

Imagineries of a Global Finland—Patterns of Globalization in Finnish National Cinema

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ABSTRACT: The cinema of Finland exemplifies many of the complex patterns in which globalization impacts normative conceptualizations of national cinema. Conceiving of these processes in terms of glocalization enables us to understand these processes in polyphonal and contradictory terms instead of the more traditional homogeneous or convergent theoretical frameworks of national cinema. Interrogating well-known concepts such as the national, the local, the transnational, the supranational, and the postnational enables us to highlight some of the predominant ways in which cultural producers negotiate globalization. To explore how strategies of containment work alongside increasing cross-border flow and transnational interaction, the article discusses the works of well-known directors such as Markku Pölönen, Aki Kaurismäki, Aku Louhimies and A-J Annila. *Jadesoturi* [Jade Warrior] (2005), a Finnish-Chinese kung-fu production, forms the ultimate case study as it exemplifies many of the opportunities and obstacles that cultural producers face when entering the global marketplace.

RÉSUMÉ: e cinéma finlandais illustre plusieurs des formes complexes par lesquelles la globalisation affecte la conception normative du cinéma national. Concevoir ces procédés en termes de glocalisation nous permet de les comprendre en termes polyphones et contradictoires plutôt que selon le cadre théorique du cinéma national, plus homogène et convergent. Remettre en question des concepts connus tels que le national, le local, le transnational, le supranational et le post-national nous permet de souligner certaines des façons prédominantes avec lesquelles les producteurs culturels font face à la globalisation. Afin d'explorer comment les stratégies d'endiguement se conjuguent avec une circulation trans-frontalière accrue et l'interaction transnationale, cet article traitera d'oeuvres de réalisateurs renommés tels que Markku Pölönen, Aki Kaurismäki, Aku Louhimies et A-J Annila. *Jadesoturi* [Jade Warrior] (2005), une réalisation finno-chinoise sur le kung-fu, constitue l'étude de cas par excellence, illustrant les nombreuses opportunités et les obstacles auxquels les producteurs font face lorsqu'ils entrent sur le marché global.

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Finnish cinema is facing increasing challenges and opportunities in the twenty-first century. It has gradually developed all the hallmarks of a successful small national cinema—a nascent star system, stable production facilities and companies with international connections, sizeable distribution of films in the domestic marketplace, and steady governmental and independent financing. Yet, the number of films that receive substantial releases internationally is minimal and government subsidies and budgets for films are some of the smallest in Europe. Similarly, only a few comprehensive academic accounts exist of the ways in which Finnish cinema—in terms of both representation and infrastructure—has dealt with the increasingly inter- and transnational scope of cultural production. Hanna Hemilä’s 2004 study of the economic transformations of the Finnish film industry is an invaluable contribution to understanding the economic imperatives and policy decisions involved in the internationalization of this particular national cinema, but its analytical/theoretical relevance for cultural studies remains limited to infrastructural considerations. There have been numerous insightful studies of various aspects of Finnish cinematic production (Pantti; Ahonen et al.), but the scope of these studies remains relatively intranational—that is, focused largely on national issues—which does not take into account the full extent of Finland’s globalizing status. While works have been published on the international scope of Aki and Mika Kaurismäki’s work (Nesting 2004) and on the wider cultural politics of Finland as a globalizing “Scandinavian” welfare-state (Nesting 2008), the diverse modes of globalization in Finnish cinema remain relatively uncharted in comparison to other Nordic cinemas, and certainly in the global scope of (trans)national film studies.

We need to examine the globalization of Finnish cinematic culture from a multitude of angles, conceiving of it in terms of what Roland Robertson has termed “glocalization” (1995). In this model, globalization is understood as a series of social and cultural phenomena, where the main focus remains on the reciprocal interaction between local or national cultural elements and those with more globalizing tendencies. Another productive way of understanding the complex patterns of interaction between the global and the local is to conceive of these films and the production policies and initiatives they mobilize as reactive forms of globalization (Hjort 2005b). Every pattern and strategy of encountering, accommodating, negotiating or resisting globalization can be understood as constituting a new version of the very process of globalization. Accordingly, the films we discuss here indicate particular patterns in which cinema renegotiates the translucent borders and fluid social relations of a global world. Through this, the globalization of national cinema is understood as a constantly transforming, polyphonal process.

To account for the complexity of Finnish cinema, we must move past any simplistic model of national cinema which may try to position it as constituting some sort of unanimous national project for reflecting and strengthening core values. Instead of observing how cinema binds the nation together, it is more productive to focus on those elements that indicate the heterogeneity and polyphony of the nation. To this end, this exploration of Finnish cinema takes five different thematic perspectives on cinema and the nation, all of which aim to present us with a unique angle on the significance of the “national” in cinematic production. These categories start from the *national* level, exploring those films which are often discussed as authentic national products, evoking a traditional past for a purportedly unified audience eager to consume these at the domestic box office. From here, we move to the *local* level, exploring films which seek to answer some of the challenges of globalization and the information age with an effort to strengthen a sense of solidarity in localized spaces. To complicate the vision of a bound-together nation in these first categories, we explore both *transnational* and *supranational* imperatives in cinematic production. Here, co-production schemes and the clear dominance of Hollywood at the Finnish box office both complicate any argument for a purely national cinema, and provide approaches for countering the dispersive implications of globalization by building connections across national and cultural boundaries and by the reworking of genre conventions and ideological imperatives. The final part discusses *postnational* films, which focus on marginalization and the increasingly multi-ethnic Finland to evoke the fragile and contested socio-cultural territory of the nation. Instead of contributing to and creating the “imagined community” of the nation, of which Benedict Anderson writes, these cultural negotiations create imaginaries of a global Finland—they represent ways in which Finnish cultural producers increasingly conceive of their life-worlds beyond national boundaries.

