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# Bound by Elusiveness: Transnational Cinema and Folk Horror

Keith McDonald

## Abstract

This chapter considers Folk Horror in the light of Transnational Cinema studies. This involves charting the long history of Folk Horror tales and folklorism in the history of cinema and the intercultural dialogue between folklore tales on screen in a global context. In addition, it identifies some similarities between the tropes of Folk Horror (such as border-crossing, the diasporic experience and the potency of the clash of cultures) and those that emerge in Transnational screen narratives. It argues that Folk Horror should not be simply viewed as a storytelling mode dominated by the ‘unholy trinity’ that is the coterie of British films, but as a far more complex entity which is both nationally specific and transnationally mercurial.

## Chapter

This article considers Folk Horror cinema and its place in the nascent discipline of transnational cinema studies. This will argue that both Folk Horror and transnational cinema are not genres in any traditional sense, but rather semi-organized ways of considering cinema which have been galvanized in and around the twenty-first century and the rising prominence of transnational cinema studies and the Folk Horror ‘revival’, both of which share similar characteristics and at times coalesce in narratives which can be seen as transnational Folk Horror films. As Yang and Healey state: ‘Disordered landscapes in the Gothic represent the

chaos of a culture in transition, or the violence of passions seething beneath the veneer of civilised society. Gothic landscapes are a lens by which cultures reflect back their darkness hidden from the light of consciousness.’ (2016, 5).

Paradoxically one of the prominent features which are shared between the genres of Folk Horror and transnational cinema is their elusiveness with regards to a clear set of codes and conventions, a definitive timeframe, and exclusivity with regards to setting and base of production. Adam Scovell correctly reminds us that:

Folk Horror is a prism of a term. Its light disperses into a spectrum of colours that range in shade and contrast. Contrary to the handful of images that the term now evokes, arguing for it to represent a single body of artistic work with strict parameters and definitions is conceivably impossible. (2017, 1)

Just as a horror film is not naturally a ‘Folk Horror’ tale or a film working outside the established Hollywood or legitimised national cinema system is by proxy a transnational film, the definition of what may constitute a transnational Folk Horror film is somewhat elusive as this piece will explore as I believe this elusiveness to be its most valuable quality.

In relation to transnational cinema, a term that gained currency in film studies in the late 1990s, the arguments concerning the definition of the term itself have thrived and remain part of its energy. Mette Hjort recognises that ‘the discourse of cinematic transnationalism has been characterized less by competing theories and approaches than by a tendency to use the term “transnational” as a largely self-evident qualifier requiring only minimal conceptual clarification’ going on to contend that ‘the term “transnational” has assumed a referential

scope so broad as to encompass phenomena that are surely more interesting for their differences than for their similarities.’ (2009, 13)

One of the clearest overviews of transnational cinema comes from Chris Berry, who recognises the interconnected conceptual regions of the developing discipline. He states that it can be located in:

[T]he beginnings of cinema itself. Or it can be dated from the impact of globalization in the cinema. It can refer to big-budget blockbuster cinema associated with the operations of global corporate capital. Or it can refer to small-budget diasporic and exilic cinema. It can refer to films that challenge national identity, or it can refer to the consumption of foreign films as part of the process of a discourse about what national identity is. (2010, 114).

As transnational cinema is specifically concerned with interstitiality, attempts to identify and demarcate clear areas are inherently limited. Transnational cinema involves all of the categories above but slips within the liminal spaces between them. In this sense, there are clear similarities between the elusive attempts to clearly define transnational cinema and satisfactory and stable attempts to pin down Folk Horror.

