also contribute to a recognisable Kiwi contemporaneity. However, identity is most emphasised, and most crudely flagged, in the New Zealand version of English the characters (particularly Sal) use. The vernacular used by the characters is at times so colloquial that it would likely be incomprehensible to non-New Zealanders or those not familiar with the New Zealand vernacular. Some of the terms and phrases used are:

“Party hard and no piking out”

“Is this how you suss chicks out?”

“...you’re gonna munt yourself.”

“And you’re still keen after I already rooted him?”

“...we’re bailing.”

“We’ll be sweet as”

“I gave her the flick”

“Done like a dinner”

“Rark it up, mate”

Although such phrases would be familiar to the majority of New Zealanders (hence underlining the film’s perceived cultural authenticity), these phrases would likely be unintelligible, or at least perplexing, to the uninitiated non-New Zealander. It could be argued that this deployment of a distinctive vernacular is one of the most convincing enunciations of ‘New Zealandness’ in the selected films – and at precisely this point the universality of recognition breaks down, the ‘national’ becomes a challenge rather than a comfortably consumable characteristic.

This pursuit of textual analysis is rooted in the need to examine the assertions found in the national cinema literature that national films will have stylistic and thematic similarities. However, while we have found various combinations of commonalities in, for example, the various use of New Zealand locations in the case study films, there is no common thematic or stylistic thread to the films that marks them as collectively 'New Zealand' films. The *mediascape* of each of the films is individual. Each of the case study films shows a different version of New Zealand – or no version of New Zealand in, for example, *The Lord of The Rings*, depending on which way you look at it. And it is perhaps all in how one does 'look' at it, as each stakeholder brings multiple inflections to their understandings of New Zealand and of New Zealand cinema. Textual analysis is clearly a deficient tool when judging national cinema – or, at least, it is not a robust enough tool to be used in isolation. This underscores the assertion that an alternate framework is needed to define and consider national cinema, one that takes into account such inflections.

The five case study films suggest the fluid and dynamic nature of national identity, demonstrating how this cannot be reduced to one set of norms or values. Even as each of the films flags to the audience its authenticity as a New Zealand film in different ways and in different combinations. For example, vernacular rather than landscape signals New Zealandness in *Kombi Nation*, whereas *Whale Rider* used landscape *and* language. And because there are many different imaginings of New Zealand, even the landscape may be ritually deployed in a range of expected and unexpected ways, and as a flag of a film's New Zealandness. Flags are not the same in every context. An important aspect of such deployment is the *reception* of these cultural signs, and what the foregoing textual analyses do not touch on is how these signs are understood by various audiences, and whether or not they are thought to contribute to the New Zealand quality of the case study films. And so we shall turn to the *ideoscape*.

4.2.5 Positioning the films in the *Ideoscape*

Ideoscapes are where we find the historical, conceptual and ideological construction of cinema as a socio-cultural form. It is the realm of ideas, and as such this is where I position ways of thinking about and interpreting New Zealand cinema. In the last chapter, certain common characteristics attributed to New Zealand cinema by various stakeholders were considered. These included that the films be clearly located within certain understandings of New Zealand culture(s), that they feature the New Zealand landscape, and that they conform to various generic, stylistic and/or historical conventions. Following from the textual analysis above, the textual features of the films need to be examined in a way that is informed by the understandings of New Zealand cinema found among its various audiences. This is a further step toward the framework developed in Chapter One, in that it begins to take into account stakeholder readings of national cinema, in terms of the range of their interpretations and expectations concerning New Zealand cinema. This forms part of the context within which *all* cinema operates, and within which the films themselves are made. Included here are government expectations, as well as those of various New Zealand audiences, concerning what a New Zealand film will be, particularly with regard to films which have been financed by the mechanisms of the state, such as the NZFC or the SIPP. These sets of expectations significantly make up the *ideoscape*, for it is the *scape* of ideas.

Having examined the textual characteristics of the films, we need to build on this and to consider whether and how these films fit into the idea of what national cinema is, in terms of the range of literature, and in terms of the legislation. This means holding up the elements of the films already examined against the assumptions and opinions concerned with what New Zealand film actually is. This takes the material in the previous section and examines it from a different perspective, that of those who seek to define New Zealand cinema as an object and a conceptual category; how well do the case study films fit the various criteria? This is a discussion informed by the stakeholder definitions discussed in the previous chapter.

To reiterate: national cinema is often considered to be cinema which communicates central truths or important cultural realities of the nation which

provides its production context. The previous chapter outlined the commonly accepted features of 'New Zealand cinema'. It also argued that these films feature flags recognisable to stakeholders, and the films become New Zealand flags when these flags are recognised, or activated. The point at which this occurs is a collision of notions about New Zealand culture with media images, whereby the films are viewed in terms of their consistency with established discourses of New Zealand cinema.

New Zealand cinema is not being examined here only in terms of how it might be considered to be New Zealand cinema, but more widely as *national* cinema. In the earlier consideration of national cinema, several conclusions were reached, and the case study films are consistent with these. Consistent with the academic literature concerned with national cinema, the case study films all participate in a film production industry found within a designated national territory. They each have relationships with the state which assumes responsibility for that geographic territory. The case study films all also have various relationships with international film production in terms of audiences, investors, technologies and conventions. The fundamental relativity of the term 'national cinema' in terms of the international context argued in the Introduction¹¹¹ has been observed in each of the case study films. Further, the state support often considered important to national cinemas¹¹² is also an important aspect of the production of four of the films,¹¹³ and the remaining case study, *The Lord of the Rings*, received a great deal of marketing support from the state. So the case study films both adhere to and undercut the assertions found in the national cinema literature, putting them both inside and outside of the accepted parameters of what is commonly termed *national cinema*.

¹¹¹ Also see, for example, Higson, 1995, p.278; Soila, Soderbergh-Widding and Iverson, 1998, p.45; O'Regan, 1997, pp.48-9.

¹¹² See, for example, Turner, 2002, p.13.

¹¹³ Despite the buy-out of government's investment in *Whale Rider*, the Film Fund was instrumental in initial financing and the film's production.

As we can see from the information about the films set out above, even their most basic features – their settings, shooting locations and the composition of their casts and crews – do not conform to the expectations set by various stakeholders. For example, the films do not consistently meet the criteria supplied, for example, in Section 18, or in those asserted in Petrie and Stuart’s audience surveys (2008). The most inconsistent of the films in terms of this *Kombi Nation*, which was not filmed in New Zealand and so does not conform to what we might refer to as the “landscape” trope. In terms of their “subject”, two of the case study films were based on stories that originated outside of New Zealand (*Lord of the Rings* and *The Māori Merchant of Venice*), and so they could not plausibly be considered films that ‘tell the New Zealand story’. Also, the films’ finance did not only come from inside New Zealand borders, which complicates somewhat the notion of how ‘New Zealand’ a New Zealand film needs to be.

There are, however, aspects of New Zealand cinema set out by various stakeholders that are not as easy to gauge as the nuts and bolts of the filmmaking process. The oft-quoted understanding of New Zealand cinema as that which features New Zealand landscape,¹¹⁴ is clear in only two of the films. *Kombi Nation*, being set and shot in Europe, does not contain images of the New Zealand landscape, save for one shot toward the beginning of the film. Of the other two films, *The Māori Merchant of Venice* was shot largely using interiors, so that very little of the landscape is discernible, while *The Lord of the Rings* does feature vast amounts of the New Zealand landscape but, as noted above, the landscape stands in for Middle Earth, so that the New Zealand the film shows is focused on the natural world, rather than on New Zealand’s society or culture.

The idea of a Pakeha preoccupation with the ‘strangeness’ of New Zealand landscape¹¹⁵ can be seen in *Little Bits of Light*, a film which has much in common with the view that New Zealand films have elements of a certain darkness. This film’s ominously empty landscape and dark theme are augmented by a rural setting that is consistent with a certain emotional quality generated by a dichotomy of rural and urban in which the former invokes and

¹¹⁴ For example Robson and Zalcock, 1997, p 6.

conveys an intense psychological quality. *The Māori Merchant of Venice* might be seen as having a similar emotional intensity, because of the themes of racial tension which are to the fore in the film's interpretation of Shakespeare's work, although the landscape does not feature in this element of the film.

We are beginning to see that the films are again falling both in- and outside of the accepted paradigms of New Zealand cinema. There are further examples of this, if we consider other common criteria for New Zealand film, such as issues of race, or of Māori -Pakeha relations. Of the case study films, only one has race at its thematic heart (*The Māori Merchant of Venice*), while *Whale Rider* is concerned with race relations only obliquely. Taking into account further possible criteria, *Kombi Nation* is the only case study film that conforms to the generic conventions of the road movie (save for stretching the category to include *The Lord of the Rings*), but its status as a New Zealand film on these terms is called into question when we remember that the film is not concerned with a journey through the New Zealand landscape. The 'concern for the inner life' (Jones in Read, 2002, p. 11), seen to be part of the art film tradition in New Zealand cinema is most prevalent in *Little Bits of Light*, and the common elements thought to part of this tradition (such as a focus on childhood and adolescence, character-driven narratives and a lack of external action) may also be seen as features of *Whale Rider*.

More complex features of New Zealand film include 'Kiwi humour' (stipulated in Petrie and Stuart's audience surveys), which is most identifiably present in *Kombi Nation*. This film is largely built around a humour that is recognisably 'New Zealand', and can be seen in the distinctively New Zealand vernacular used by the film's characters, used throughout the film as flags of the characters (and, by extension, the film's) authenticity. Humour is also present in *Whale Rider*, such as in Pai's pet name for Koro, "Pukka", a Māori transliteration of the English word 'bugger'. The humour used in *Whale Rider* does particularly conform to some of the peculiarities of 'Kiwi' humour stipulated by the audience research, specifically that it "is quirky, droll, and seldom goes for the obvious laugh", "accompanies deeper emotions" and

¹¹⁵ For example Conrich and Davy, 1997, p 3.

“functions as an egalitarian tool to cut self-important people down to size” (Stuart, 2008, 111). Elements of this humour are also visible in *The Lord of the Rings*.

The notion of an identifiable New Zealand culture is fundamental to New Zealand cinema – the New Zealand version of Hayward’s assertion that French films will be identifiably French, imbued by the French culture (Hayward, 1993). This is a difficult measure to make, but arguably what we see onscreen is for the most part derived in some way from New Zealand culture, particularly in the case of films that are written by New Zealanders. Possibly we could put the films along a spectrum, whereby ‘New Zealand culture’ is most prevalent in the rite-of-passage OE film, *Kombi Nation*, and least so in the international blockbuster, *The Lord of the Rings*. Perhaps we could assemble another spectrum, focused on location, on which *Kombi Nation* would appear at the opposite end, and *The Lord of The Rings* would be the *most* New Zealand of the case study films. Alternatively we could argue that *Whale Rider* is the most authentically New Zealand of the films, due to the presence of the indigenous people and their culture, and that *Kombi Nation* and *Little Bits Of Light* are the least. Perhaps we could also judge the films on their inclusion (or not) of flags that might appeal to and be recognised by New Zealanders. Again, though, this is difficult; New Zealand culture, as already argued, is itself not homogenous, and questions about *which* New Zealand audience to privilege are inevitable.

In terms of the *ideoscape* of the case study films, can they be considered to have ‘significant New Zealand content’? While all of the films have a mixture of New Zealand and overseas factors, in terms of subject, finance, personnel and so on, the *combination* of these factors in each film is distinctive. Certainly, all of the films qualify as having ‘New Zealand content’ under varying criteria of the Act. However, *The Lord of the Rings* actually has little to recommend it as a ‘New Zealand’ film, with the possible exception of the large number of New Zealanders employed in the production of the film. *Kombi Nation*, on the other hand, has many qualities set out in the legislation, but was not shot in New Zealand, which may appear a commonsense consideration for identifying a ‘national’ film. Conversely, *The Lord of the*

Rings was shot in New Zealand, but using a narrative from a foreign source and a hybrid setting, unlike *Whale Rider* which has a very local story but some of the film's proceeds are going offshore. *Little Bits of Light* is perhaps the most consistently 'New Zealand' film in terms of the Act, but, like *Kombi Nation*, the film depicts only Pakeha New Zealanders.