The globalization of Finnish cinema cannot only be understood in terms of the films’ text-based representations—though these of course form vital reactive or proactive strategies to changes in social formations—but also through the production, exhibition, distribution and reception histories of the individual films. It is also increasingly pertinent to focus on the ways new media technologies transform the production and consumption of cinema, and challenge most, if not all, place-bound conception of media production and spectatorship. Due to considerations of space, I must limit my exploration to textual readings of theatrically-released mainstream films for the sake of maintaining analytical clarity, a demarcation which results in the exclusion of such important and transnationally-visible forms as installation/video art and documentary films. I make these omissions while acknowledging fully that future studies will take these into account in discussing how the infrastructural and technological changes of Finnish film production have contributed to a more global-minded domestic film industry.

The national—films of the cultural nation

What is the role of national cinema in times of globalization? To answer this question, we must discuss one of the clearest markers of globalization in cultural-politics—that of the national and its implied return to traditional values. Often called heritage films, such modes of reclaiming the nation emphasize picturesque scenery, national traditions, a narrative focused on the rural/urban divide (often favouring the former over the latter) and ethnic homogeneity. To account for some of the reasons why these films—conceivable as the “heritage symptom” of globalization—hold such an enduring power over their audiences, we turn to the films of Markku Pölönen, who gained immense indigenous critical and financial success in the mid-1990s with the “tango-film” *Onnenmaa* [Land of Happiness] (1993) and *Kivenpyörittäjän Kylä* [The Last Wedding] (1995), the recipient of numerous Jussis (the Finnish “Oscars”). The films were significant successes on their initial theatrical runs, with *Kivenpyörittäjän Kylä* and the logger-film *Kuningasjätkä* [A Summer by the River] (1997) attracting over 100,000 spectators each; they gained even greater audiences of over a million spectators on subsequent airings on television. The films were, accordingly, heralded by critics as the type of cinema that the nation needs; that is, as films that were perceived as uniquely, “authentically” Finnish and which simultaneously spoke to popular audiences.

Pölönen would unsurprisingly agree with these assessments as he has stated that he is interested in the Finland that has been created in images, the picturesque, grand Finnish nature conveyed in paintings and in seminal films from the dawn of Finnish cinema. For him, “Suomalaisuus on minulle kaipausta yksinkertaiseen elämään. Se on reilu ja yksioikoinen tila saunan ja järven välissä” [Finnishness is longing for a simple life. It is a fair and uncomplicated state between the sauna and the lake] (Pölönen in Närhi 180). Even though the films are based on Pölönen’s own childhood experiences and are thus entrenched in subjective nostalgia, the audience is expected to recognize the depiction through cultural memory—that is, from previous representations of the traditional nation. Images such as the summery countryside and tangos danced on open-air dance floors have lodged themselves in the national imagination via literature, films, television, and paintings, and have thus become signifiers of a shared past, an ethno-symbolic point of identification. Pölönen’s films, filled with “aitoja suomalaisia tunteita” [authentic Finnish feelings],¹ aim to provide a comforting vision of the national past for contemporary urbanized audiences, a vision that is presented as common to the majority of the inhabitants of the nation, regardless of whether they have ever actually lived in the countryside.

Pölönen’s success can be directly linked with the felt need to re-visit the nation’s history at times when its internal unity is under threat and its external

borders are perceived as facing erosion by increased internationalism. The early to mid-1990s had been a particularly difficult time for Finland as the irresponsible economic policies of the previous decades resulted in a catastrophic depression, prominently manifested in nation-wide mass unemployment. Finland's accession to the European Union in 1995 was perceived as a considerable threat in certain circles advocating the importance of a sovereign socio-economic, political, and cultural sphere free from outside interference. In response to these challenges, the concept of the "kulttuurikansakunta" [cultural nation], a sort of ethno-cultural community emphasizing the unique nature of Finnish culture, "antoi tarvittavan vastauksen kysymykseen onko Suomella itsenäisyyttä tai identiteettiä valtion heikentymisen jälkeen" [provided the desired answer to the question of whether Finland had any independence or identity since the weakening of the state] (Ruuska 292). It is therefore not surprising that audiences embraced Pölonen's films of tradition, as his representations engage in a conscious meditation on the contemporary meaning of the history of the nation. Yet, by the conceptualizing of their audience in more or less homogeneous terms, the representation is positioned as the property of an "authentic," historically-bound nation-people. Such a mode of representation inevitably brings forth internal fissures and schisms, concerns to which we now turn.

Return to the ancestral home: *Kivenpyörittäjän Kylä* and cultural memory

Pölonen's *Kivenpyörittäjän Kylä* seeks to create a reminder of the idyllic shared past re-interpreted for an economically unstable contemporary Finland. The film recounts the return of Pekka, a Finn currently living in Sweden in an unhappy marriage and with an unsuccessful career, to his home village. The film addresses the national audience symbolically through Pekka's homecoming, with the film providing a portal to the traditionally recreated village and to a facsimile of an "authentic" national past. The village is represented as a "national village," a strictly defined community of shared belonging with its own peculiarities, customs and traditions. The conflicting views come to the forefront as Pekka's cynical wife Meeri expresses her frustration with the stubborn, primal mind-set of the village folk:

Käyttäydymme kuten käyttäydymme, jotta aito suomalaisuus elää. Kauan eläköön tämä alkukantainen tunne, luonnon kauneus ja tango. Tämä on se aito maailma, kansallinen sivilisaatio. Alas eliiteillä ja sivilisaatiolla, kauan eläköön populismi!