Although both transnational cinema and Folk Horror cinema are strangely bound by their elusiveness. The things that do chime on inspection, are amplified and make the niche category of the ‘transnational Folk Horror film’ go from a murmurous and discordant, heteroglossic cacophony to a curiously melodic (if chaotic) collection of oddities with resonant notes. Some of these recurrent themes will be explored in this discussion of

transnational Folk Horror film and certain examples demonstrate this symbiosis. It is worth pointing out some of the elements that we see in the extraordinary range of transnational films that may not initially appear as overtly 'horror' related and many more overtly 'horror' films may not initially present as transnational, but their similar themes can alter their interpretation. The first of these connecting themes is the notion of diaspora; the scattering of those from ancestral bases and the spaces and places where they find themselves. This often involves border crossing and the trauma that this can aggravate. Another feature that is recurrent is the notion of the outsider or outsiders encountering cultures and cultural practices that is alien to them, but they nonetheless get drawn into. A further feature I wish to point out here as an element that has perhaps been illuminated in the twenty-first century which has seen interest in transnational cinema and Folk Horror is the clash between old and new and the plight of those who are caught in such a clash, its violence, and its consequences. In addition, there is a melancholic tone which can be seen in many transnational and Folk Horror films, a melancholy derived perhaps from the fact that although past traumas may be ignored or buried, their return to the surface is inevitable and inescapable.

Jaques Derrida writes of the general problem of classification as a failed crusade stating:

[A] text cannot belong to no genre, it cannot be without or less a genre. Every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text; there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging. (1980, 65)

In terms of film, Rick Altman draws attention to ways in which genres exist in an environment of shifting sands, revealing the futility of preordained regulations, stable continuance and retrospective surety, explaining that:

Genres are not inert categories shared by all (although at some moments they most certainly seem to be) but discursive claims made by real speakers in specific circumstances. Even when the details of the discourse situation remain hidden, and thus the purpose veiled, we nevertheless do well to assume that generic references play a part in an overall discursive strategy. (1999, 101)

Others such as Edward Lowery (1984) and Peter Hutchings (2004) have noticed that the horror film exemplifies the slippery nature of categorisation and that it makes itself aware of 'points of contact' between conventions rather than being defined by fixed character types, narrative trajectory, or space and place. In this sense, 'horror films' exists within and throughout its subcategories and diversions and deviations from some notional map in the same way as transnational cinema exists within diasporas, in exile from fixed genres and in states of statelessness.

With regards to Folk Horror films, we may be able to identify 'discursive claims made by real speakers in specific circumstances', in the form of Mark Gatiss' *History of Horror* (John Das and Rachel Jardine, 2010) series which nominates (or ordains) the 'Unholy Trinity' as emblematic texts (and there seems to be a growing coterie of filmmakers and writers who seek to lay claim to its coinage). Considering this, there is something of an awakening moment that connects the emergent discourses of transnational cinema studies and Folk Horror film studies, both of which came about during a similar time period (and which have resulted in transnational Folk Horror film studies). In both concurrent discourses, the awakening involves both an awareness of the recurrence of trends in film fiction that examine 21st Century anxieties and the potency of change in a discordant world and the means by

which to look back at the history of cinema and the illumination that comes from this. Transnationalism was always there, as was Folk Horror, and now we can re-examine cinema's past and its use of genre fiction through a process that can identify, specify and unearth some fears and anxieties that were dominant during the twentieth century and continue to entertain and disturb in the twenty-first.

Folk Horror film studies has arguably both benefited from and been reductively inhibited by the notion that it is a largely British phenomenon of the commonly evoked notion of the 'unholy trinity'. The trio of *Witchfinder General* (Michael Reeves, 1968), *The Wicker Man* (Robin Hardy, 1973) and *The Blood on Satan's Claw* (Piers Haggard, 1971) have been retrofitted as ur-texts in the field and their influence is clear to see in the discourse which follows their birth as a set. However, the notion of their stability in this context (although alluring as a quasi-supernatural metaphor) is far too neat. One of the reasons for the oversimplification that the reliance upon the templatic importance the 'unholy trinity' its inherent lack of transnational cross-culturality and its national and regional focus on the British Isles (ironic, given the fact that it relies upon a clash of cultures, which is a staple of both Folk Horror and transnational film). That is not to diminish the important and influential position they hold in terms of canon formation and genre; indeed, *The Wicker Man* is significant in a transnational sense as shall be discussed. However, the 'unholy trinity' is, to many, totemic and foundational, and this can draw attention away from the international richness and depth of the mode of storytelling.