The intrinsic localness of *Whale Rider*, the very specificity of Whangara, may paradoxically be seen as either underscoring or undercutting the film's status as national: can such a specific and isolated location *really* be considered to stand in for the totality of 'New Zealand'? Similarly, the nationalness of *The Lord of the Rings* is somewhat confusing when viewed in light of location. This film differs from several of the others, because its setting and shooting location differ from each other, as the film of course depicts a fictional realm. Similarly, *The Māori Merchant of Venice* takes imagined history and subverts it by placing Māori within the context of 16th century Venice, and by overtly depicting Peremona as a Māori world, a parallel, non-existent dominion.

Considering that, in concrete terms, national cinema is often assumed to be analogous with cinema production within national borders (for example, Ritchie, 1971; O'Regan 1996, p. 1), that these two films can be considered examples of New Zealand cinema may be an obvious conclusion to draw. Then again there is *Kombi Nation*, where the location is *not* New Zealand, but it could be that the very 'New Zealandness' of the film depends on its overseas location. Additionally, while the worlds of *The Māori Merchant of Venice* and *The Lord of the Rings* do not exist, *Little Bits of Light* is both shot and firmly located in its 'realistic' rural setting, insisting as it were on its groundedness in New Zealand.

The casts of the films as representative or indicative of 'New Zealand' can also be questioned: *Whale Rider* had almost no Pakeha, an ethnic/cultural group that makes up the majority of the New Zealand population, while the characters of *Kombi Nation* and *Little Bits of Light* do not include any Māori, the indigenous people. None of the films that feature New Zealanders – *Kombi Nation*, *Whale Rider* and *Little Bits of Light* – present the audience with anything like an inclusive representation of New Zealand society, although all three do arise from the experiences of particular New

Zealanders. This begs the question of whether delving into the experiences of a specific group makes a film more or less national in its conception and achievements.

Thematically, *Little Bits of Light* may be interpreted as concerned with depression, *The Māori Merchant of Venice* with race, *Kombi Nation* with cultural displacement, *Whale Rider* with leadership and culture. Might, though, *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Māori Merchant of Venice*'s historical inventiveness actually preclude these films from assuming the mantle of 'New Zealand film', placing them somewhere beyond or outside nationality? Further, when considering the national claim of *Whale Rider*, might its allegiance be in fact determinedly sub-national given the fact of the small, isolated community depicted?

As indicated at the outset, of course, these are largely rhetorical questions. Their unanswerable nature is somewhat the point. Even in the cases of the relatively uncomplicated genealogies of the selected films, in examining the films we are led into the superficial and misleading conundrums that questions of national origin and culture represent.

In terms of government legislation's encouragement for quantifying the 'national' like an ingredient, some of the films may be considered to be New Zealand films more than others; *Little Bits of Light* is the most obvious example of this, where the film was entirely financed by government, the story was set in New Zealand, and so on. However, when viewing the film in terms of the *ethnoscape*, this may not necessarily be the case, as the film was seen by a very small local audience, which undercuts the argument that government involvement is the primary precondition of considering a film to be 'national'.

4.3 Discussion

So the case study films both adhere to and undercut the assertions found in the national cinema literature, putting them both inside and outside of the accepted parameters of what is commonly termed *national cinema*. The question of whether these films are New Zealand films remains largely

unanswered. In some ways they are examples of what we might consider to be New Zealand cinema, and various of their factors prove and disprove theories about what this term means. More importantly, the findings here contribute towards an understanding of the term 'national cinema' as one that takes into account stakeholder practice and the way that understandings of national cinema contribute to its construction. Certainly we see here that the national – and, by extension national cinema – is a concept dependent on viewpoint and perception, as understandings and examples of it shift.

To return to the case study films: all of these are identifiably the product of New Zealand culture and to a large extent there are enough signifiers in each film to identify them as such. However, for each case study film, this is the case for a different combination of reasons; there is no clear way of identifying a 'New Zealand' film based on textual flags. Text-based arguments regarding the attribution of films as 'national cinema' are not robust enough. What then are the processes engaged in by various stakeholders which might help to account for the continued existence of the concept of national cinema? Further, what are the processes undertaken in the context of the varied relationships the varied stakeholders have with the films? The answers are not to be found in the films as texts. There is no common peg on which to hang a clear definition of national cinema in light of the films considered here.

The idea of a coherent 'national cinema' is not being borne out. If, for example, the contribution of government to the films is used as a yardstick by which to measure their national qualities, the hierarchy of 'national-ness' of the films would see *The Lord of the Rings* appearing at the head of the list. But, as we see, there are multiple other viewpoints from which to view the New Zealand-ness of the films, and these do not place *The Lord of The Rings* at the apex of every such hierarchy. The same is true of each of the remaining films, for which various score sheets could be constructed. When viewed in light of certain criteria, any of the films may appear to best meet a definition of New Zealand national cinema. *Kombi Nation* was not even filmed inside New Zealand's geographical borders, however it is explicitly a film about a typical cultural practice, which can be viewed as arising from the specific historical

and geographical circumstances of New Zealand; as such, surely it *is* a quintessentially New Zealand film? And *Kombi Nation* could not have been made any other way due to the constrained financial climate of the New Zealand film production industry, money not being available to do it “properly” – i.e. with film rather than digital cameras and on a budget that afforded more than campsites for the cast and crew (Lahood, personal communication, July 4, 2006). As such, *Kombi Nation* is utterly a product of the New Zealand production climate or filmmaking culture, despite its filming location. So, which is it?

And so the case study films can be considered of varying cultural significance in terms of their ‘national-ness’. The production of *The Māori Merchant of Venice* was largely brought about by the impact of European colonisation on the Māori language. *The Lord of the Rings* has really no cultural resonance in terms of New Zealand-ness, as it is not about New Zealand, or a New Zealand experience. However, it might be seen as from the work of a British writer and so part of a literary culture that has shaped New Zealand’s European heritage – perhaps somewhat of a stretch, but a possible argument for the film’s status as New Zealand cinema, nonetheless.

If the size of government contribution is considered, *Kombi Nation* and *Little Bits of Light*, as comparably insignificant recipients of government finance, may be the least ‘national’ of the films. However, if we consider the *proportion* of the New Zealand government’s financial contribution to the films, these two films become the *most* national of the films.

Then again, we might take into account the audiences imagined by each of the films – New Zealand was a tiny part of the this for *The Lord of the Rings*, but was significant for *Kombi Nation* and *Little Bits of Light*. The practice of international premieres taking place before domestic ones (as was the case for *Whale Rider* and the first two *The Lord of the Rings* films), seems to undercut the notion of the national, in favour of the international. So perhaps these two latter films may in this way be considered *less* New Zealand films than the others. But, conversely, these latter films were seen by a far greater proportion of New Zealanders than the others, and were the only two of the case study films highlighted in Petrie and Stuart’s audience

surveys. So in this way they might be considered the *most* New Zealand of the films.

If we think of the films in terms of who benefits from them, as Section 18 puts forward, then *Whale Rider* and *The Lord of the Rings* are the films with the greatest amount of financial return for New Zealanders. We might also take into account the professional development offered by the films, and surely it is *The Lord of the Rings* that offers the greatest potential for capacity building in terms of the skill sets of New Zealander workers, as well as for the workforce and production capacity on the whole. But how can we measure this against the contribution *The Māori Merchant of Venice* makes to those New Zealanders who speak and are learning to speak te reo? This is surely an important film for this group of New Zealanders, a rare resource for many New Zealanders.

The Lord of the Rings is a film seen and contributed to by many New Zealanders, but it is not a New Zealand-originating story; *Kombi Nation* is almost its exact opposite, as is *Little Bits of Light* – but how do we take into account the tiny audience numbers? I am tempted to rephrase an oft-repeated philosophical question: if a New Zealand film is made, but New Zealanders don't see it, is it really a New Zealand film? Or, in the case of *The Māori Merchant of Venice*, if only a particular portion of the potential New Zealand audience sees it, is it still a New Zealand film? *Whale Rider* could be seen as emerging as the *most* New Zealand of the case study films, but then we must ask the question of whether the seeking of a broad international audience prevents us from whole-heartedly bestowing the label New Zealand film. By contextualising the case study films in the *scapes* model, the notion of national cinema in NZ as isolated or as having a typicality becomes undone.

Clearly, a coherent argument could be made for each of the films in turn as national films. Taken together, this is slightly more difficult, as there is no definitive thread with which to stitch an argument together. So it may seem that the notion of national cinema has here been unravelled. However, there are further ways in which to consider the question of national cinema in light of the films.

4.4 Conclusions

All of the films conform to some of the notions of national, and New Zealand cinema. There are flags of New Zealand in each of the films, in the form of recognisable landscapes, symbols, products, vernacular – and even actual New Zealand flags. So we can conclude that flagging is a useful tool when examining national cinema. But is the inclusion of recognisable flags of New Zealand enough to make a film a New Zealand film? In the example of *The Lord of the Rings*, the New Zealand landscape is simply a stand-in landscape for a mythical location (Middle Earth), and this film is not the only runaway production to use New Zealand's physical geography in this way. This suggests that such flags are not enough, and when taken with the other range of factors thought to contribute or translate to New Zealand film, the argument for *The Lord of the Rings* as a New Zealand film becomes less coherent. Further, surely it is in the *recognition* of such flags that their power truly lies.

So, while identifying flagging in the films is useful, it is not considered here to be enough to account for the persistence of the concept national cinema. Fundamentally, we need to look to the stakeholders in a more specific way. The following chapter seeks to move the national cinema question forward, by considering the actions and relationships of stakeholders in relation to the films

CHAPTER FIVE: RE-FRAMING (NEW ZEALAND) NATIONAL CINEMA

It is clear from the previous chapter that the concept of (New Zealand) national cinema is not stable in terms of either the texts or the production processes of the films. We have seen that the 'national' qualities of the case study films are not necessarily locatable in the conditions set out in the legislation or, in any consistent manner, in the films themselves. So, rather than attempting to identify national cinema using government legislation or academic or critical opinion as to the general nature of New Zealand film, we need to look at what was established in earlier chapters as of fundamental importance to national cinema – the *relevant stakeholder practices*.

Hence the films need to now be considered in a way that takes into account their discursive realm, with a focus on stakeholder practices of media ritual. The term media ritual takes in the actions and processes that constitute the relationships between stakeholders and the films themselves. This means that the idea that there is a 'New Zealand cinema' is not a media ritual, but the engagement with, belief in or employing of the term 'New Zealand cinema' is, so that the assertion of a film as an example of New Zealand film by a stakeholder is an example of media ritual. At times, such media rituals can be seen in conscious and strategic moves by stakeholders, aimed for example at increasing audience share by appealing to the domestic audience's sense of patriotism. Alternatively, appeals might be made to the international audience's sense of the exotic, by those who stand to profit from a film. However, these rituals also may be unconscious and systemic, whereby a stakeholder seems to take for granted the New Zealand-ness of a film. Intrinsic to this approach to national cinema is the argument that an important element in the constitution of national cinema resides in *processes*.

The processes of media ritual involve concepts that are not intrinsic to the films themselves, but rather are *attributed* to them. We have already seen the use of such concepts, in the "cultural identity" and "national identity" arguments for the support of cinema production in New Zealand, put forward

by government and filmmakers considered in Chapter Three. It can also be seen in the use of key words, with “Kiwi” being the most obvious of these, and perhaps the most potent, because it is so often used as an inclusive and affirming shorthand for what would otherwise be disparate New Zealanders. The use of such concepts and terms may be seen as a flagging of certain films’ national characteristics, and intersects with the notion of media ritual, firstly in the sense that the act of talking about media typically engages the speaker and the speaker’s various audiences in the process of mediated ritual expression, and secondly in that this process of attribution may produce tangible results. Hence, this chapter examines cinema production in New Zealand and the selected case study films in terms of the *rituals of reception of the flagging of their national characteristics*.

Under examination here is the attribution of ‘national’ characteristics to the case study films, as this flagging of a film as a New Zealand film is intrinsic to the recognition of ‘national cinema’. The recognition of onscreen flags of New Zealand, with the landscape perhaps being the most-often cited (see Chapter Three), is a ritual in and of itself, and a key feature of a range of national cinema rituals. The mundane flags that exist in the films themselves, such as the New Zealand accents and vernacular that are such a part of *Kombi Nation*, and the recognition of these by audiences forms a ritual. Another example of the ritual of flagging is the self-interpretation, on the part of directors, of films they have directed, as belonging to a category of national cinema, and the perpetuation of this interpretation, in forms such as media interviews and press release material.