[We act the way we act so that real Finnishness will remain. Long live this primitive feeling, the beauty of nature and tango. This is the last real world, national civilisation. Down with the elites and civilisation, long live populism!]

Meeri brings a dissenting voice to the national village, unable to understand the customs of the village or to participate fully in its way of life. When taken in context with the largely negative portrait of Meeri's character and the idyllic portrait of rural life, her comments emphasize the film's critical stance towards the narrow-minded, self-obsessed city-dweller. Yet, this critical perspective is constructed as something with which the majority of the audience should be able to identify. Effectively, the film both invites the contemporary audience to participate in national nostalgia, while, symbolically, excluding them from narrative participation. Audiences are expected to have access to this shared memory and to interpret the subjectivity of Pölönen's vision through it. Where does this leave audience members with different frames of reference, such as ethnic minorities and the urbanized?

The idyllic, pure Finnishness proves to be only an approximation, a metaphoric portrait of what contemporary Finnishness ought to be but really isn't. This doubled connotation reveals the limited scope of the national village, where the proposed homogeneity of *Kivenpyörittäjän Kylä* is internally fragmented and contested by the rural/urban and nature/modernity schisms that dominate contemporary Finnish cultural discourse. This is a larger problem with the heritage genre as "even those films that develop an ironic narrative of the past end up celebrating and legitimating the spectacle of one cultural tradition and identity at the expense of others through the discourse of authenticity and the obsession with the visual splendour of period detail" (Higson 119). Thus, the ideological work of the film relies on the inherently unstable, yet unquestionably powerful, construction of national memory.

The heritage film remains remarkably successful at the domestic box office. For example, in 1999 four highly successful films dominated the charts for the better part of the year: *Rukajärven Tie* [The Road to Rukajärvi], *Poika ja Ilves* [Tommy and the Wildcat], *Häijyt* [The Tough Ones] and *Kulkuri ja Joutsen* [The Swan and the Wanderer]. Heritage conventions were seen as an especially significant factor in the success of the four films as the publicity and their reception drew attention to the way they dealt with national history (Salmi 18): *Rukajärven Tie* examined the individual costs of the Continuation War; *Poika ja Ilves* emphasized the stoic beauty of Finland's nature; *Häijyt* chronicled the contemporary lives of Härmä-ruffians; and *Kulkuri ja Joutsen* recreated Finnish cultural history through the stories of two popular entertainers and folk musicians, Reino Helismaa and Tapio Rautavaara. Yet, the surface homogeneity of these films is compromised of ideological schisms: *Rukajärven Tie* looks at the divergent loyalties, ideologies and allegiances in the supposedly unanimous war cause; *Poika ja Ilves* alludes to

the incompatibility of man and nature through the ultimately impossible friendship of teenager Tommy and his pet cougar; the portrait of the main characters in *Häjyt* is at times adoring, at times critical of the actions of the protagonists, and ultimately depicts the incompatibility of their outmoded lifestyle in modern Finland; and *Kulkuri Ja Joutsen* chronicles the struggles of its folk heroes to come to terms with accepted cultural norms. While bio-pics, the war genre, traditionalist fantasy films such as *Joulutarina* [The Christmas Story] (2007) and the films of Pölonen invariably contain heterogeneous and contesting ideologies, they are also the most successful form of domestic cinema at the box office. Such films imply a limited way of conceptualizing the contemporary nation, but the resonance they find with domestic audiences indicates an important, if not somewhat ideologically myopic, facet of globalization's complexities.

The (g)local—the localization of culture

One of the oft-perceived effects of globalization is the strengthening of local ties in the face of the insecurities and the sense of flux generated by the complex connectivity of globalization, that is, its reliance on economic and political consolidation and the prevalence of wide-ranging multimedia networks and all the opportunities and challenges they imply (Tomlinson). Films such as Jarmo Lampela's *Joki* [The River] (2001) and Johanna Vuoksenmaa's *Nousukausi* [Upswing] (2003) take place in ordinary, contemporary urban settings and tell stories that are very specifically about the places and the communities in which they take place. In contrast to heritage cinema, these films emphasize familial or "neighbourial" connections over the imagined communities of nations. They make especially interesting case studies of the effects of globalization as they envision globalization processes in two main ways: firstly, by emphasizing local connectivity; and secondly, by taking for granted the already globalized nature of certain aspects of contemporary Finland.

Joki presents a multi-story narrative in the vein of films such as *Short Cuts* (1993). While this well-known and often-discussed independent/Hollywood film chronicles the multicultural metropolis of Los Angeles, attempting to provide a voice for its heterogeneous population, *Joki* takes place in Äänekoski, a small town in mid-Finland, and contains a distinctly different ideological approach. The individual narratives construct a mosaic of society, from a troubled teenage mother giving birth after attempting suicide to an old couple facing imminent death in a sterile hospital room. Meanwhile, we observe a budding romance and the breakdown of a marriage. The film represents the town as a microcosm of the Finnish welfare society with all its complexities intact, as it does not shy away from the estrangement and claustrophobia one may experience in such societies. But the town is also portrayed as a living organism with all of its different elements

coming together in a network of social meaning. The people that inhabit this space all look after one another, despite any shortcomings in the welfare state structure and the pressures of dispersal that globalization may connote for such idyllic urban spaces. Yet, this collectivity is also limited in a similar manner to the national village of the heritage films as it presents a utopian urge to avoid the complications that the transformation of the welfare state invariably has on the lives of those who inhabit it.