Therefore, there is something of a tension here, in terms of the emergent academic discourse concerning Folk Horror film and, to an extent, transnational cinema and by extension, transnational Folk Horror film. Scovell, as noted, recognises that Folk Horror encompasses a

vast array of elements and that classification, and the formation of a reliable canon, is therefore a dubious endeavour. However, the influential *Folk Horror: Hours Dreadful and Things Strange*, invoking a powerful quotation from *Macbeth*, nonetheless, sets out a now popularly accepted and identifiable ‘chain’ (landscape, isolation, and skewed belief systems and rituals) emanating from the *Unholy Trinity* of British films. Scovell is quick to problematise this canon formation, attesting that it was no pre-planned concept, stating that during a conference where the ‘unholy trinity’ notion became invoked participants were energised by the connections they were discussing, acknowledging that they were ‘nodding our way towards a folkloric gestalt.’ (2017, 13) Yet the notion of this ‘trinity’ remains (along with Scovell’s chain theory) theoretically robust. One of the reasons for this may be the centrality of landscape to the genre, which lends itself so well to the notion of a conceptual expedition and map-making, or charting territory, which dominates Scovell’s thesis.

Therefore, a significant portion of what follows will be charting the territories where horror cinema, folk-horror and what is reductively seen as ‘world’ cinema in order to identify some terrain that we can call transnational Folk Horror, whilst avoiding falling into the trap that a film with non-western credentials is naturally transnational. In doing so we shall see that all of the territories encountered blur boundaries and indeed that is in these blurred spaces that transnational Folk Horror lurks and thrives.

An alternative view of seeing contemporary transnational folk-horror film as being a sub-discipline which oscillates around, yet still defers to the genre supremacy of three British films may be to acknowledge that they include some resilient elements that seem to be in the DNA of very many folk-horror films and transnational films and that they came out roughly in the same period.

At the risk of stating the obvious, certain tropes by nature simply bind many Folk Horror films to transnational narratives. One of these is travel, be it through exploration into mysterious territory in the Folk Horror narrative or the displacement or seeking out of a new life in the transnational film and these often involve both change and coexistence, elements I see as fundamental to what may be considered a transnational Folk Horror film.

This relation may relate to the fact that some of the focus of transnational cinema is interstitially, border crossing, and diaspora; all transient by nature. In addition, one thing that runs throughout discussions of transnational cinema is its connection to wider the socio-economic implications of globalisation with Ezra and Rowden stating that transnational cinema ‘comprises both globalisation [...] and the counter-hegemonic responses of filmmakers from former colonial and third world countries’ (2010, 1). It is then, worth noting that a good deal of Folk Horror has at its dark heart a deeply embedded colonialism and its refusal to remain buried under the structures and ideologies of the new world. This can be, for example, in Australian Folk Horror films such as *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (Peter Weir, 1975) and *Lake Mungo* (Joel Anderson, 2008) where landscape is integral to the narrative in it that symbolically represents the violence and dehumanising stratification of indigenous Australians buried in what is cursed earth.

Globalisation is of course, deeply connected to the past and the ructions of a world in flux and undergoing re-organisation are at the root of so many cinematic narratives and it is a recurrent feature of transnational cinemas' growing filmography. Some genres particularly resonate with the effects of change and horror fiction ranks high among these genres. Raphael and Saddique ascertain, ‘[f]rom its origins, what would eventually come to be called “the horror genre” has been deeply transnational, both in contexts of production and reception [...]

as the first works of horror stitch together the flesh of various national and generic texts.’  
(2017, 2)

Keeping this in mind can remind us that the transnational horror film (and by extension the transnational Folk Horror film) is part of the life-breath of cinematic history, but may not as yet have been recognised sufficiently as being so symbiotically connected. Consider for example Universal Horror and the ways in which it became a melting pot of creativity resulting from individuals who found their way there to escape from the rise of fascism in Europe in the inter-war years. Ian Conrich states that ‘Universal was the most European of the American Studios’ in the silent era, and this ethos continued into the sound age.’ (2004, 41)