This chapter examines the language applied to the films by various stakeholders; the discourses surrounding each of the films. This examination is concerned with the practices of reception, attribution and shared discussion, and with the way these intersect with the notions of imagined community, flagging of the national and, particularly, with media ritual. The key point here is that national cinema can be found in the perception and recognition of various elements - the location of their shooting, the themes that underpin their narratives, the nationalities of their cases and crew, and so on - as evidence of the national status of the films. This is an argument for national cinema to be understood as media ritual.

There is a difficulty in attempting to study all of these rituals. The analysis included in this chapter is only representative of the totality of the media rituals of the wider milieu of national cinema. This totality includes discussions and assumptions made by stakeholders in many, many locations – film promoters in overseas markets, for example, or discussions of the films to which I am not privy – and so I have made decisions about which rituals to privilege and which shortfalls to accept. One constraint is that research interviews were carried out only with practitioners; clearly, there is a rich source of material relating to the rituals undertaken by various audience members which, in this thesis, remains untapped. However, the current chapter does indicate the range of possible rituals and the findings discussed here support argument that national cinema is to be found primarily in practices of ritual. And while there is no primary audience research to draw on here, a focus on the public discourse regarding the case study films does provide readable traces of media ritual that have much to say about audience perceptions.

The following examples of the language that surrounds the films offer a highly specific description of national cinema as a concept kept in circulation by means of a range of stakeholder practices. How else to explain the ritualised engagement with the concept of national cinema easily locatable in these mundane quotes from popular media concerned with *Kombi Nation*:

The comedy about four twenty something Kiwis belting through Europe in the iconic Volkswagen camper van.... a hilarious celebration of a Kiwi tradition. (Cardy, 2003, p. 8)

...an entertaining riff on [a] Kiwi rite of passage... (Peter Calder, 2003, p. 22) *Weekend Herald*, 11/10/03)

Kombi Nation is ... a funny Kiwi film... (Broatch, 2003, p. 18)

These quotes, by no means unique, provide a strong demonstration of the assumption that not only do the cultural concept of the Kiwi, and of the perceived cultural importance of the 'OE' exist, but that their depiction in a film acts as a national flag. These signifiers, whether actual or assumed, are ritually engaged; in the examples above, the stakeholders engaging them are

film reviewers who, with a limited investment in the relative success of the films, may reasonably be considered disinterested stakeholders. Even so, these stakeholders recognise that a film so deliberately set on the other side of the world may also be easily distinguished as a 'New Zealand' film, demonstrating the mundane power of the investment in the concept of national films. Even further, the ritualised *practice of locating and accessing* the national in this way, via the cinema screen, is the only common and tangible characteristic uniting the selected films, as we shall see.

5.1 The Films: Stakeholder Practices and Ritual

At this point of the thesis, we take as given Anderson's theory of the imagined community, alongside Billig's argument that banal 'flags' maintain the notion of the imagined national in popular discourse. It has also been argued that it cannot only be via textual flagging that the imagined community is maintained. That argument does not account for the process of *recognition* of this material as national flags, and calls for a movement away from interrogating texts as discrete objects, and towards theorising national cinema as comprised of a range of elements, of which media rituals are crucial. The approach favoured here involves looking at the films and their textual features in terms of how their various 'flags' form part of wider rituals which, as Couldry argues, function to connect those involved with a notional common ground.

The recognition of elements of the films as being 'New Zealand' in nature, of the national flags contained in them – elements as diverse as Māori language, New Zealand slang and geography – are themselves media rituals. Whether these and other such flags have a legitimate claim to being national, 'New Zealand' characteristics is irrelevant; it is the process of recognition of these as national flags that makes them so. Thus, the assertion is that the 'New Zealand' quality of the films, or of any films arising from the New Zealand cinema production industry, is not necessarily to be found in the substance of the 'flags' featured in the films themselves, but in the *fact* of their inclusion and attribution. This is part of the recognition of these flags on the part of various stakeholders, and of the subjective nature of the imagined

nation. Further, this media ritual of reception and attribution connect to an imagined common ground and so has a function in the maintenance of Anderson's imagined national community.

As already discussed at length, Billig describes a 'flag' as a rhetorical or visual *reminder* of the existence of a nation, such as the rhetoric of politicians or notes of currency (Billig, 1997, p. 8). Recognisable flags of New Zealand in cinema function as 'reminders' of the national which, if recognised, form this inclusion-attribution structure. The presence of the NZFC banner at the beginning of several of the case study films, including *Kombi Nation*, are an example of such flagging. So are the literal New Zealand flags and other recognisably New Zealand-identified symbols, such as the silver fern, that feature in the film. But the inclusion of this material is also evidence of a wider ritual, one which involves those working on the film. For example,

... I was interested in (.) kind of showing in a way ... that New Zealanders are never more Kiwi than when they are away from home. (Lahood, personal communication, July 4, 2006)

How else to make a "Kiwi" film but to wave textual flags at the audience, *ones which they will understand?* And, indeed, the critical and academic audiences have supplied us with a range of textual devices and items to include on a checklist of New Zealand cinema, such as the inclusion of New Zealand's rural landscape, the emotional darkness argued by Conrich and Davy (1997), and a preoccupation with race or Māori -Pakeha relations. This tells us that flags *do* exist, they *are* recognisable, and there is engagement with them that forms media ritual.

One possible way to examine engagements with media ritual is by looking to the public language relating to cinema production in New Zealand, to the ways New Zealand cinema is spoken of, and to the assumptions made publicly regarding it. This material provides a rich potential source of media ritual, enacted and documented. Government documents, such as reports, speeches and media releases, provide tangible evidence of media rituals that we may explore here. In many instances, the New Zealand government seeks to influence the collective imagination using cinema, for example:

We would like to provide a means whereby New Zealanders were helped through motion pictures to come to a better understanding of themselves. (New Zealand Interim Film Commission, 1978, p. 8)

To paraphrase: *We know we can show New Zealanders what they are, and we know they will recognise it.* This is nothing if not evidence of the belief in the power of the (national) media ritual on the part of a key stakeholder. This is a discursive media ritual, practiced by a key stakeholder. Let us pause now to consider what these terms mean.

So, a media ritual in the context of national cinema can be seen in the use of language in the attribution of a film or industry as *national* or relating to *a particular nation*. On the other hand, this attribution is also here considered to be a *stakeholder practice* and the notion of consistency among stakeholders is rejected because stakeholder positions are by their nature subjective. In order to unpack and examine these terms in action, and to appraise how they interact, let's turn briefly to look at an example, that of the New Zealand government, a key stakeholder in New Zealand cinema in the broadest of terms, one that engages with both the cinema industry and with the overall concept of New Zealand national cinema. In fact, the New Zealand government's engagement with cinema consists largely of ritualised stakeholder practices. Take for example the government language regarding cinema and the screen production industries in general:

Film and television are powerful media. The way in which they project and brand New Zealand has considerable value beyond the earnings generated by the companies in the industry. (Clark quoted in Clark and Anderton, 2003)

This quote highlights the particular significance the Clark government placed on New Zealand cinema. It is also an example of the kind of media ritual I am talking about.

Examples of media rituals performed by the New Zealand government include the following quotes, which were included in the previous chapter:

Film is one of the most powerful forms of expression in popular culture. Our art tells our story. It tells the world about us as a people, a nation and a place. And the more we tell our story, the more confident and successful we will be in the world. To put it simply, it's a powerful way to assert our New Zealand identity. So the film industry contributes more than simply its own economic earnings. (Anderton, 2003e)

As Minister for Arts and Culture in New Zealand, I know how important film is in expressing the uniqueness of national identity and culture. (Clark, 2003b; see also Clark 2000a, 2000d, 2004)

Here, above, we see again the expression of the notion that not only does New Zealand have a unique and collective national character, but the belief that this can be communicated to New Zealanders, and to the rest of the world, via the media. These are explicit examples of discursive media ritual, and of the practice of such ritual.

However, stakeholders who speak publicly about films have competing financial and ideological interests, such as the desire to secure funding versus the need for the NZFC to justify its level of funding versus the profit motive. Each of these financial aims are expressions of different stakeholder positions, and inevitably some of these rituals will be contradictory. This is the nature of the shifting subjectivity of the nation. When stakeholders speak publicly about films they do so in reviews, media reports, publicity material and interviews, as well as government documents including press releases, speeches, policy statements and reports. These traces of material evidence of practices of New Zealand national cinema provide us with concrete examples of media ritual. This indicates a usefulness in considering the films' discursive traces, however the field here is uneven as the amount of material about each of the case study films varies. Two of the films, *Whale Rider* and *The Lord of the Rings*, have had a great deal written about them, and this material is very accessible, featuring generally in mainstream, well-archived publications. In relation to the other three films, *Kombi Nation*, *Little Bits Of Light* and *The Māori Merchant of Venice*, less published material was available and so to make up for a comparative lack of available material, interviews were carried

out with a key creative member of the production crew of each film, or order to provide some balance of coverage.

The previous chapter highlighted a dialectic of *national-not national* in all of the case study films. In the same way, each of the films is discursively positioned as New Zealand cinema in the material that follows, but the New Zealand-ness of the films shifts across the films, so that each of the films is argued to be national in an individual way. Each of these films is discursively positioned, in different combinations of ways, as New Zealand cinema and as having particular New Zealand 'qualities'. These qualities include location, the featuring of the New Zealand landscape, a perceived cultural resonance, a contribution by New Zealanders to their production, and so forth. Each film, however, is positioned as national cinema in a unique combination, with a different balance of qualities that mark it out as distinctively New Zealand cinema.

One common assertion is that the New Zealand production climate imbues the films with a cultural specificity, and so with elements found only in New Zealand. In practice, of course, there is an ambiguity about what exactly such specificity might refer to. This is interesting, as it suggests that there are production practices that might mark a film as local, even if this may not always appear on screen. This is an idea that we see at work in the example of *Whale Rider*. In the discourse concerned with this film, the contribution of the production climate is a feature:

Working with a New Zealand crews [sic] is always fun. There's a different kind of pressure in Hollywood, where it's all about money.... It's more David and Goliath-ish when you're working on an independent film. It's you against the world, you against the big machine. (Cliff Curtis quoted in Matthews, 2003, p. 24)

Cliff Curtis is an actor with a major supporting role in the *Whale Rider*, that of Paikea's father, Pourorangi; as an actor he has a stake in the success of the film. Nonetheless, this is an assertion made by others, including then Minister of Tourism, Mark Burton:

We know it [*Whale Rider*] is a great movie. Because it is such a New Zealand story and very much in the style of our rural New Zealand This [film] is a story of New Zealand and about New Zealand and that cultural connection is really important. (Burton quoted in NZ taxpayers gamble, 2001, p. 8)

Here, Burton repeats a common-sense definition of New Zealand cinema, and all of these quotes demonstrate the belief that there can be 'New Zealand' attributes beyond the textual features of the films, that a film can be seen as a New Zealand film due to certain conditions of its production. These conditions thereby become flags of New Zealand cinema. Crucially, these flags do not necessarily appear onscreen only, but instead are part of wider rituals. Flagging occurs not only on screen, but can also be observed in promotional material, media commentary, film festival notes or in the traces of a variety of other rituals involved in the production, marketing, distribution and exhibition of films. There are many examples of a ritualised belief in the concept of national cinema in New Zealand, which can be seen in legislation (here we refer to Section 18), government reports (such as those of the NZFC), press kits, audience surveys, and other sources. In the example of *The Lord of The Rings*, there is strong sense, among such sources, of the notion that 'unique' contributions were made to the films by New Zealanders, indeed by the country as a whole. Director, Peter Jackson:

Bringing that world [the world of *The Lord of the Rings*] to life has been a fantastic and incredibly difficult journey, but one made special because of the people and places of New Zealand. There was never any question the film wouldn't be made here. With the variety of landscapes of such an awesome nature, and the opportunity to involve talented Kiwis in a major production, it was the only way to go. (Jackson, 2003, p. 6)

Of course, it could be argued that Jackson's comments are meant as nationalist platitudes aimed at a patron government. But there is also a broader political economy – of the cost effectiveness of using New Zealand

labour, for example.¹¹⁶ Further, such claims have purchase, as we see in the rhetoric of others, such as key actors:

...New Zealand, which has the most amazing landscapes and people necessary to bring it [*The Lord of the Rings*] off. (Ian McKellan quoted in Sinclair, 2002, p. 5)

This is an example of the ascribing of non-textual, or non-visual flags as marking out New Zealand films. This is a rhetoric largely outside of conventional concepts of national cinema – one that we saw was included in the findings of Petrie and Stuart’s audience surveys (2008). This points again to the necessity of broadening the category of ‘national cinema’. A similar example can be seen in the following remarks from *Little Bits of Light*’s director, Campbell Walker:

As we shot the film [*Little Bits of Light*], we found that the land exerted a strong and unavoidable influence upon us. I found myself thinking a lot about how New Zealand films are usually heavily tied up with the rural landscape and how we’re directed to feel a certain way about landscape because we’re New Zealanders. This is very visible in the New Zealand countryside, where the shape of the land is foregrounded, especially for those of us who spend most of our lives in the city. (Walker, personal communication, 18 July 2006)

Underlying the assertion of New Zealand-ness we see here is an assumption of a reflective, mutable New Zealand, one that is highly and reflexively subjective. This New Zealand is accessed through film, through ritual practices that underline individual, nuanced and shifting interpretations and understandings.