Nousukausi presents a very similar approach to glocalization as it focuses on the creation of a harmonious local community to counteract the pressures and dehumanization of the information age. The protagonists of the film, Janne and Katri, exemplify the upward mobility of a certain section of the Finnish population who benefit from the societal transformation of the national welfare state into an exemplary “network society” of Manuel Castells and Pekka Himanen’s description. Janne works as a computer programmer in a firm that supported him through his early career. But as an opportunity opens for career advancement in another firm, he leaves the company. Yet Janne’s life seems to be missing something, as the lack of interpersonal loyalty and solidarity in his work environment allows only for the most transient of connections. Tiina discovers a holiday agency promising unique holidays in the “ordinary” suburbs of Finland and the pair relinquish their personal possessions to the care of the agent and move to a shabby suburban housing block in Jakomäki. This neighbourhood has a relatively bad reputation in Finland as it is often seen as one of the places that encapsulate the dark side of welfare state egalitarianism with their identical faceless blocks of flats and down-and-out residents. The initial reaction of the couple is one of bemused tourists finding themselves on the wrong side of the tracks, but the situation soon gets worse as it becomes evident that they have been scammed by the holiday agent. They now have to survive on a job-seekers allowance as the previously detested welfare structure now seems to be the only available solution to their predicament. For people who have grown accustomed to the immediacy and convenience of a modern information society, the question arises: what happens when such networks cease to exist in their taken-for-granted form? As the complex connectivity and the networks of the information society fail them, the social connections they thought they had and the information systems they relied on contribute to the eradication of their former existence and the dilution of their identity as part of the upper-middle class of Finnish society. The only thing that can offer a sense of stability in such a situation is a return to the welfare state and a reinvigoration of its stabilizing influences for people displaced from the socio-economic ladder. Janne and Katja soon discover the virtues of their local community, where the cold style of their modern nouveau riche house is replaced by barely functional yet cosy apartments and where the superficial relationships of the business world are compensated by neighbourly

relations and a sense of communality. The local thus becomes a powerful antidote to the perceived dispersal of globalization.

The ideological valorization of locality requires further examination: Is such a recourse to localization a restrictive backward step in cultural identity politics or do these films constitute a progressive step towards representing the possibility of egalitarianism and the heterogeneity in contemporary Finland? Both examples of localization valorize similar socio-political structures as the heritage films, but in this case we move to a sub-national level, where it is not necessarily national identity and traditionalism that binds the protagonists to their contexts. The conclusion of *Nousukausi* presents a seemingly balanced look at the merger of the nation's affluent middle- and underclasses as the neighbours from Jakomäki join our information-age couple in their newly reclaimed house. The conclusion can be interpreted as a mutually-beneficial joint venture (to use appropriate business terminology) as both parties receive something they desire: the neighbours, an upper class place for social gatherings; the couple, good company and affluent surroundings. But as was the case with the heritage films, the anti-globalization discourses of the film seem somewhat overstated in their simplicity. As with any joint venture, there is real danger of cultural and socio-economic friction and this utopian harmony can only last for so long. While such egalitarian propositions of class harmony certainly seem to make sense, they are based on a degree of class snobbery and avoidance of the very real problems of class division that exist in society. Ultimately, the approaches of both glocal films necessitate viewing them as similar instances of wish-fulfilment and escapist fantasy that we see in the heritage films.

Transnational co-productions

Collaboration with production companies from other national industries is an increasingly significant feature of national film production, especially in the Nordic context. Co-production and its influence on national culture has been a topic of frequent debate especially in Europe, where the presence of Hollywood has generated many countermeasures for protecting the domestic film industry. A common technique is embarking on co-production operations which emphasize transnational regional identities or similarities between peoples and cultures as answers to the perceived imposition of Global Hollywood. Often, these transnational co-productions have attempted to emulate the conventions of Hollywood cinema with decidedly mixed results, labelled in derogatory fashion alternatively as “euro-puddings” or “self-defeating co-productions” (Hjort 2005a). Such self-defeating co-productions, according to Hjort, attempt to address audiences beyond immediate national or regional contexts through methods such as the use of English and non-native actors, which should, in theory, allow the

films to have easy access to the global markets. But films that adopt such methods seem to lose many of their intended global and domestic audiences by negating cultural specificity to such an extent that they neutralize the possibility of audience participation. Hjort suggests this comes down to a conflict between two contradictory modes of audience address: one that seems to say “[we] care about your national heritage; and another that seems to implore the audiences to ignore travesties of your national heritage” (2005a 208).

Co-production has had a relatively brief history in Finnish cinema as it was only in the 1980s that the policies of the Finnish Film Foundation were concretely targeted at the internationalization of the national film industry. Co-production initiatives have thus been encouraged as a way of building financing networks as well as expanding the distribution of Finnish films. Aki and Mika Kaurismäki were at the forefront of several of these developments as their films not only feature transnational themes and elements, but they often managed to secure funding from non-Finnish sources due to the significant reputation these films garnered at the international festival circuit. Both Kaurismäkis have also produced films in different national contexts, but with a significant Finnish contribution (such as the Paris-set *La Vie de Bohème* (1992) with starring roles for Kari Väänänen and Matti Pellonpää and cinematographer Timo Salminen).

These are isolated instances in Finnish cinema, as despite the encouragement of the Finnish Film Foundation, the Kaurismäkis’ uncompromising art house credentials did not form a successful template for Finnish producers. Several unsuccessful examples of international co-productions—such as Lauri Törhönen’s *Ameriikan Raitti* [Paradise America] (1990) and Pekka Melartin’s *Going to Kansas City* (1998)—chronicle the attempts of Finns to adapt to American society. According to one critic, these films often resemble holiday trips of the film crew, who just happened to bring a camera with them (Rosenqvist). The comment is revealing in that these films seldom engage in in-depth explorations of transnational negotiation and intercultural communication. One way to explain this is to think of the significance of the term “American” in the popular Finnish imagination, especially in relation to the geopolitical metamorphoses that were taking place in post-Wall Europe. There is a distinct tendency to react to American culture as something to be emulated or rejected and this sort of simplicity influences the transnational approach of these films, whereby in-depth exploration of cultural difference is bypassed in favour of stereotyped impressions.