This situation emerged from immigration to the U.S., exile, and sanctuary in the face of global change, world wars, and turmoil which in turn affected film production and style in, prominently, the influence of German expressionism on American genre cinema, film noir and horror. The prominence of the exilic filmmaker is core to transnational cinema to some such as Hamid Naficy, author of *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (2002), who argues that a sense of melancholia imbues narratives directed by those stratified from a stable homeland resulting in ‘nomadic identification’ where ‘mourning is not their fault, but their fate’ (2002, 34). Some have seen such melancholy in the work of James Whale’s Universal Horror work such as *Frankenstein* (1931) and *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) bound up, in intersectional terms, with both his life as a queer man and artist in exile seeking a place to live and work. More recently, the work of Guillermo del Toro (no stranger to folkloric elements in his narratives in films such as *Cronos* (1993) and *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006)) is influenced by his shifting position in a world where he lives in exile from his

Mexican homeland because of threats to him and his family's safety, creatively exhibited in the presence of outsiders, orphans and the displaced in his films.

Flux and displacement impacted Folk Horror-inflected narratives that came out of Universal Studios, with folklore playing an important role in for example *Dracula* (Todd Browning, 1931) and later *The Wolf Man* (George Waggner, 1941). Transnational Folk Horror film then, is not a simple grafting between two already discreet genre forms, rather is a long-standing core genre feature that the energy surrounding the two academic disciplines can seek to illuminate, adding further colours and definition to the prism that Scovell invokes.

Universal Horror played a key part in establishing narrative cinematic templates which drew upon a transnational array of sources reflecting the international work created by the coterie of artists and technicians who found themselves in its refuge. Other studios embraced the adventurous potency and danger associated with the exotic travel, ritual and the arcane folk ritual and myth of 'other' cultures and those they worship. Consider for instance Merian C. Cooper & Ernest B. Schoedsack's seminal *King Kong* (1933) from RKO which bears many of the generic signifiers of Folk Horror, not least the strange and terrifying closed tribal culture encountered, but also the ritual summoning of the beast and the sacrificial nature as a result of his summoning. The myths of the werewolf, the vampire, and the mummy are in many ways calcified in popular consciousness and in the cinematic canon through the channel of these studios, which recognised and mined an exoticism and danger associated with a clash of cultures differentiated spatially and temporally. In these narratives, to travel is not only to see previously obscured places and people, it is also to unearth ancient and buried potent myths and lores; to tread upon the sacrosanct. Early Gothic and horror cinema in turn

drew from the rich vein of European Gothic literature where the clash of cultures and the desirous allure of otherness fuelled and forged a rich set of organic genre possibilities.

In a broader context, Folk Horror on-screen is born out of pre-cinematic folklore, folktale and the dark corners of fairytale and cinema has proven to be a suitable vehicle for bringing these visions to life. This cinematic tradition of displaying oral narratives, and in doing so preserving them on film continues one of the ongoing elements of folkloristics. Folkloristics is the collection, curation and study of folktales and their roots and offshoots and is a discipline in itself, a kind of narrative taxonomy. Alan Dundes points out that one of the central tenets is international and transactional in nature and pioneered by the brothers Grimm, which have informed a great deal of cinematic and screen narratives and become cemented in popular culture more widely (1999, 1).

Considering Folk Horror film in the context of international cinematic history and the ways in which national traditions have been represented and entered in exchange with others in the rich and multifaceted ecology of the artform highlights ways of approaching transnational Folk Horror as an area worth attention. A shared understanding of the weird, eerie and uncanny and the ways in which these elements have been interpreted in specific national and regional contexts is key here. As well as having a currency and relevance in a national cinematic setting, where recognisable local and nation-specific lores have been exploited for their horrific potential for an audience who will recognise the relics and remnants of the culture on screen, folk-horror also moves through an international habitat and transcultural space. In this sense, the national and its relationship with the international forms a part of transnational cinema and therefore transnational Folk Horror. However, many transnational narratives are formed in interstitial spaces, their roots by nature, are in a process of being

uprooted and this is where the tension and the resultant propulsion of transnational Folk Horror is to be found. As folk-horror in cinema sees the value in violent space between shifting cultures; spatially, temporally, and existentially, the transnational can benefit the genre and the narrative potential of these violent spaces is amplified.