In the language used when discussing several of the films a localising tendency can be observed whereby a specific New Zealand geographic location is alleged to imbue the film with local specificity, a case of a part standing in for the whole. This is the case in, for example, the foregrounding of Wellington in relation to *The Lord of the Rings*:

¹¹⁶ For a robust discussion of the underpinning advantages of situating the filming of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy in New Zealand, see Thompson, 2007.

This city [Wellington] and this country feel enormous pride in hosting the world premiere and the pride comes from knowing this film was conceived of by a Kiwi, has been contributed to by thousands of Kiwis and has been filmed entirely in New Zealand and is taking the world by storm. (Clark quoted in Emotional Jackson, 2003, p. 1)

And just as Wellington, in some instances, stands in for New Zealand as a whole, in much media attention focused on *Whale Rider*, it was the settlement of Whangara which was emphasised as the contributor of special, national qualities. However, the reverse is true in the case of *Kombi Nation*. Here it is the *lack* of a New Zealand shooting location that was most strongly invoked in discourses asserting that New Zealand cultural elements appear in the film:

But I guess the ... what () its New Zealand-ness is (.) thrown more sharply into focus by the fact that they are out of the country, the fact that they are this group of, which is exactly what happens in the real trip, and kind of what I was interested in, interested in kind of, showing in a way, was that New Zealanders are never more Kiwi than when they are away from home. Lahood, personal communication, July 4, 2006; Lahood, 2003b)

This is a flagging of *behaviour*, rather than of landscape, one related to action, rather than imagery. Largely, though not always, an emphasis on location occurs alongside a discursive positioning of the films in ways that emphasise geography more generally. This language brings the physical location of the films into the national cinema rhetoric by discussing these locations as places where New Zealanders – an appropriate term here is ‘Kiwis’ – live and work. Again we see the belief in the “Kiwi”, in specific attributes that can be portrayed onscreen, ones that will be recognised in rituals of national cinema.

There is a diversity of themes identifiable in discussions concerning the films’. For example:

The film [*The Māori Merchant of Venice*] locates it [Belmont/Peremona] in New Zealand by incorporating Māori art, music and culture in the design and staging of events. For example, when the Prince of Morocco arrives

in Peremona to seek Portia's hand in marriage, he is given a ceremonial Māori welcome with conch shell, and karanga ... counterpointed by Moroccan trumpets and song. (He Taonga Films, 2002, p. 13)

The use of the conch shell and, particularly of karanga, is the onscreen re-enactment of Māori welcoming ritual. This means that these public, legitimised rituals – which are flags, in the Billig sense, of Māori culture – are used in the film's publicity material as evidence of the film's Māori -ness and, at times, its New Zealand-ness (the discourse tends to shift between the two). This is also the case for *Whale Rider*, which also had significant input from Māori. Discourses of the film's perceived resonance with the New Zealand audience, which were extended to the inclusion of Māori culture:

[*Whale Rider*] shows parts of New Zealand that are in their own way absolutely wonderful and beautiful. But it also tells people more about Māori culture, New Zealand society and some of the values that our [sic] country is built on.' (Mark Burton quoted in NZ taxpayers gamble, 2001, p. 8)

Here, part, the Māori part, stands in for the whole, New Zealand. Academic Murdoch, describes a process of indigenization:

[*Whale Rider's*] national resonance comes from a bicultural identification with things Māori in which they trigger an instant patriotic response. (Murdoch, 2003, p. 104)

This is an example of a form of ritual that is sometimes invoked in support of the national but sometimes is marginalised from the imagining of the national.¹¹⁷ In the quote, above, Murdoch links Māori to the perception of *Whale Rider* as a New Zealand film. Attempting to provide an explanation for this

¹¹⁷ Very recent public debate about the choice of the Tino Rangitiratanga flag as the 'Māori' flag to fly alongside the New Zealand flag on Waitangi Day is one such example of a shifting identification with things Māori on the part of New Zealanders.

...we [Pakeha/non-Māori] know about going back to the land and the sea and about the silent, ancient ones; we recognise his working definition of 'utu'; we sway to the waiata. Non-Māori New Zealanders in no way own these things, just as tracts of the essential *Whale Rider* myths must always remain inaccessible to them; but all of Aotearoa New Zealand knows them *representatively* – and, indeed, can identify with them patriotically. In this slipstream, we watch in *Whale Rider* as depictions and enactments of Māoritanga come to stand for collective identity, homecoming, ethnicity. (*ibid.*, p. 101)

Here Murdoch indicates the possibilities of ritual practices of recognition, linking these to *Whale Rider* but modelling such a ritual recognition herself. This example is similar to that of the karanga in *The Māori Merchant of Venice*, but here 'Māori' is extended to stand in for 'New Zealand'. This patriotic identification of non-Māori with Māori can be viewed as identification with Māori as national 'flag', in Billig's sense, rather than with a complex and contradictory cultural reality. Here, Māori become a motif for authenticity as a New Zealand film. This serves to ascribe to Māori a sense of being ritualised flags that are available for equally ritualised consumption and – by extension – endorses the notion that the films provide a point of connection with the New Zealand community in its imagined form.¹¹⁸

While this use of ethnicity as a flag is particular to some films, it is not the case in others. Two of the case study films have Māori actors and use Māori tikanga and custom onscreen, and this is highlighted in the publicity and commentary that surround these films. On the other hand, the ethnicity of the actors in the remaining three case study films is not emphasised in the literature, despite the mostly Pakeha ritual that is the OE, as seen in *Kombi Nation*, a ritual that is historically linked to the British lineage of many Pakeha New Zealanders (see Bell, 2002). Furthermore, there are many films that have Māori actors that are *not* claimed as Māori or New Zealand films – the *Star Wars* films featuring Temuera Morrison, for example. To be clear, these films do not use Māori protocol or customs onscreen, so that we might fairly assume that the conflation of Māori with New Zealandness springs not from

¹¹⁸ There was some notable public debate over whether *Whale Rider* should be considered to be a 'Māori' film.

the ethnicity of the actors, but rather from the onscreen context that they operate within.

So the construction of authenticity in terms of New Zealand cinema is not necessarily straightforward. The various flaggings of New Zealand-ness that are a part of all of the case study films does not occur uniformly, as we saw in the last chapter. Further, the various rituals involved with this flagging takes many forms. Each of the case study films offers a particular set of flaggings that are recognised and reaffirmed in rituals which work to identify these films with New Zealand.

5.1.1 *Whale Rider*: Celebrating a ‘New Zealand’ Film

Whale Rider is a film about which much has been written, in terms of media commentary and academic writing. Opinions regarding the film often emphasise its success, but also extend to the ways the film might speak for, about and to New Zealand as a nation. The film is seen by some as a national artwork, and many note the affection with which the New Zealand audience is alleged to have received the film. This is demonstrated by Murdoch, in the literary journal *Landfall*:

...*Whale Rider* animated a warm and massive national pride and recognition among native viewers, who took the film to number one for over twelve weeks... (Murdoch, 2003, p. 8).

The quote is consistent with a strong theme found in the discourse surrounding *Whale Rider*, wherein the importance placed on the popularity of the film is in turn then used to demonstrate the film’s perceived cultural importance. This theme is one of the alleged authenticity of the film as ‘a profoundly New Zealand film’, one which ‘asks New Zealanders to embrace what is theirs alone’ (Morris, 2003, p. 19). Murdoch points out the way the film was seen to speak for New Zealand as a whole:

This is a massive and moving achievement, then: that the unique and precious creation myth of a particular iwi on the

East Coast of the North Island can, by faithful representation, be representative of all New Zealanders. (Murdoch, 2003, p. 101)

This discursive positioning of the film enacts a smoothing-out of contestation around the 'national' (as in 'national pride'), relying on an ultimately utopian vision of what New Zealand might be understood to mean. This is a ritual of self-recognition, not by the public spontaneously, but one constructed discursively within the public sphere, one that relies somewhat on the public reception of the film.

What we see above is the assertion that the success of the film hinges, at least partially, on the significance the film is thought to have for New Zealand peoples. Alongside the significance ascribed to the film's public perception, is the argument that *Whale Rider* is of particular importance for the larger, imagined, body of films thought to constitute New Zealand 'national cinema':

Whale Rider has been heralded as riding a new wave of national cinema for New Zealand that is regarded as being both bicultural and significant in both local and international contexts. (Message, 2003, p 90)

Message not only commentates on this aspect of *Whale Rider* discourse, but also adds to it, arguing that the film "embodies a new wave of national New Zealand cinema" (*ibid.*, pp. 87-88). Part of this 'new wave' claim is the contention that the film contributes to a shift within the New Zealand cinema production industry, away from the darkness Neill discusses in *Cinema of Unease*, in style and content:

There's a relief in the New Zealand movie *Whale Rider*. Sweet relief. From darkness. From violence. From despair. New Zealand movies haven't been easy to watch over the years. 'I realised with this film that it was time to step into the light,' says writer-director Niki Caro. (Bagnall, 2003)

This demonstrates a desire, on the part of journalist Bagnall, among others, to position *Whale Rider* in the perceived tradition of New Zealand national cinema. However, to do so it is necessary to shift the perception of this

cinema to include the circumstances and features of *Whale Rider*. This forms a *transformative* ritual, one in which the film is transformed into a traditional New Zealand film. This forces us in turn to question what importance can really be placed on established national cinema criteria, in New Zealand at least. Seemingly, such criteria have elasticity, which points to the possibility of the New Zealand cinema criteria as somewhat constraining and limited.

Various production features of *Whale Rider* are consistently cited in the discourse as adding to *Whale Rider's* special significance. As discussed, the film largely used a combination of Pakeha filmmakers and workers, and Māori actors, including local iwi who appeared as extras. These aspects of the film's production have been fundamental to the discursive invention of 'backstage biculturalism', an invention further used to underscore the authenticity of the film:

While the cast of *Whale Rider* is almost all Māori, the crew was mostly Pakeha. 'We crewed it very mindfully so they were temperamentally suited to work in a small community of people who had no experience of working on a film set,' Caro explains. '[While we were shooting] all the nannies and aunties would be out each day, and our unit guys would set up chairs beside the monitor, and they would sit and knit and talk, and the crew would bring them lots of cups of tea and they would give me little hugs and tell me that I was making a 'real quality show'. (Bagnall, 2003)

Of course, for Caro this is a good thing, because it adds to the authenticity of the film as a film of the Māori people, a stance which skims over the facts that the film is (almost entirely) in English, and has a very conventional linear narrative structure.

Clear in the discourse surrounding *Whale Rider* is the establishment of a publicly available narrative concerning the film's bicultural characteristics. As we can see, those involved in creating and perpetuating this discourse are not confined to the realms of those actively engaged with the machinations of publicity, such as press kit writers and journalists. Murdoch, again:

... the public discussion of the film in New Zealand came to hinge on the history of its pre-production and filming: a discussion extrinsic to, but in its effects utterly confluent with, the film-story proper. *Whale Rider's* production

became a contemporary exemplar of bicultural creative practice. And in this nexus, this confluence of public narrative backfill and plain narrative gleam, it seemed the film's time had come. (Murdoch, 2003, 98)

While Murdoch examines this phenomena at a distance, she also contributes to it, with a conclusion that seems to fully support the assertions found in this aspect of the public-realm discussion of *Whale Rider*, positioning the film as a 'massive and moving achievement' that is:

...one of the most sincere successes of biculturalism, that one part can speak so effortlessly, of both, to all – and that collective and close collaboration *are* the 'only way'. (*ibid.*, p. 101)

This is clearly appropriation of production circumstances for a discursive flagging of the national, and illustrates the thesis that national cinema is not simply understood as something that resides only on screen, but is also interpreted as including the wider context of a film's production and reception.