In contrast to these models of transnational collaboration, we have increasingly seen the popularization of regional and specifically Scandinavian modes of collaboration between Finnish producers and production companies from the Nordic countries. While co-production has been frequent (and not unproblematic) between Scandinavian countries, Finland did not participate in such ventures on a large scale until the end of the 1990s (despite isolated instances like the production agreement the Kaurismäkis signed with the Swedish Film

Foundation in 1988). Such collaborations have increasingly become the norm, even for products that remain thematically connected to one specific nation—for example, the participation of Nordisk Film och TV Fund in Auli Manttila's feminist exploration *Pelon Maantiede* [Geography of Fear] (2000) and Aleksi Salmenperä's male prostitution socio-realist melodrama *Miehen Työ* [A Man's Job] (2007). Other projects, such as Mika Kaurismäki's documentary *Moro No Brasil* (2002) argue for cosmopolitan conceptions of Finnish identity, as its first scene features its director departing from the wintry confines of Finland to multicultural and colourful Brazil. Here, the indication is of the necessity to open one's horizon to new experiences and the opportunities they bring.

Several transnational collaborations provide a more explicitly identifiable pattern of encountering globalization as they seek to thematize issues of Finnish identity in relation to neighbouring countries. The films of Klaus Härö examine historical interconnections between Finland and Sweden, drawing on personal affinity and state-level collaboration in films such as *Äideistä Parhain* [Mother of Mine] (2005), and *Näkymätön Elina* [Invisible Elina] (2002). The former of these focuses on the relocation of Finnish children to Sweden during the Second World War, showing the conflicts and the attempts at adaptation these children face in their new host families and culture. *Elina* focuses on liminal identity as the eight-year old protagonist lives in Tornionjoki located between the borders of Finland and Sweden. Both films share a trajectory of conflict and reconciliation as the relocated Eero learns to ultimately accept his new life in Sweden, where loyalty to the nation is bypassed in favour of interpersonal connections. Meanwhile, Elina goes to school on the Swedish side of the river while her family lives in Finland. After several conflicts with her new autocratic teacher, she learns to respect the teacher's authority as well as remain loyal to her family roots in Finland. Both films contextualize their interpersonal struggles as metaphors for historical struggle for identity and self-determination, indicating that past differences can be overcome by recognizing mutual affinities and similarities. And as these films are situated in the near past, the focus on historical relationships allows the films to counteract any accusations of the supranational euro-pudding syndrome. Instead of the self-defeating co-production, these films are more appropriately characterized as "mutual affinity" productions.

Regional mutual affinities are not relegated to Finnish-centric co-productions as films such as Alexander Rogozhkin's Russian production *Kukushka* [Cuckoo] (2002) and Reza Bagher's predominantly Swedish *Populärmusik från Vittula* [Popular Music from Vittula] (2004) create narratives aimed at finding similarities between the neighbouring countries. Instead of the Finnish characters that build affinity through personal connections and cultural adaptation, as in Härö's films, these films find more metaphoric avenues, such as the absence of common language in *Kukushka*, and the universal power of popular music in *Vittula*'s case, to construct their modes of affinity. While one could suggest that these productions hardly

fit in with the categories of Finnish cinema, they provide a vital alternative perspective to those films with more clearly defined Finnish agency. And as they ultimately seem to reflect similar conceptions of affinity, they can be understood as affirmations of reciprocal regional collaboration that aim for a pan-regional cinema in contrast to the more supranational methods of the euro-pudding.

In addition to these affinity productions, other transnational collaborations question the role of the nation in times of globalization. For example, A-J Annila's *Sauna* (2008) is a predominantly Finnish production with financing and production assistance from the Czech Republic and Estonia. The film focuses on two brothers who are given the task of drawing the line between Finland and Russia in 1595. They journey to a village in the middle of a swamp whose population seems to exist in a stasis with no mortality rate or newborn children. The village is a metaphoric liminal space between Finland and Russia, where old ghosts still haunt and refuse the official designations of the state and its geographical borders. As the sauna of the village seems to evoke the spirits of their victims, the brothers must face their inner fears and their part in the bloody campaign to establish national solidarity. The film's engagement with transnationalism is fraught with ambiguity and uncertainty. While it suggests that collaboration and evocations of independence are necessary parts of the international world of nation-states, it also connotes the difficulties of this process and the inability or unwillingness of some people to fit into these neat categories. Do such projects imply a strengthening or a dilution of national identity? In what ways can such projects be seen as indicative of necessary evolutionary steps for national identities? There are no clear answers to these questions that projects like *Sauna* seek to raise as part of their *modus operandi*.

These recent thematizations of transnationalism see collaboration as a key feature of contemporary self-identity and cultural politics while they are aware of some of the more problematic effects of such interaction for social self-definition. Transnational productions are multifaceted, but the two main strands identified here—regional affinity and cultural ambiguity—indicate some of the predominant patterns in which the cultural producers of Finland have engaged with the increasing demands of the global marketplace: transnational productions are a way of countering some of the problematic connotations of globalization, while they are simultaneously, almost paradoxically, part of that same process of challenging the cultural sovereignty of nations.