Horror cinema has often drawn upon the folkloric traditions of national cultures as having a strange glow popular with global audiences as can be seen in 'national cinema' which finds horrific potential in its nation specific folklore. This is seen in for instance Nordic Folk Horror cinema which mines the rich tradition of Nordic myth. A notable early and influential example of this is *Häxan* (Benjamin Christensen, 1922) a Swedish film blending a documentary essayist aesthetic and vignettes of scenes depicting witchcraft and mediaeval witch hunts. As a part of the twenty first century Folk Horror flourish, Nordic Folk Horror films such as *Sauna* (Antti-Jussi Annala, 2008), *Trolljegeren* (André Øvredal, 2010), and *Draug* (Klas Persson and Karin Engman, 2018) are all enriched and mired in their own folkloric traditions and yet appeal to a wider global audience (as seen in the mass appeal of *Trolljegeren/Trollhunter*) fluent in the genre conventions of Folk Horror. In this context, transnational cinema as a discipline does not seek to diminish the importance of national cinema, but rather situate it in a broader transnational environment.

Another example of this can be seen in Japanese horror cinema and its global success which is such a pivotal part of transnational cinema's development and fundamental to the expanding roots of transnational horror cinema in the twenty-first century (led by distribution companies such as Tartan and its Asia Extreme range as shall be returned to later) typified now by the huge interest in South Korean film and television where horror is prominent.

Frazer Lee points to the fact that Kaidan (Japanese folklore ghost stories) often have at their

core entities that are vengeful and exercise this through retribution connected to the environment as depicted on screen in *Onibaba* (Kaneto Shindo, 1964), where victims are thrown into a hole in the ground and in a reverse conceit in *Ringu* (Hideo Nakata, 1998). Stylistically, this has tended to be expressed in surrealistic terms which emphasise the elements, a feature that runs through Japanese Folk Horror and many Folk Horror films in general but amplified in for example, the prominence of water and water imagery in Japanese incarnations of the Folk Horror convention. In contemporary South Korean cinema, we see the tensions of the conflicts of the past re-emerge in Folk Horror in films such as *The Wailing* (2017) where a village on the borders of Seoul is decimated by a demon inhabiting the form of a Japanese outsider that arguably feeds upon existence of remnant xenophobia and prejudice shaped by historic conflict.

In this context, the italicised nature of the ‘national’ tradition, which draws attention to the established and ingrained folklorrific cabals etc. embedded in regional and national knowledge does not rule out these Folk Horrors from the transnational developments, which on the one hand seem to highlight 21st century global mixing; rather, it further demonstrates that the national functions in relation to transnational vicissitude.

What is so often the case, regardless of the national root of the Folk Horror itself is the fact that the enemy of the cabal, the lamb to the slaughter is the modern, urbane wanderer, and the epitome of this, the figure of fragility and folly, is the cosmopolitan, a figure that *all* hidden cabals would spit upon and often find themselves sacrificed to the ancients. Andrew Higson states:

On the one hand, a national cinema seems to look inward, reflecting on the nation itself, on its past, present and future, its cultural heritage, its indigenous traditions, its sense of common identity and continuity. On the other hand, a national cinema seems to look out across its borders, asserting its difference from other national cinemas, proclaiming a sense of otherness. (2000, 67)

At the heart of many Folk Horror films is the amplification of certain seemingly national traditions which are part of the soil which is so important to the genre (with Ben Wheatley's *In the Earth* (2020) being a direct reference to this fact). Viewed in this way, *Witchfinder General* can be seen as quintessentially English, *Onibaba* seems quintessentially Japanese and *Marketa Lazarová* (František Vlácil, 1967) appears as quintessentially Czechoslovakian. As we know though, genre in film is more often than not fed by dialogue and genre filmmakers are fuelled by exchange, hybridisation and intertextuality. In relation to the apparently inward nature of national cinema, Higson continues:

The problem with this formulation is that it tends to assume that national identity and tradition are already fully formed and fixed in place. It also tends to take borders for granted and assume that those borders are effective in containing political and economic developments, cultural practice and identity. In fact of course, borders are always leaky and there is a considerable degree of movement across them (even in the more authoritarian states) (67)

In the context of transnational Folk Horror, these narratives are reliant on the tension between new notions of identity (national, global, temporal) and solidarity in the face of pre-existing, inexorable entities (supernatural or not) bound by combination in the face of fads and notions

of modernity. In another way, Folk Horror cultures are often pre-national, enlivened and willing to decimate others who would seek to lay claim to the land, no doubt one of the reasons that civil wars or contested borders are so often ideal settings for Folk Horrors (as can be seen in Ben Wheatley's *A Field in England* (2013)) So many Folk Horrors also develop, in dread and in depth, by the crossing of borders by those who fail to recognize their potency, spectrality and sanctity, as they are not written and recorded in newly formed maps, treaties, GPS apps, guidebooks and any idealistic sense of cosmopolitan fluidity. Folk Horror films that seem to display nation-specific myths and iconography may be in fact, held together by pre-national and ancient roots, below contested topsoil, disputes and trades, and all thoroughly willing to feed upon and discard infantile wanderers, invaders, and traders. An excellent example of this can be seen in the Indian film *Tumbbad* (Rahi Anil Barve, 2018). The film centres on a young man (Vinayak who stumbles upon a mystical but dangerous means of acquiring gold. As he lives a life in which he can invoke a hideous spell to claim riches when required he becomes obsessed and myopic about his own shallow existence as the world around him changes, with the changes in government, anti-colonial rebellion, and feminist change being ignored. His eventual personal awakening reveals a life wasted by the spell of materialism and a lack of engagement with humanity and his own kin. The ancients that hold the totems that so mesmerise Vinayak pay little attention to the infantile squabbles of governments, the shifting man-made borders, and the power dynamics of humans and Vinayak's life has, in this context, less validity than a mayfly. (2020, 77-79)

Mette Hjort and others such as Will Higbee Song Hwee Lim argue that one of the ways in which to ground transnational film studies and mark terrain is to work through case studies. They argue that a way forward is 'not to theorize transnational cinema only in the conceptual-abstract but also to examine its deployment in the concrete-specific so that the power

dynamic in each case can be fully explored and exposed.’ (2010, 10). Since this emergence and following on from this case study approach, branching sub-disciplines have flourished, including transnational horror film studies and from this, attention to Folk Horror and the transnational, this case study approach has been warranted and necessary with the abundance of Folk Horror on screen in recent years and the ways in which this has been bound to wider film culture and transnational culture in the resurgence of Folk Horror.

So, if we are to look for a contemporary example of transnational Folk Horror film which may solidify this discussion; one that works within the framework of industrial collaboration and exchange that is emblematic of transnational cinema, and also dominated by transnational clashes of culture, genre hybridity and the interstitial dissonance and terror, then Ari Aster’s *Midsommar* (2019) is as good an example as any. There are, of course, many other pertinent instances of Transnational folk-horror, many of which are mentioned in this book. However, *Midsommar* is illuminating in terms of how it functions in the wider ecology of transnational Folk Horror, beginning with its place in the wider body of work of Aster and companies such as A24.

*Midsommar* is transnational co-creation between BReel, a Swedish company and Aster’s and producer Lars Knudsen’s Square Peg company and is distributed by A24, a company with a considerable credibility in the Folk Horror cinema habitat after releasing films such as *The Witch* (Robert Eggers, 2019), *Men* (Alex Garland, 2022) and Aster’s own *Hereditary* (2018) (a Folk Horror which is more in the American tradition).