This notion of the specialness of the Māori content of *Whale Rider* is also frequently mentioned in interviews with various key production workers and cast members. Director Niki Caro was particularly vocal on *this* point when it came to the Māori elements of the film:

Everything in this film is there to celebrate in that community and in many communities in New Zealand like it. [The] People [of Whangara] don't have much materially, but they are so rich with their spirit and their compassion and their commitment to each other. It makes my world look impoverished. (Caro quoted in Bagnall, 2003)

...it's very interesting to me with this film to have taken it all around the world now and to see something that is so culturally specific to this tiny, intense, strong indigenous culture have this amazing ability to reach out universally to audiences. (Caro quoted in Thompson, 2003)

Using such a discourse usefully allows Caro to emphasise her status as a privileged insider. Caro was vocal in the discursive deployment of the word 'bicultural' in relation to *Whale Rider*, and her rhetoric emphasised collaboration between Māori and Pakeha.

Whale Rider enjoyed much support from the New Zealand government, which invested in the film's promotion as a way of showcasing 'New Zealand' as a tourism destination and a potential site for foreign investment. Toward this end, several government agencies released statements praising the film and lauding its achievement in showcasing national excellence.¹¹⁹ The idea of New Zealand as a "hot new movie country" (Investment New Zealand, 2003) was meant for an international audience made up investors and producers in search of a lower-cost, technologically competent filmmaking location. Intrinsic to New Zealand becoming or being perceived as such a location is the pursuit of the economic goals evident in earlier arguments for state support of cinema production in New Zealand. Here, the film becomes the subject of state-sanction, in effect an official example of New Zealand national cinema. Further government sanction of the film's 'New Zealand' qualities' can also be seen in public statements about the film that came from government portfolio holders, including Prime Minister and Minister for Culture and Heritage, Helen Clark:

... in many respects the foundations of New Zealand's film industry are films like *Whale Rider* – films that are conceived, funded, directed and produced by New Zealanders in New Zealand. (Helen quoted in *ibid.*)

The narrative of the (sacred) national is at the fore. Clark takes up the notion of the film as intrinsically a 'New Zealand' story, and pins to this the promise of commercial success:

Ideally you want more of your own stories told through film Through the success of a film such as *Whale Rider* it's clear that there is commercial potential for them. (Clark quoted in Johnston 2003)

Here, Clark is clearly articulating the twin aims of national cinema traditionally raised in arguments for state support of national cinema, including the aim of potential economic and cultural gains. There are contradictions here, too,

¹¹⁹ For example, in a press release: "Investment New Zealand Director for North America, Jane Cunliffe, said the quality of *Whale Rider* is playing an

caught in the attempt to balance the global with the local audience; as we have seen, the size of the New Zealand cinema audience will not support the cost of filmmaking, forcing producers and filmmakers to look to global audience in order to recoup their investment. Clark was not the only politician to add to the *Whale Rider* discourse by publicly praising the film. Tourism Minister Mark Burton made similar comments, highlighting the rural setting and claiming the film unequivocally a New Zealand film (Burton quoted in NZ taxpayers gamble, 2001, p. 8).

But such claims are predictable; politician falls into raptures over a film after its success, a process that is itself ritualistic. Of course, film has been claimed to have both potential and actual benefits for tourism, and Burton also reinforced the narrative of the film's Māori values and qualities and their supposed generalisability, in what is beginning to seem a collision of positive claims regarding the film:

It [*Whale Rider*] shows parts of New Zealand that are in their own way absolutely wonderful and beautiful. But it also tells people more about Māori culture, New Zealand society and some of the values that our country is built on. (*ibid.*)

And what does this mean? What are these values that our country is built on? Are they bicultural? Or is it simply the international success of the film that Burton is referring to? Nonetheless, the film itself, and its success, are being used here as flags of New Zealand's greatness.

Clearly, there are multiple strands to the discursive positioning of the film as national or New Zealand cinema. The film is to be considered New Zealand cinema because it, in turn, included a relatively high degree of input (relatively) from a small, remote East Coast iwi, because New Zealanders were involved in the film's conception, financing and production, and because it presents New Zealand to the world in what has been a positive reception. This contrasts with the previous chapter, where there was a struggle to identify the film as unambiguously an example of New Zealand national cinema according to the various criteria against which it might be empirically

integral part in reinforcing New Zealand's reputation as one of the hot new movie countries" (Investment New Zealand 2003).

quantified. What we have here, instead, is a more or less triumphant discursive achievement in establishing not just the film's national credentials but its absolute national importance. The persistent flagging of biculturalism – and more specifically of Māori elements as 'universally' recognisable in characterising New Zealand – has an effective resonance at the discursive and political levels. This is emerging as one of the more powerful ritual investments in the very idea of national cinema.

The discourse surrounding *Whale Rider* manages to smooth out any aspects of the film that may prove problematic when attempting to claim that the film is a New Zealand film. Rather than considering the forty percent of the film's financing that came from a German source, Prime Minister Clark chooses to focus on the New Zealand-based financing the film received. And while the agendas of key stakeholders in *Whale Rider* are being articulated in the examples above, we can see that their discourses have been taken up by journalists and academics – stakeholders with little to gain from taking this stance. Furthermore, in terms of the general audience's response to the film we see that it was chosen in Petrie and Stuart's surveys of the general New Zealand audience as in the top five of New Zealand films in each category the survey isolated (Petrie and Stuart, 2008, pp.176-77), which indicates a high level of ritual engagement with the film by this set of stakeholders.

5.1.2 *The Lord of the Rings*: New Zealand as the Vital Ingredient

While many factors may point to *Lord of the Rings* as *not* a New Zealand film – including finance sources, story origin, the nationalities of main-role actors – nonetheless, many *Lord of the Rings* stakeholders see the trilogy in terms of national achievement. Actor Elijah Wood (Frodo) provides an excellent example in terms of location and landscape. However, the emphasis here is not on essential New Zealand landscape but on the flexibility of the landscape:

New Zealand is gorgeous! I don't really think that there's anywhere else we could have filmed this movie unless we had travelled to lots of different places around the world. Every element of Middle-earth is contained in New Zealand. It is perfect. (Wood quoted Sibley, 2001, p. 21)

While Wood deftly ties New Zealand to *The Lord of the Rings*, there is a measure of contradiction here, in that the way the film's narrative suited New Zealand's geography is used in this way. This raises the question of whether geography equals nation, although to be fair, as we have seen above the landscape is often at the head of the list of what makes a film a New Zealand film. Further, it was not just New Zealand's physical geography which was claimed to be important to the film's success. When accepting *Return of the King's* Academy Award for Best Picture, director Peter Jackson said:

I just want to say a very few quick words, especially to the people of New Zealand, to the Government of New Zealand, the city councils and everyone who has supported us the length and breadth of the country. (Jackson quoted in Baillie, 2004, p. 1)

The fact that *The Lord of the Rings* was filmed in New Zealand seems to have been used as evidence that the film is an authentically 'New Zealand' film in a similar way to the presence of Māori and 'backstage biculturalism' was in the previous example of *Whale Rider*. But in this case, the emphasis shifts to the people as crew and supporters at a range of levels. Indeed, the circumstances of the films' production proved a fertile ground for sowing the seeds of this discursive achievement, as demonstrated in the above quote from Elijah Wood, which is typical of a tendency to refer to the trilogy and New Zealand in a mutually beneficial and somewhat symbiotic relationship. This notion of the trilogy and the New Zealand nation as a perfect fit in some respects seems (discursively) to encompass the whole of New Zealand, to the point that the government Ministry of Tourism backed a publicity campaign proclaiming "***New Zealand – home of Middle-earth***" (Ministry of Tourism, 2004, p. 2). The message was clear, that it was New Zealand that made the success of the trilogy possible.

Government agencies beyond the Ministry of Tourism were vocal in tying the success of *Lord of the Rings* to New Zealand, specifically to the New Zealanders who worked on the film. Industry New Zealand's claims were particularly specific:

New Zealand companies were responsible for every aspect of the trilogy's look, from the props and sets to breathtaking special effects. New Zealand artisans and craftsmen custom made nearly all of the 30,000 props for the trilogy. (Industry New Zealand, 2002)

As Industry New Zealand's primary aims are to support and attract investment into New Zealand business, it would be fair to say that the above quote is performing part of these aims. We also need to be careful to take into account the *audience* at which such statements are aimed. The quote above is aimed at producers and those in the international film industry who might choose to base runaway productions in New Zealand. Investment New Zealand, an agency with comparable aims, contributes in a similar way to the *Lord of the Rings* discourse:

But it was not just New Zealand's diversity of locations that made *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy so successful. Two other factors: on-screen production value; and unique innovation in all areas of production, were also crucial. These have since attracted other major studios to New Zealand. (Investment New Zealand, 2002, p. 2)

Statements such as these were often delivered by, or on the behalf of, politicians and government departments, most notably Tourism Minister Mark Burton. Burton's comments, similar to many examples already cited, are reflective of the historical claims that a successful film industry has great potential for inbound international tourism. This stance was part of his Ministerial brief and Burton's rhetoric was emphatic:

Last night [at the Wellington premiere of the third *The Lord of the Rings* film], the entire world saw the proof that New Zealand is one of the most exciting, innovative and creative nations in the world... (Burton quoted in LOTR success, p. 3)

With our pristine environment as a backdrop, we were able to showcase New Zealand's originality, creativity and, above all, our quality. *The Lord of the Rings* represented all of those things. (Burton, 2004)

Again, New Zealand and the trilogy, including by extension the trilogy's success – are portrayed in the discourse as inextricable. This claim was one also made by (then) Prime Minister Helen Clark (Clark quoted in 2003), who emphasised Wellington as the region where the production was based, and by Minister Burton, who spoke of the success of the film as being “about the technical brilliance of the movie and all that” (Mark Burton in NZ taxpayers gamble, 2001). The vagueness of ‘and all that’ rather perfectly encapsulates what is going on here – the elision of any distinction between cinematic success and national success. Commentary on the locations often linked the unique New Zealand landscape with the idea that the people of New Zealand were also a unique and incomparable ingredient in the production of the films. Indeed, New Zealand was often portrayed as far more than simply a location, and equally, the film was often portrayed as more significant to New Zealand than a typical blockbuster.

A particularly strong feature of the New Zealand government's public statements about *Lord of the Rings* was the presentation of the trilogy as a unique and important opportunity for the country, one with a myriad of benefits for New Zealand industries. These form part of an economic argument for the film to be considered as a New Zealand film:

With all three of the trilogy's films shot at a range of locations throughout New Zealand, *Lord of the Rings* presents a unique opportunity to showcase our country to the world. There are significant and ongoing spin-offs for the tourism, computer software, film-making, wine and food, and dozens of other local industries. (Clark quoted in NZ Government, 2001)

LOTR offers New Zealand unparalleled opportunities to achieve an international profile through the release of the trilogy over the next three years. (NZ Government, 2001)

The Lord of the Rings provided New Zealand with an unparalleled opportunity to generate international media coverage of New Zealand as a visitor destination. (Tourism New Zealand, p. 2)

International media coverage [of *The Lord of the Rings*] has greatly aided New Zealand in the international marketplace... (Voigt, 2004)

Associate Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Pete Hodgson says Peter Jackson's blockbuster has alerted Hollywood to the fact the New Zealand is a great source of 'creative minds and innovative technology'. (Kelly, 2002, p. 15)

Here, again, is the notion that *Lord of the Rings* functions as a showcase for New Zealand, perhaps even part of a national brand. Such arguments for potential tourism benefits echo the arguments for government support of filmmaking aired in the 1970s in New Zealand, when a case was made for the potential of a successful cinema industry to encourage inbound international tourism. There was much optimism regarding the potential impact of the trilogy for filmmaking in New Zealand, particularly the use of New Zealand for film production by overseas filmmakers:

As the project's scale makes this place seem larger than its geography, New Zealand can become a sort of permanent 'Middle Earth' for film-makers because it has the 'authenticity' of the right place to realize your imaginings. (Jones, 2003, p. 66)

Here, Jones is participating in the ritual of renaming New Zealand as the ultimate unspecified location.