Supranational commercialism

Finnish cinema has mostly avoided accusations of the euro-pudding syndrome, of pandering to audiences expecting products that emulate the standards and vernacular of Hollywood entertainment. The euro-pudding concept relates to

co-productions between different European nations, and Finland has largely been outside of such production schemes, preferring to focus more on regional considerations. This is not to imply that Finnish films do not attempt to engage Hollywood on its own terms. An increasing trend of the 2000s is the emulation of conventions from international commercial cinema and television, emulation which applies to the audio-visual structures, thematic content, narrative patterns, as well as production and distribution mechanisms. Markus Selin's production company Solar-Films is one of the predominant Finnish production companies mobilizing these techniques as they have effectively created a production enterprise modelled on Hollywood and its characteristic strategies: they have a nascent star system in place, in-house directors, large-scale advertising campaigns, and a very successful track record at the domestic box office. Harri Kilpi discusses the company's domestic blockbuster *Vares* (2004) as taking over conventions from the films of Quentin Tarantino and Guy Ritchie, notably *Lock, Stock, and Two Smoking Barrels* (1998). The film is clearly indebted to the characteristic devices of these earlier films: highly-stylised freeze-frame editing for character introductions, the jump cuts, "tarantinoesque" dialogue, pop soundtrack, and the multilayered narratives found in Ritchie's films.

This stylistic debt is nevertheless contextualized locally, despite the narrative's universal tale of cops and robbers. The dialogue constantly contrasts slang expressions with regional intonations while the Finnish milieu is captured through these stylistic transmutations. The result is a film that is simultaneously exportable and unexportable, to use a distinction often made in relation to national cinema. The film language will be familiar to most global audiences, but most of the intricacies of humour and the pop culture references will only be open to Finnish spectators. It is no surprise that *Vares* was a major success in Finland as its multilayered intertextuality appeals to the tastes that Hollywood has created in cinema-goers everywhere while it also provides localized content for domestic audiences, a notion used in the marketing campaign to boost the film's relationship with national culture.

Other instances of supranationalized products include films such as *Levottomat* [The Restless] (2000), *Kuutamolla* [Moonlighting] (2001), *Kolmistaan* [Threesome] (2007), and *Saippuaprinssi* [Soap Prince] (2006). These types of films can be called self-fashioning narratives which seek to emulate lifestyles and trends familiar from television shows such as *Sex and the City* (1998). They are set in an information-age society similar to that of their American predecessors, and feature protagonists who live and work in highly networked social environments. By encouraging consumerism and upward mobility, they effectively seek to normalize the idea of Finland as a high-tech developed society with few problems and schisms. Both types of film—the indigenous blockbusters like *Vares* and the self-fashioning narratives—indicate a response to the more commercial, economic aspects of globalization as they indicate the necessity to adapt to, and adopt from,

popular, dominant forms of Western culture. While the aesthetic and ideological techniques they mobilize are largely connected to the homogenizing influences of a global culture, they do not simply advocate the erosion of national culture. After all, the localization of supranational (read Hollywood) culture contributes as much to these films' success as their acquiescence to its norms. Accordingly, these types of films highlight the constant dialogue and adaptation necessary for national cinema to survive in times of late capitalism (to use Jameson's very apt conceptualization). Simultaneously, they reinforce the sense that Hollywood is, indeed, "colonizing our subconscious" (as Robert, the protagonist of Wim Wenders' *Im Lauf der Zeit* [*Kings of the Road*] [1976] puts it).

The postnational: the welfare state and multi-ethnic Finland

In contrast to the other categories, postnational cinema does not seek to reinforce traditional values of the nation, nor does it imply a metamorphosis of national culture for a more globally-attuned audience. Rather than just affirming or undermining the symbolic potential of the nation, postnational cinema explores the conditions within nation-states in an era of accelerating globalization, where "for substantial numbers of people, the world appears as complex, liminal, lacking in clearly demarcated borders and commonly accepted values" (Hedetoft and Hjort xviii). Andrew Higson has suggested that postnational films are texts that cannot be comfortably situated within the cultural and sociological body of the nation. He is talking in the context of British cinema where films such as *My Beautiful Laundrette* (Stephen Frears, 1985) and *Trainspotting* (Danny Boyle, 1995) challenge the dominant Britishness (or perhaps more appropriately, Englishness) of British cinema. Higson suggests that restricting the Scottishness of Boyle's film and Frears's multicultural dialectics to a singular, umbrella-like conception of national cinema (the cultural pluralism argument) can effectively limit these films to merely alternative approaches to dominant Britishness.

The rhetorical promise of postnational cinema is founded on its potential for enunciating the perspectives of subjects excluded from the homogeneous promises of the cultural and the civic nation—for example, immigrants to the city or those whose ideological perspectives do not match dominant conceptions of civic duty. Accordingly, it can point us in new directions for exploring the potential of cinema to work from the basis of the nation, but also address concerns of social belonging that do not necessarily rely on assimilation or hybridity. By focusing on moments of uncertainty, indecision, fragmentation and disjuncture, these films move past any sense of national homogeneity. Yet they demonstrate that we should not be too hasty in doing away with the national, even in so-called

postnational times, as the nation-state is still the “driving force behind the construction of global structures and ... a resource for political action” (Kastoryano 135), despite the changing nature of citizenship in a globalizing world. Appropriately, postnational films are characterized by a conscious effort on the part of filmmakers to justify the presence of the national in their representations when all its traditional or taken-for-granted values are contested by transnational movements, even if the national appears as something that repels or rejects the disillusioned protagonists of the films.