*Midsommar* follows Dani, a young American travelling with a group of anthropological Grad-school students which include her reluctant boyfriend Christian (Jack Reynor) who are

curious tourists who come to see their jaunt as a means of furthering their doctoral ambitions. The group encounter, via one of their fellow students, elders and an extended familial group, the Hårga of Hälsingland, a cult who reject modern technology and live in their own seemingly bucolic valley who are celebrating a ninety-year cyclical festival and revival. The Hårga ritualise the death of their elders in a suicide ritual and during the course of the narrative ritually kill members of the group and select Dani as their Midosmmar queen in a ceremony that sees Christian (embodying his moniker) ritually burned alive whilst stuffed into the carcass of a bear. The absurdity of the film is accentuated by a *mise en scène* drenched in the sunlit glare of Nordic mountains and augmented through a psychedelic haze as the group ingest psilocybin mushrooms.

*Midsommar* also enters into dialogue with important folk-horror films without falling into the realm of the remake or re-imagining process. It pays its dues to *The Wicker Man* (not least in its bucolic setting, costume and use of music), yet such references do not dominate as there are a range of other cinematic and folkloric references which it incorporates. Equally, it recognises the cynical academic colonialism which takes place in the would-be scholar's vampiric competition to see who can read, articulate, 'other' and Americanise alternative cultures (several of the American visitors are Anthropology Grad students hungry for case studies), a feature familiar to those weary of neo-colonialism in a globalised world.

*Midsommer's* inherent strangeness, black humour and surreality also position it as an example of Naficy's 'accented cinema'. Indeed, Folk Horror by its nature is a hybrid genre accented in this case by the merging of cultures temporarily, geographically and socially apart but enmeshed together in the ensuing chaos. This may explain the headiness of the final act of *Midsommar* and its delirious, hypnotic and absurd conclusion.

Many of the features which I identified earlier in this discussion regarding the cross-fertilisation of Folk Horror and transnational cinema can be found in *Midsommar*. The naive travellers, the clash of customs and the old and new. The crossing of borders physically and mentally. This is amplified to comic effect by the ways in which the American group patronisingly seek to understand the ways of the isolated 'other' and the ways in which in turn, the Hårga infantilize the Americans as brainless tourists. Considered from the perspective of 'accented cinema' as a comedy, the film can also be seen as a parodic comment upon the American led 'torture porn' cycle and the fascination with Nordic film and culture which precedes the production of *Midsommer*. McDonald and Johnson state that '*Midsommar* is perhaps best seen as a clash of cultures comedy, where the national stereotypes of each group are highlighted to absurd effect.' (67) This potential for transnational cinemas' ability, to consider national cinematic traditions in a new light and the abundance of the Folk Horror revival to look back upon some of its own traditions with an ironic eye, once combined intensify the potential for films such as *Midsommer* to be open to multiple interpretations.

In singling out *Midsommer* as some sort of typical transnational Folk Horror film I may well be falling into the trap which enshrined the 'unholy trinity', which can stultify as I have argued. It is Scovell himself though, who recently in an interview recognised that rather than situate Folk Horror as a genre, seeing it as a mode may be a more useful way of wading through its concoctions, and the same can certainly be said of transnational cinema.

Considering this then, the transnational Folk Horror film is a murky, mesmerising and at times alchemically potent mixing of modes, but certainly one that is showing no signs of slowing in its ongoing fusion.

What we have seen then is a rich tradition of horror cinema from around the globe which has since its inception drawn upon folkloric myths and legends, some of which resonate with folk-horror tales with a universal quality and some of which remain extremely culturally specific in order to be appreciated. What is certain though, is that as a global artform, cinema has benefitted from cross fertilisation, the vitality of trends and the industrial machinations of show business. But what of the specific development of the transnational Folk Horror film as a cinematic mode in line with the twenty first century.