Lord of the Rings director Peter Jackson was often marked out in public discourse as an exemplary New Zealander. Prior to the completion of *Lord of the Rings*, Jackson was typically presented in media as a champion and a hero, and as a stalwart, indeed a saviour, of the New Zealand film industry. For example:

He [Jackson] is the only New Zealand filmmaker who has attained international recognition and who has not been lured away by the temptations of Hollywood. Jackson has steadfastly refused to work away from New Zealand. (Grant, 1999, p. 1)

This depiction of Jackson only became more emphatic in the wake of the news that he had secured international financing to direct and produce the trilogy (for example, Cleave, 1998, p. 28). So Peter Jackson as champion of New Zealand cinema becomes a familiar refrain, and it seems to be that Jackson himself comes to stand for, or to embody, the success and potential of cinema production in New Zealand. Jackson's success becomes New Zealand's success and here Jackson and his practice become flags, representative of essential 'New Zealand' qualities.

While the publicity and public comment surrounding *Lord of the Rings* often presented the relationship between the trilogy and New Zealand as inextricable, this deft discursive positioning sometimes fell down when it came to intelligibility:

This [the premiere for the *Return of the King*] was a festive day, and media had long been heralding it, here in Wellywood, this-time capital of Middle Earth, celebrating such a rich fusion of deep tradition, family, and techno-managerial derring-do. How all the talent assembled from such distant fields had adored the friendly family ethos of both work and play... (Downie, 2004, p. 6)

The world premiere of the third of *The Lord of The Rings* films, which took place in Wellington in December 2003, was itself a huge, confirming ritual, with significant buy-in from the public, the media, the filmmakers and other stakeholders. We also see, in such discursively complex but empirically suspect phrases as 'fusion of deep tradition, family, and techno-managerial derring-do', the processes of aligning the trilogy with New Zealand. And, as we've already seen, just as New Zealand became Middle Earth, so the successes of *The Lord of the Rings* were seen to be New Zealand's successes. The use of the trilogy's imagery in such aligning extended to a wide range of areas, including Air New Zealand's *The Lord of the Rings*-themed planes. When, in 2003, NZ Post issued a set of *Lord of the Rings* postage stamps:

New Zealand Post Stamps Business General Manager Ivor Masters [said]: 'Shot entirely in New Zealand, by a New Zealand director and a mostly New Zealand cast and crew,

the trilogy speaks volumes about the huge capability of New Zealand's film industry and New Zealand Post is proud to be celebrating this success.' (New Zealand Government, 2003)

Here, we see a strategic flagging of *The Lord of the Rings* by a key stakeholder, the state, where again the film is used to link its qualities of success to New Zealand and New Zealanders.

The culmination of the government-backed discursive campaign to flag New Zealand via the films may be seen in the dissemination and acceptance of the idea that *The Lord of the Rings* simply and unquestionably is a New Zealand film. This seems to be almost an act of faith, rather than a matter of empirically verifiable reality, as argued by *NZ Listener* television reviewer, Diana Wichtel, who claimed the large number of New Zealanders who worked on the trilogy gave it a national status (Wichtel 2002). This indigenisation of a global phenomena, and the contradiction inherent in the claiming of a film trilogy with an international pedigree and intention, as a New Zealand film did not go unnoticed. Academic Stan Jones commented:

The slogan ['the Home of Middle Earth'] can even imply some sort of cultural transfer as an indigenising process, whereby the potential for cinematic mythopoesis in the visualizing of Middle Earth somehow always existed here as part of the *genius loci* of Aotearoa. (Jones, 2003, pp. 663-4)

Jones's argument is that the discourse that positions New Zealand as Middle Earth does so with an underlying assumption that without New Zealand there would be no *The Lord of the Rings* films. Reviewing the statements from various stakeholders that position New Zealand as the faultless, "pristine" backdrop to the film, we can only conclude that this is the case.

Both *Whale Rider* and *Lord of the Rings*, in their very different ways, display at full force the ritual investment in the idea of national significance that can be achieved through processes of discursive flagging. The theorisation of banal nationalism as an extension of the imagined community thesis reveals how national cinema as an idea persists even against the interpretive or empirical odds. It is not necessary at all to find thematic

correspondences in these two films; nor is it necessary to tick off checklists of funding or production characteristics. They have both been made into triumphant instances of New Zealand national cinema in the things that have been said about them. However, *The Lord of the Rings* gleans its New Zealand-ness from its production practices, even if these don't always appear in the film itself.

5.1.3 *Little Bits of Light*: A Quietly New Zealand Film

Little Bits of Light is a film about which very little has been written. The film's low budget, limited release and difficult subject matter (depression), have led to a relatively small amount of public discourse, with few reviews of the film, and little publicity material circulated. Because of this deficit, an interview with the film's director, Campbell Walker, was carried out to ascertain his views on the 'New Zealand' character of the film, which means in turn that the statements gleaned from that interview are responses to prompts, giving them a slightly different flavour from the quotes from the directors of the two case study films considered above. Further, public discourse regarding his previous two films is drawn on, as each of Walker's films is claimed by commentators and by Walker himself to have built on the last, to create a body of work, hence providing a greater amount of material for discussion here.

Like Peter Jackson, Walker's work has been singled out as significant for filmmaking in New Zealand. Walker's 1999 film *Uncomfortable Comfortable* (1999) was called 'the first of the current breed of digital features to be seen widely in New Zealand' (New Zealand International Film Festival, 2005). His work on digital feature films has led him to be labelled 'a creative force' (Campbell, 2003a, p. 9), and to be singled out among his contemporaries, by film critics and journalists, who claimed that his work was pioneering new territory for low-budget filmmaking in New Zealand (Matthews, 2003, pp. 3-4; New Zealand International Film Festival, 2005; Daud, 2005). This is a similar mythologising to the case of Peter Jackson, with the work of both cited as important for national filmmaking, albeit that their work is on a

very different scale and pursues a different audience. Walker as 'godsend' is not only seen as a filmmaker; he is seen as a *digital* filmmaker with a 'unique voice', and a timely gift to film in New Zealand, one that provides an alternative to the "foreign blockbusters dominating the landscape" (Daud, 2005). It is significant that digital technologies are not just seen as providing new opportunities in the context of New Zealand cinema production, but are evoked as offering distinctive 'home-made' opportunities. Walker himself takes this view, preferring the independence of working small (Walker in New Zealand International Film Festival, 2005).

Within Walker's privileging of the "home made" ethos, he argues that his work is reflective of New Zealand. When discussing *Little Bits of Light*, Walker admits that it is a very different "New Zealand" to that usually celebrated:

In most New Zealand films 'us' is represented by Kiwiana and things like that. We very consciously made no reference to any of that. Instead we set the film [*Little Bits of Light*] in an uninflected New Zealand place and allowed those characters to be as they would be in that situation. I would hope because of that that it reflects New Zealand better. (New Zealand International Film Festival, 2005)

Walker's work focuses on his experiences of the New Zealand emotional landscape and the social world, rather than the physical landscape so important to *The Lord of the Rings*. Walker hopes that the quotidian details of his life in New Zealand will translate onto the screen, and argues for the everyday in preference to larger budgets. In his approach to filmmaking, Walker insists that he draws very much on his own, personal, experiences of life in New Zealand, which are sometimes at odds with those typically portrayed in New Zealand-made films:

My notions of national identity don't have much to do with 'Kiwi' or with traditional filmic representations... (Walker, personal communication, 18 July 2006)

The 'Aro Valley' label is one that has been attributed to Walker's films. Walker sees films made in Aro Valley, or by its residents, firmly as New Zealand films, saying that "obviously 'Aro Valley' films are New Zealand films" (*ibid.*). Walker is arguing for a definition of national cinema that includes films made by New Zealanders, films that come out of the experience of living in New Zealand.¹²⁰ Of the 'Aro Valley films', and their atypicality from the 'Kiwi' variety of New Zealand films, Walker goes on to say that these films don't

...fit the traditional notion of a New Zealand film. Like of course it's a New Zealand film, if it's based in a very specific notion of New Zealand, how could it be anything else? (*ibid.*)

There is the suggestion here that these films are more *authentically* New Zealand than those films that are generally assumed to be part of the national canon, because they arise from the particular experience of the writer/director. For Walker, his films are very clearly both New Zealand films and New Zealand films unlike any others, in what is a very different argument toward the attribution of a film as a 'New Zealand' film than that found in the two previous case study examples. Walker's pursuit of a different kind of filmic articulation of New Zealand is deliberate:

But I'm also much more conscious of the issues around [traditional assumptions about New Zealand films] too, and avoiding the traditional representations of New Zealand films and ... acknowledging ...

some of the other ways it can be shown are, there's other ways of doing it. (*ibid.*)

Walker does not believe that 'traditional' notions of what constitutes New Zealand cinema necessarily confer authenticity, arguing instead that his films achieve status as New Zealand films by way of an organic embodiment of his own experiences as a New Zealander. And, interestingly, for Walker these New Zealand qualities of his films are almost inextricably linked to his use of digital technology, as such technology allows filmmakers to have a greater

¹²⁰ *Whale Rider*, particularly, would fit into this category.

degree of control over the end product due to a relatively inexpensive outlay and the ability to edit digital film on a home computer (*ibid.*). This model of national cinema, this argument for what national cinema is, is vastly different to the government fanfare of the two previous case study examples. This is a small, context-dependent cinema, underpinned by a do-it-yourself ethos.

In short, what we have with *Little Bits of Light*, understood in terms of a discursive positioning that flags the national, is a kind of reverse image of *Lord of the Rings* or even *Whale Rider*. Having nothing in common with those films, Walker's work can none the less be constructed (not least by Walker himself) as no less distinctively national cinema due to its home-made ethic, its appropriateness to the conditions of production in New Zealand, its low-tech, new-tech aesthetic which in the end is just another version of the claim for Kiwi 'techno-managerial derring-do' that we have encountered in relation to the big-budget films.

What is developing so far is a sense of contradiction in terms of naming a national cinema. But on the other hand, also emerging is a series of arguments for a range of cinematic work to be included under the rubric of New Zealand national cinema. It seems that a variety of vastly different film work can be interpreted as New Zealand cinema, with nothing to hold the work together save for engagement by various stakeholders with the films as example of New Zealand cinema. And these stakeholders seem to be engaged with each film as national cinema, in what may be termed a ritual engagement with the films, but also and more importantly here, with the films as national cinema.

5.1.4 *Kombi Nation*: A New Zealand Story

Much of the public commentary concerned with *Kombi Nation* focuses on the perceived importance of the travel story in the New Zealand context. The 'OE', the traditional journey to, and usually through, the United Kingdom and Europe is generally considered a rite of passage for young, often middle class, often Pakeha New Zealanders. The perception of the ritual qualities of

the OE is evoked in relation to *Kombi Nation*, for example in the following quote from actor Genevieve McClean:

Young New Zealanders have a really strong need to travel overseas. Basically so they can look back at New Zealand with an international perspective. (McClean in Lahood, 2003b)

Intrinsic to this quote is the definition of the nation itself as something that is only ever distinct in relation to other nations. The idea that one is never more oneself than when one is away from home is important to the narrative that surrounds the film. The act of leaving New Zealand conversely underscores the characters' New Zealand identity.

The characters' journey along a path already established by a multitude of previous young New Zealand travellers is the element of the film consistently evoked as its most New Zealand, or more precisely 'Kiwi' feature. Lahood proposes this marks the film out as 'one of the most Kiwi films that has been made' (Lahood, personal communication, 18 July 2006). For Lahood, it is precisely the characters' distance from home that draws attention to the New Zealandness, the 'Kiwi'-ness of the characters and, by association, to the film itself demonstrating "that New Zealanders are never more Kiwi than when they are away from home" (*ibid.*). So, while Walker argued for a national cinema based on his experiences of everyday New Zealand, Lahood was very clear in his intention to set and film a New Zealand film in Europe.