Postnational films are those texts that seek to observe the nation from its margins as they create critical visions of the welfare ideologies espoused by most of the films belonging in the four categories. The films of Aki Kaurismäki—e.g. *Mies Vailla Menneisyyttä* [The Man Without a Past] (2002) and *Laitakaupungin Valot* [Lights at the Dusk] (2006)—and of Aku Louhimies—e.g. *Paha Maa* [Frozen Land] (2004) and *Jäätynyt Kaupunki* [Frozen City] (2007)—engage with the changing nature of the welfare state from a highly critical perspective. In Aki Kaurismäki’s films, we follow protagonists who are pushed outside of the welfare state by the loss of their memory or by getting involved in criminal activities in their desperate search for human connection. Losing their position in society results in the eradication of their civic identity and they have to form new collectives on the margins of the welfare state. In contrast to the pronounced marginality of Kaurismäki’s protagonists, Louhimies’s films focus on the ordinary people of the society who struggle with social and personal problems. The multi-story narratives of these films are in direct contrast to films like *Joki* as the collage of bleak destinies and selfish acts of social antagonism reveal the inherently fragmented constitution of the society. The characters of the films need to be understood as metonymic representatives of wider social problems in Finnish society, as even the titles of the films gesture towards a sense of collective malaise. These films represent Finland as a decidedly fragmented constellation where economic and political structures serve to alienate a large section of the nation’s citizens, who, in turn, interpret the social and cultural norms of the society in decidedly negative ways.

Another challenge to national homogeneity is constructed through films that focus on the multiethnic constitution of the Finnish society. Films such as Nanna Huolman’s *Aavan Meren Tällä Puolen* [On this Side of the Open Sea] (2007) and Peter Lindholm’s *Leijat Helsingin Yllä* [Kites over Helsinki] (2001) explore the lives of Fenno-Swedes, who attest to Finland’s official status as a bilingual nation. While such films are important in highlighting cultural diversity, their contributions to multicultural Finland do not propose substantial disruptions to the imagining of a historically-continuous and ethnically homogeneous Finland. Though immigration matters have received substantial coverage in the media, filmic representations of Finland’s multi-ethnic composition are relatively sparse. Whereas other Nordic cinemas, especially those of Sweden and Denmark, have addressed such matters in more critical detail, Finnish cinema remains

underdeveloped in this regard, with only *Vieraalla Maalla* [On Foreign Land] (2003) and the television series *Mogadishu Avenue* (2005) as significant instigators of discussion on the vital theme of immigration. While such texts do have an important function in instigating debate on the topic of racism and multiculturalism, they function more along the lines of British examples like *Bend it Like Beckham* (2002) and *The Kumars at 42* (2001) than the more explicitly political and fragmentary depictions in *My Beautiful Laundrette* or *Brick Lane* (2007) in that they focus on creating a sense of harmony rather than critically exploring the many problems that still endure. *Vieraalla Maalla* addresses some of the problems of an immature multicultural society, but its conventional and comedic narrative and its focus on Finnish protagonists maintains a dichotomy between “us” and “them,” between the “authentic” Finns and their “others.” Many areas of the film gloss over very real and difficult social problems—an example of this is the conclusion where the Finnish and Turkish characters of the film join together to play the Finnish version of baseball. Such resolutions unfurl a blanket of homogeneity over the complex and heterogeneous population of a global Finland, assuming that conflicts and cultural differences can be solved with a return to the traditional nation. Until now, the “multicultural” films of Finland only discuss some of the problems of multiculturalism while they also reveal a pervasive eurocentric attitude that, despite the best intentions, maintains a distinction between authentic traditional Finland and its more complex, globalizing incarnation.

The complexities of a globalizing national cinema

The majority of Finnish films share numerous indicators of Finland’s globalizing status—hints of linguistic diversity or the presence of information-age culture, for example. Thus it is arguable that most Finnish films fit into all five categories as national values, for example, can exist alongside alternative or critical (postnational) conceptions of society, while localization functions both as a transnational tool and a way to counteract fears over this process. For example, how do we classify the films of a director such as Markku Lehmuskallio, whose films focus on the lives of the Sami-people, who inhabit the autonomous Sami-lands in northern Lapland? Lehmuskallio has since the mid-1990s produced films on various indigenous populations of the northern hemisphere in collaboration with his wife Anastasia Lipsui, a native of the Nenetsi minority in Russia, films which explicitly seek to challenge any national designation. Furthermore, films such as *Matti* (2006) deal with very locally-specific cultural issues (the fictional biography of national legend ski-jumper Matti Nykänen), whilst it highlights Finland’s international connectivity by focusing on Nykänen’s international star persona. Meanwhile, elements of the supranational exist in all

productions as it would be truly difficult to conceptualize a specifically national aesthetic and narrative style. Furthermore, there are the more ambiguous products, such as the films of Renny Harlin (*Die Hard 2* [1990] and *Cliffhanger* [1993]) and the Lordi-film *Dark Floors* (2006), with their tokenistic insertions of Finnish elements into the aesthetic and thematic framework of Hollywood blockbusters. Additionally, the escapades of the Dudesons, a Finnish band of pranksters raised on Hollywood pop culture, often highlight specifically Finnish idioms, but their choice to speak English indicates the ways that the current younger generation is in constant dialogue with supranational and national forms of culture. What is the point in engaging in such categorization efforts, then? These five categories provide a framework within which to explore the complex ways in which globalization (or more accurately glocalization) affects national film production. It is precisely this conflicting multiplicity that indicates the cultural complexity of globalization, and the efforts of cinema producers to come to terms with its opportunities and demands.