In terms of transnational horror cinema more widely there has been broadly three waves so far in the twenty first century. In the first decade, the rise in J Horror (spurred by the new possibilities of DVD international distribution and online commerce and fan communities) is significant in broadening the channels of horror cinema. The presence of Tartan's 'Asian Extreme' played a huge part in this and is typified by the success of Hideo Nakata's *Ringu*. In addition, the captivating appeal of Hispanic horror and the influence of directors such as Guillermo del Toro are significant to the transnational development of the genre. This led to the success and celebration of del Toro's own work such *Pan's Labyrinth* and his and others move over to English language productions with Spanish artist films with horror inflected narratives such as *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2004). Along the way, with the influx of these self-titled 'three amigos', we see the production of one of the most recognised transnational dramas in the form of Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Babel* (2006).

Such transnational enrichment is also boosted by the rise in popularity of the stylistic features and narratives of Scandinavian Noir. In the first decades of the twenty-first century (typified in this context by the success of such films as *Let the Right one In* (Tomas Alfredson, 2011),

the continuing growth and ubiquitous nature of the internet and the sea change in distribution, fan culture and global culture has seen more diverse transnational narratives routes open up to a global audience as exemplified by the massive success of the TV show *Squid Game* (Netflix, 2022) which is not without its own Folk Horror reference points and demonstrates (along with many others) what is fast becoming a dominant feature of the third decade: a fascination with South Korean film and television.

There have also been some recognizable technical trends which transnational Folk Horror films have embraced for some time. Folk Horror is often bound to the ancient, the revenant and in violent opposition to modernity and of course popularised by films set in the past such as *Blood on Satan's Claw*, *Häxan* and *Onibaba*. However, such violent interactions between modernity and progression and media and growing digital culture in the globalised world have been accentuated by the inclusion of the found-footage film (which began in analogue times) into Folk Horror, accentuating the antipathy and the distrust of technology as a means of revealing any 'truth'. The found footage film is an extension of the epistolary form (which can aid in the suspension of disbelief in such horrific tales) which has a long and important association with Horror fiction as seen in canonical examples such as *Frankenstein* (1818) and *Dracula* (1897) (the latter of which casts its own shadow of Folk Horror mythology). Early examples of transnational Folk Horror using found footage can be seen in *King Kong* as noted and importantly in *Cannibal Holocaust* (Ruggero Deodato, 1980), which sees a group of eager would-be media ethnographers set on exposing uncivilised tribal cabals to a mass audience hungry for unfettered and authentic culture meet a grim fate. *Cannibal Holocaust* has an element of the transnational mode of production, with the ethnographers being American and played by U.S actors. The found footage mode has proven to be resilient and reliable in horror fiction and in Folk Horror has enhanced the feeling of verisimilitude and a

violent interaction between nascent ephemeral methods of recording and ancient and potent scriptures, curses and engrained legends. This can be seen in films such as *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, 2010) which explicitly draws upon place and topography as so many Folk Horror films do. Other recent Folk Horror inflected films to employ this mode are *The Borderlands* (Elliot Goldner, 2013), a film set in a remote church in Devon, England and *Gonjiam: Haunted Asylum* (Jung Bum-shik, 2018)) which sees a group of aspiring Youtubers seeking to monetise fear for an increasingly desensitised internet audience. This is another feature which has been defined as a part of transnational cinema and the search for identity in a digitised world.

Folk Horror, as ever, is evolving (somewhat ironically) to embrace nascent technologies, modes of production and perhaps most importantly, forms of exhibition which are transnationally dependent. The huge success of some of South Korean horror narratives on platforms such as Netflix which coexist alongside Folk Horror narratives where wanderers to foreign lands return to American homelands with exotic visitors in tow as seen in Netflix's *Midnight Mass* (Mike Flanagan, 2021) (packed to the brim with Americana) are revealing, if not surprising. They reveal an audience more than willing to embrace the coexistence of styles, hybridity, nation specific and border crossing narratives literally and figuratively. Folk Horror's roots run deep and may be affected by the topsoil that is rearranged and fought over by those who live and die above it, but it is of deep earth, and as a mode of storytelling it is pan-national (and arguably pre-national) and slices through the illusion of a fixed national identity.

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