The European setting is fundamental to *Kombi Nation*, and it is this European setting which, paradoxically, Lahood invoked when asserting the 'New Zealandness' of the film:

...when suddenly you're a group of Kiwis travelling around Europe ... (.) it's what you share that becomes important and everyone starts singing ... the same music Kiwi music and you know everybody's interested in rugby and you know it becomes a sort of distillation of what it is to be a New Zealander ... it's really ... it's fascinating and despite the fact that people are travelling through international borders there is a kind of (.) it's sort of irrelevant (.) they

cling to all the things that are similar about themselves.
(*ibid.*)

This 'Kiwi'-ness is somewhat indistinct – it serves as a flag for something greater than the sum of its parts, and is all the more compelling because of that. So, rather than the “uninflected space” chosen by Walker for *Little Bits of Light*, Lahood has deliberately chosen a particularly resonant space, rich with the traditions and culture of Europe as well as the travelling circus of New Zealand youth culture that is the contribution of the young New Zealand tourists shown in the film. The mixture of factors Lahood claims in the quote, above, is indicative of the commentary and discourse concerned with the film. The throwing into relief of particularly 'New Zealand' characters, the repetitious use of the term 'Kiwi', the notion of transplanted culture and the perceived importance of the OE, are all thematic staples in the discourse surrounding the film. The first of these, the inherently New Zealand nature of the film's protagonists, is emphasised by Lahood:

The characters in the film, there's something uniquely kind of Kiwi about them. They're really easy to identify with because you recognise them as people you know or you know people who are kind of like your friends or like your family. (Lahood, 2003b).

Not only are these characters argued to be *distinctively* New Zealand in nature, but they are – and this term is used frequently in discussions of the film – *Kiwi*. Cast member Loren Horsley's claim that the film is “really Kiwi” (Horsley in *ibid.*), joins Lahood's, who also asserts that the film depicts “a real classic Kiwi experience that ... everybody can connect with” (Lahood, 2003b).

The argument that the film portrays “a transplanting of Kiwi culture” (Croot, 2003, p.4) is made only by those who worked on the film. This “film about Kiwis on tour” (McClellan in Lahood, 2003b), was said by film reviewer Matthew Grainger to be:

... a laid-back experiment in freeform storytelling, a make-it-up-as-you-go-along yarn that, in following this recipe, perfectly captures the wayward spontaneity and alcohol-

fuelled spirit of adventure of that great Kiwi institution, the Big O.E. (Grainger, 2003, p. 19)

This, the onscreen depiction of the 'OE', is at the heart of claims that this is a New Zealand film, despite the at-times unflattering portrait:

Kombi Nation is that rare model, a funny Kiwi film. ... *Kombi Nation's* full of energy and thoroughly unashamed of accent, bingeing, rooting, mindless rites of passage, cultural ignorance. ...It perfectly captures so much of the casual acceptance that Kiwis take overseas, the worst of it boorishness, the best a quiet pride and what-are-we-here-for hedonism. (Broatch, 2003, p. 18)

And here, again, we see the notion that the 'Kiwi'-ness of the film is indeed greater than the sum of its parts; nothing in the list above ("bingeing, rooting" etc), is a positive attribute, something to be nationally proud of – these are not the type of 'national' characteristics asserted by the state in the case study examples above. But these things here take on a mythic quality, and at the heart of much of this commentary is the myth of the OE experience as the quintessential New Zealand-ness of this journey through Europe, as a particularly New Zealand ritual. This commentary comes not only from those stakeholders involved with the film's production. Other reviewers affirm this view:

Four Kiwis take an old VW van around Europe: it doesn't get much more 'big OE' than that... (Lamb, 2003, p. 22).

...an entertaining riff on that Kiwi rite of passage - the Big OE. (Calder, 2003, p. 22)

And this aspect of the film, it was believed, would prove resonant with the local audience. It was assumed that many viewers would recognise the journey depicted (McClellan in Lahood, 2003b). This is at the heart of claims that the film is a New Zealand film – the depiction of a recognisable cultural tradition (albeit, and this is not mentioned in the commentary, a largely Pakeha one). This begs the question of why New Zealanders can not be as much themselves, or so freely themselves, when they are at home, or of what

the rest of the world offers that New Zealand cannot. This assertion of cultural tradition also contrasts with the already-discussed case study examples, with their varying modes of nationalness. As the examination of discourse progresses, there seems not to be a consistent 'angle' in the claims of individual films as New Zealand cinema.

5.1.5 *The Māori Merchant of Venice*: New Zealand Film, Māori Film - or Both?

Like *Little Bits of Light*, comparatively little has been written about *The Māori Merchant of Venice*. So, as in the case of the former film, an interview with *The Māori Merchant of Venice*'s director, Don Selwyn, took place. Again, this interview material was used to counter a lack of information, but also was taken as an opportunity to question the director about his perceptions of the 'national' qualities of the film. Additionally, the film's press kit is drawn on, as it is here that some of the strongest public claims concerning the film are made. However, unlike the other case study films, the discourse about *The Māori Merchant of Venice* does not assume such unproblematic New Zealand-ness.

Unsurprisingly, in commentary around *The Māori Merchant of Venice*, the 'Māori' qualities of the film are often highlighted, partly because it was the first feature film made entirely in the Māori language. The language is additionally significant due to the intention of the film's director, Don Selwyn, that the film be a vehicle for the teaching and retention of te reo Māori :

The premieres [of *The Māori Merchant of Venice*] will benefit a new charity, the Pei Te Hurinui Jones Trust, formed to fund creative writing in te reo, part of the revitalisation of the language, a lifelong passion of Don Selwyn. (He Taonga Films, 2002, p. 17)

The Māori language is at the forefront of both the film and the discourse. The Press Kit, for example, emphasised Selwyn's "lifelong commitment to the revitalisation of the Māori language" (*ibid.*). Without doubt, the Māori language is to the fore in this film, and academic and Shakespeare scholar Mark Houlahan argues that:

He [Selwyn] wants to deploy Shakespeare's cultural charisma in order to enhance the global circulation and mana of the Māori language. (Houlahan, 2002, p. 119)

Houlahan emphasises the cultural mixing of Māori and Shakespeare. In using an older, more formal form of the Māori language in the film, one sympathetic to Shakespearean English, it was hoped the depth of the language in everyday use in New Zealand would be enhanced (Selwyn quoted in Press kit, p. 11). This, arguably, gives the film a particular significance to at least one of the film's audiences, to reo Māori speakers.

The Māori Merchant of Venice is not claimed in the press kit to be simply a "Māori" film, due to the use of the Māori language. The notion of cultural cross-fertilisation that was a cultural hybrid of sorts, hinted at by Houlahan (2002, p. 9). These cultures are not simply Māori and Pakeha. Indeed, this hybridization subsumes Pakeha New Zealand culture, calling instead on the culture of Shakespearean times:

Selwyn's visual treatment for turning the play into a film keeps Shakespeare's plot, characters and settings, enhancing them by adding a Māori dimension. 'We are using Māori language and cultural elements as a vehicle to be able to express the dynamics that Shakespeare came up with. (He Taonga Films, 2002, pp. 8-9)

The experience of the actors and other creative contributors is also positioned as important in this narrative of cultural mixing. In playing the role of Shylock, actor Waihoroi Shortland said he drew on his identity and his experiences of racism as a Māori in the New Zealand context (Shortland quoted in He Taonga Films, 2002, p. 19), so that contemporary New Zealand politics are woven into the discursive positioning of the film. Hence, even in its absence, contemporary New Zealand is still visible in the film:

Vilsoni Hereniko has observed that Portia's legal interpretations are 'reminiscent of the court battles between Māori political activists and the New Zealand government over differing interpretations of key clauses about land ownership as expressed in the Treaty of Waitangi' (Wayne, 2004)

The context of the film's production, both historical and contemporary, it is argued means that "This becomes a Māori play about oppression, prejudice and the pursuit of bloody revenge" (Matthews, 2002c, p. 52). Yet is this film considered to be a New Zealand film? Even given the contemporary New Zealand context of the film? Selwyn's notion of a New Zealand film is one in which Māori elements and values are intrinsic:

Yes, in its form it is [a New Zealand film]. ... we've tried to keep the context of the multicultural element in there but we've told the story in the Māori language. We've set it in New Zealand. And we've got Māori actors playing all the roles apart from the Moroccans, who we've used you know because and (.) the German and the Italians who were playing those suitor roles who were [already] here in New Zealand ... and so went out of our way to keep the different ethnic contributors there (.) but they were contributors who had to deal with the Māori language. (Selwyn, personal communication, July 18, 2006)

What we have here is a series of interesting contentions, in which 'New Zealand' and 'Māori' are somewhat conflated, and contemporary New Zealand is writ large.

Another interesting claim made about *The Māori Merchant of Venice* is one of 'reverse colonization.' Here, the combination of Shakespearean and Māori elements is seen as an assertive cultural appropriation:

... by adapting *The Māori Merchant of Venice* in an old style, seemingly traditional manner, Māori apply Shakespeare in terms of high culture to reclaim their own cultural traditions, language and values. They 'decolonise' their culture by 'colonising' the English cultural icon Shakespeare. (Stehr, 2006, p. 12)

Selwyn certainly sees the film in these terms, looking back to being taught Shakespeare while at school and claiming that "now I've put it into Māori language I've colonised Shakespeare" (Selwyn quoted in Hewitson, 2005, p. A3). This is a combination that is reflective of the realities of contemporary New Zealand and the historical context of the place and relationship of Māori in terms of this context:

...the appropriation of Shakespeare for this endeavour is what makes the film so remarkable. Rather than choosing Māori characters of legends ... Selwyn appropriates the ultimate British literary icon to speak Aotearoa's indigenous language. The result is a complex and interwoven story of New Zealand – one that involves and acknowledges its past as a British colony. At times a work like this can point out the oppression of its colonization, and at times it builds upon its colonizer's own cultural past to create something entirely syncretic. Thus this film manages to speak in tongues Shakespearean, Māori and modern English, and to speak about the complex social interactions that have marked the exchange between the cultures represented by these languages. (Minton, 2004, p. 54)

So it seems that the 'New Zealand' aspects of the film are inextricably linked to both Māori and to the contemporary context that the film arises from. This context includes, as Waihoroi Shortland noted, racism and the subsuming of one culture (Māori) with another (Pakeha). If the film is thought to be a New Zealand film, and clearly in some instances it is, this is due to the need for Māori to assert their language in an often sympathetic New Zealand context.

The Press Kit for *The Māori Merchant of Venice* describes the film as 'a distinctly New Zealand production', going on to explain this is "because the language is indigenous to New Zealand" (He Taonga Films, 2002, p. 22). So te reo becomes a flag for New Zealand, though this version of 'New Zealand' puts Māori to the fore. Selwyn himself sees the film as Indigenous, albeit with some qualifiers:

Well it's Indigenous for the reasons I've said [the language, the cultural elements] ... probably it's more Indigenous than doing a film in the English language (.). There's a difference between a New Zealand film and an Indigenous film ...whereas [an] Indigenous film will fit both, a New Zealand film in the English language, it may have some of the elements of ... like *Whale Rider* it's all in English and it may have cultural elements ... it may be like (.). *Once Were Warriors* which is a subculture ... it's not the culture of Māoridom it's a subculture that's been dragged out of colonisation that's the way I see it ... and those truly identified as New Zealand films. (Selwyn, personal communication, July 18, 2006)

Here the fact of the film arising from the indigenous people of New Zealand, it is argued, makes the film a New Zealand film, but it seems that this does not work both ways. It is almost as though, to Selwyn, the category of New Zealand cinema here becomes somewhat of a subset of the Indigenous – just as ‘New Zealand’ as an entity came after pre-European Māori settlement, so too does New Zealand film play a secondary role to the Indigenous. This is an interesting concept, a culturally-specific one, and one that is not seen in the other case study examples.

So we see that the film has variously been claimed as a New Zealand film, a Māori film and an indigenous film and, in one instance, a Pacific film (Minton, 2004, p.47). This points to the concept of internal differentiation, indicated earlier. And the use of a contemporarily less-popular Shakespeare play to make such comments is part of the series of contradictions inherent to the film – which is, seemingly simultaneously, an Indigenous, New Zealand, Shakespeare film.

When asked whether he himself also sees *The Māori Merchant of Venice* as a New Zealand film, Selwyn said “No ... I see it as an interpretation of an English film” (Selwyn, personal communication, July 18, 2006). So, to add to the list, *The Māori Merchant of Venice* claims some lineage as an English film, which just goes to show the inherent contradictions and complexities of this film – mirroring, perhaps, the race relations history of New Zealand itself, from the Indigenous to the English colonists to contemporary New Zealand. Selwyn himself saw many contradictions in the film, which in some ways he did see as being a part of New Zealand national cinema:

... I'd say it's part of that process and that development (.)
 ... it's always a very difficult thin line because we're
 actually ... it's a bit like *Lord of the Rings* we're using an
 off-shore story (.) we're filming it here in New Zealand ...
 (*ibid.*)

So there is some sense of development here, of *The Māori Merchant of Venice* as part of the evolution of New Zealand cinema, albeit one that at times is seen to run alongside official narratives of just what that is. Selwyn's

claim that there are three things that give the film a New Zealand character, “one is the locations, two the language ... and three is the cultural element” (*ibid.*), mirrors the expectations of the critical audience, but for Selwyn the ‘cultural element’ is more complex than the mere evocation of the ‘Kiwi’ cultural experience. Clearly, of the case study films, the discourse of *The Māori Merchant of Venice* is the most complex. The shifting sand of national cinema seems to shift more readily in this example. But nonetheless, the film is asserted, in the discourse, to be a New Zealand film, as is the case for the other case study films. The question for review now is what the discourse overall reveals about the nature of national cinema in New Zealand.

5.2 Conclusions

What we see in this chapter is that, despite the content of the case study films, despite where and how they were made and who they were financed by, they each demonstrate a variety of ways in which the national may be invoked by stakeholders – with varying degrees of success. All of the case study films are claimed, in some way, as New Zealand cinema by some or other (sometimes many) of their various stakeholders; so we see that the films are all engaged with, to some degree, by stakeholders as New Zealand films. The flaggings of New Zealand that may or may not be present in the films themselves are, however, flagged in the discourse - and in the discourse, at least, the films are all New Zealand films.

There are a series of contradictions inherent to this argument. For example, some of the stakeholder arguments for the individual films as New Zealand films are open to challenge – such as when promoters seek to gain a specific audience or government officials claim a film’s success as part of a nation-building or cultural maintenance programme. But, nonetheless, with so little consistency among the realities of films’ production, marketing and reception, this is what remains – the stakeholder discourse is the most consistent of all the films’ features examined here.

Perhaps at the core of these arguments is the notion that New Zealanders working on a film contribute some special and specific New

Zealand qualities, which confer national status on the films. We have seen this particularly in the cases of *The Lord of the Rings* and *Whale Rider*. This is not a completely consistent notion, however, as the example of *The Māori Merchant of Venice* shows us. But what is consistent is the argument for the films' New Zealand qualities to be linked in some way to the realities of contemporary New Zealand. In the case of *The Lord of the Rings*, it is the contribution made by New Zealanders, but in the other films the argument is more that the realities of contemporary life in New Zealand can be seen on the screen and contribute a special quality to the films, one that is translated into a sense of national authenticity.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the national qualities of the case study films do not conform to a formula, on or off the screen. But in the above discussion of discourse, we see the presence of arguments for all of the films as New Zealand films. These claims, while at times possibly tenuous, are nonetheless largely consistent and highlight to us the plausibility of the argument that national cinema is a series of ritual engagements with films, evidence of a belief in national cinema that may at times be considered to be rife with contradictions but that nonetheless exists. Each of the statements examined points to some kind of ritual, and we see rituals of transformation, of landscape, of behaviour. The salient point is that these rituals connect the speaker, the stakeholder, with some sense of cultural centre, with some sense of New Zealand – perhaps even in some senses as it exists mythologically. But this is connection, nonetheless.

The tendency to discursively locate the films in New Zealand, and to claim that each has particular New Zealand qualities, is done so in the face of the contradictions that belie their national status. These contradictions include overseas location (*Kombi Nation*), story (*The Māori Merchant of Venice*, *The Lord of the Rings*) and finance (*Whale Rider*, *The Lord of the Rings*), and seem to have little bearing on the perception of the films as New Zealand films. As we saw in the previous chapter, to attempt to locate New Zealand cinema using a checklist (Was the film made in New Zealand? Did it have an enthusiastic response from New Zealand audiences? Is it a New Zealand story? etc.), leads us to unstable ground, and we are unable to use such a checklist in a definitive way.

The series of rituals engaged with in the claiming of the films' authenticity as New Zealand films is diverse. In the case of *Whale Rider*, for example, we see a ritual of transformation, one in which the accepted qualities of New Zealand cinema are discursively enlarged to include the film. In the examples of the other case study films, other rituals are enacted. However, what we do see from the material examined here is that these stakeholders are ritually engaging with the films, as they point to the films as evidence of cultural truths, as loci of connection with 'New Zealand' – whatever their version of it may be.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

I am calling for an understanding of 'national cinema' that involves active stakeholders, rather than one that is premised on the notion of a group of films with static meanings.

This thesis has argued that any stability of the concept 'national cinema' is to be found in the discursive positioning of individual films, one in which an imagined nation is ritually accessed via engagement with cinema. By synthesising the work of several theorists and applying this synthesis to a selection of films, a framework of ideas has been applied to cinema in New Zealand, particularly in an examination of five case study films. The normative assumptions of national cinema have been considered and have been found lacking despite the weight that the term 'national cinema' continues to have. However, as we have seen, the concept of national cinema is easily undermined by scrutiny, it nonetheless continues to hold meaning for the range of stakeholders who engage with it. This is because it is stakeholder practice that gives the concept of national cinema its legitimacy.

The first of the series of steps taken to develop and demonstrate the argument that national cinema should be framed in terms of media ritual and stakeholder practice, was to undertake a review of academic literature concerned with national cinema. From this, I surmised that although the concept national cinema is at times taken for granted, it is almost endlessly inflected by its international context and stakeholder relationships, particularly with the state, and thus is a shifting, rather than a fixed concept. However, it is also a concept that circulates in a range of contexts, including academic literature, government policy, film festival literature, film publicity material, film reviews, media commentary and everyday discourse.

Various approaches to national cinema were outlined in the Introduction, and the aim was hence to mark out some space between more

open (and hence difficult to discuss in practical terms) definitions of national cinema (for example Higson, 1989; Higson, 1995; Sorlin, 1996), and the taking for granted of 'national' characteristics in certain films offered by the majority of writers on the topic. It was clear that the notion of national cinema is complicated by a range of factors at play, including state relationships and international conventions, expectations and desires. Given the range of possibilities for interpreting and identifying national cinema, the need for an alternative framework was highlighted and subsequently developed and discussed.

Because such a range of issues problematise national cinema as a stable object of inquiry, a model was needed that allowed for multiple contradictions and was able to take into account the international context of, and the many stakeholders in, 'national cinema'. In developing such a model, the range of stakeholder interests were to the fore, so that their multiple positions and shifting subjectivities could be included in the consideration. Arguing that it is across the diverse range of stakeholders and stakeholder interests that the concept of national cinema is most compelling, a flexible definition of national cinema has been developed, using the work of Anderson, Billig and Couldry, and also informed by the work of Appadurai.

The framework that has been developed takes in the practices of enacting media ritual of national cinema. This is underpinned by Anderson's formulation of the nation as an imagined community, and Billig's contention that this imagining is underpinned by taken-for-granted actions and processes that involve the recognition of national 'flags'. This is fundamentally an approach which seeks to take into account the constant and seemingly natural way the imagined community of the nation is underscored in everyday life. Recognition was here a key idea, and Couldry's argument of media being ritually deployed in the accessing of an imagined cultural centre. This is a model in which active stakeholders in national cinema are emphasised.

However, there was a need to examine the literature of national cinema in a more practical manner and to test the framework that has been developed. Therefore, a study of national cinema as it might be thought to occur in New Zealand, using cinema in New Zealand as the object of study was undertaken, from the point of view of existing assumptions regarding

national and New Zealand cinema. This examination of New Zealand cinema applied the broad stance of previous studies, undertaking an historical survey and a consideration of multiple stakeholders. The findings here were that New Zealand relies heavily on state support and international stakeholders. There were fundamental contradictions between the assumptions and the realities of New Zealand cinema. A subsequent analysis of five case study films found little in the way of unifying stylistic or thematic elements, conditions of production or reception, or stakeholder involvement. In short, it was argued that definitions of New Zealand cinema are dependant on a range of factors – what they have at stake, for example, or what motivates the speaker.

Five case study films were then introduced and considered in light of the national cinema literature and then the alternative framework offered here. The uneven nature of even the most basic features of the films (such as setting, location and cast) underscored the need for a complex and nuanced mode of inquiry into national cinema. Because the case study films both adhered to and undercut the assertions found in the national cinema and New Zealand cinema literature, the question of whether these films are New Zealand became difficult to answer. While each of the case study films is identifiably the product of New Zealand culture and to a large extent there are enough signifiers in each film to identify them as such, there is no clear way of identifying a 'New Zealand' film based on textual flags.

It is at this point that the model developed in Chapter One comes to the fore. By considering the case study films in terms of their stakeholder practices, we were able to locate their stability as national cinema. The examination of the case study films demonstrated the fluid and dynamic nature of national cinema, and the subjective nature of imagining community, by way of the rituals of reception of their national characteristics. By analysing the language applied to the films by various stakeholders, thereby taking into account practices of reception, attribution and shared discussion, the argument was made for national cinema to be understood as media ritual. The use of cinema to connect to an imagined common ground (New Zealand) bears out the usefulness of the understanding of national cinema as a series of processes.

Each of the case study films demonstrates a variety of ways in which the national may be invoked by stakeholders, as each are claimed as New Zealand cinema by some or other (sometimes many) of their various stakeholders. At the core of such claims is the notion that New Zealanders working on a film contribute some special and specific New Zealand qualities, which confer national status on the films. Such national qualities do not conform to a formula (on- or off-screen), but rather are highly subjective and shifting. Effectively, the case study films have been run through two filters – that of the national cinema and New Zealand cinema literature, and that of the framework offered in Chapter One, and we have found that of these various approaches, the second is the most robust.

Consistent in terms of the films' national characteristics is that each is discursively positioned as New Zealand cinema. It is language and processes which positions them as such, often in spite of certain characteristics, rather than because of them. In short, the persistence of the notion of national cinema is the result of ritualised practices, including the recognition of various textual flags, believed to connect the stakeholder with the imagined community of New Zealand. In drawing these conclusions, the research is filling a very particular gap in the writing and research concerned with national cinema, which has largely focused on films rather than practices. The significance of the thesis is in the complexity of approach, which provides an innovative contribution to the field of research.

Having applied the argument of ritual actions and processes, and the ways that they underpin imaginings of a cultural centre, the conclusions reached might be usefully broadened out to suggest the importance of actions and processes to all media. Here, I have looked at the instance of the specific concept of national cinema, but such analysis could usefully be reframed to focus on any media. The idea that media is used to access a notional centre via actions and processes has much to offer the study a range of media, as its strength lies in the way it manages to take into account complexities of context and subjectivity.

However, certain adjustments could be made, in light of the current study, to make such arguments more robust. For example, the strength of using a relatively small sample size lies in its enabling of thorough, rather than cursory examination, however more indepth analysis could be applied to just one example of national cinema, which would result in a more comprehensive underscoring of the usefulness of this model. Further, more interrogation of stakeholders would provide additional evidence of the complexities of media ritual processes, particularly in relation to audiences and their uses of and expectations in relation to media. Further study into audience uses of national cinema would be a useful employment of the framework asserted here, and would serve to further develop the central arguments.

Like all media, cinema is positioned across complicated social-political and historical terrain. This thesis has sought to take this into account by offering a model of complex shifting media use and engagement within the global context. The question of why governments continue to fund and support cinema is easily answered: it is a ritualised practice aimed at maintaining the imagined community of New Zealand.

APPENDIX A

Section 18 of the NZFC Act 1978

1. In carrying out its functions, the Commission shall not make financial assistance available to any person in respect of the making, promotion, distribution or exhibition of a film unless it is satisfied that the film has or is to have a significant New Zealand content.
2. For the purposes of determining whether or not a film has or is to have a significant New Zealand content, the Commission shall have regard to the following matters:
 1. The subject of the film.
 2. The locations at which the film was or is to be made.
 3. The nationalities and places of residence of:
 1. The authors, scriptwriters, composers, producers, directors, actors, technicians, editors and other persons who took part or are to take part in the making of the film; and
 2. The persons who own or are to own the shares or capital of any company, partnership, or joint venture that is concerned with the making of the film; and
 3. The persons who have or are to have the copyright in the film.
 4. The sources from which the money that was used or is to be used to make the film was or is to be derived.
 5. The ownership and whereabouts of the equipment and technical facilities that were or are to be used to make the film.
 6. Any other matters that in the opinion of the Commission are relevant to the purposes of this Act.

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