The curious case of *Jadesoturi*

To account for some of the implications of these complex forms of globalization in Finnish cinema, we conclude this discussion by exploring the case of *Jadesoturi* [Jade Warrior] (2006). This Finnish-Chinese co-production has received theatrical releases in many European and Asian countries and it is widely available on DVD around the world. It was produced with a budget of \$4,000,000, a relatively small sum in comparison to the budgets of other contemporary transnational forms of the “wuxia” genre: e.g. \$15,000,000 for Ang Lee’s *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* [Wo hu cang long] (2000), and \$30,000,000 for Zhang Yimou’s *Hero* [Ying xiong] (2002). Whereas these two well-known examples of the genre benefited from the reputations of their globally-renowned directors and the star presence of Michelle Yeoh and Jet Li, *Jadesoturi* was directed by first-time director A-J Alanen and starred actors known predominantly from Finnish television, though the film does feature star Zhang Jingchu and was partially shot in China with a Chinese production crew. In undertaking this transnational collaboration, *Jadesoturi* concretely targeted a global audience while extending the scope of Finnish cinema in unexpected directions. But to what extent is such a mode of cultural production successful either for the promotion of national culture in the global markets or for the transnational development of national culture? By seeing the film as a “glocal” text—one that concretely negotiates between national cultural tropes and more global forms of cultural production—the film sheds light on the more productive aspects of transnational co-production, while it also exemplifies many of the problems associated with transcending the limits of national cinematic production.

Jadesoturi tells the story of Kai, the reincarnation of Sintai, who lives in modern day Finland and works as a blacksmith. Sintai was a foreign warlord in ancient China, who attempted to defeat a demon, a malignant being who attempted to use the mythical artefact Sampo—an object endowed with the power of achieving world domination—for his own benefit. Antiques dealer Berg has discovered the Sampo that now holds the demon and, with Kai's help, he opens it. The unleashed demon possesses Berg who in turn hires the reincarnation of Sintai, namely Kai, to reform the Sampo. As the narratives of Kai and Sintai—and those of contemporary Finland and historical China—intertwine, it is up to Kai to fulfil the prophecy made thousands of years ago and defeat the demon.

To explore the film's negotiation of global cultural production, we must begin from its reflection of contemporary cultural politics in China and Finland. In short, how does *Jadesoturi* comment on the contemporary interaction of these two nations? While the film is decidedly transnational in its conception, production, exhibition and distribution, it also remains distinctly Finnish-centric in its themes. The myths of the eighteenth-century national epic *Kalevala* are heavily present in the film, from the powerful and mythic Sampo that drives the narrative, to specific signifiers such as the folk-like musical score and the Kantele, a traditional instrument from Finland, on which Kai and Sintai perform. The modern-day parts of the film are set in Finland, whereas Chineseness is relegated to the past. Even here, the film only makes cursory allusions to historical events as it relies extensively on second-hand emulations of Chinese culture, mostly from genre films. As the film says very little about contemporary Chinese politics, its approach highlights one of the problematic positions in this type of transnational cultural production. The mediated and simplified version of Chinese culture attests to the ways cultural elements circulate in transnational flows of culture and are, in turn, appropriated and re-adapted to other cultural contexts. The result is an emulation of Chinese culture as seen through the mirror of the pan-Asiatic mainstream cinema.

Does the relegation of Chineseness to an orientalised mythical past indicate a certain eurocentric tendency in representing other cultures? To explore this point, we must turn to the ideological structures of the film. Kenneth Chan suggests that *Crouching Tiger* reconfigures “the traditional wu xia pian into a postmodernist cultural product for a global audience, critiquing, often in a rather ambiguous and conflicted fashion, the vexing centrality of traditional culture and patriarchal hegemony” (4). *Jadesoturi* also targeted international audiences, but it shares few of *Crouching Tiger*'s explicitly critical motivations. While *Jadesoturi* is set in the *jiang hu*, or the world of ancient martial arts, and deals with the codes that bind this world—codes such as honour, social obedience, duty, social responsibility instead of individual freedom—it also reinforces many of the patriarchal or socially-obedient ideas that *Crouching Tiger* critiques. Whereas *Crouching Tiger* was conceived as a revisionist take on hierarchy in Chinese society,

aimed at criticizing the still prevalent autocratic structures of the state, *Jadesoturi* shows how transgression of norms such as honour and duty leads to instability in the social order. For example, Sintai's decision to elope with Pin Yu in ancient China has negative implications for the contemporary social order, which ultimately threatens the breakdown of Finnish society. *Jadesoturi*'s ideological orientation has more in common with Zhang's *Hero*, which vindicates the authority of the central government through its narrative focus on submission to the rule of the Imperial Palace. While it seems unlikely that the producers of *Jadesoturi* would have been seeking to justify such ideological submission, its transnationalism indicates a sense of confusion as to its intentions in representing national cultures. In fact, this sort of ideological short-sightedness is a result of its status as a Finnish kung-fu film, where its predecessors are a compendium of the reinvigorated wuxia genre as well as of classics such as the *Once Upon a Time in China* [Wong fei hung] series of 1991-1997 and *Swordsman* [Xiao ao jiang hu] [1990] which reinforce nationalist ideologies in an almost matter-of-fact style.

Considering the transnational origins of much of *Jadesoturi*'s content, should it be understood as a supranational production? To explore this further, we need to view *Jadesoturi* as symptomatic of globalization in that its reliance on transnational cinema indicates the impact of non-native products on the Finnish cinematic imagination. The transformations here are closely connected to what we have labelled the supranational tendencies in Finnish cinema. Yet, the film is exceedingly reliant on local content such as that provided by the *Kalevala*, which functions as the source for most of the film's cultural references. While such elements endow the film with sufficient weight to avoid any accusations of supranationalism, the film's use of nationally specific forms of culture and traditions provide it with exotic cultural capital, which, consequently, can be used in the film's funding and marketing campaigns to attract different sorts of investors and consumers. The film's moderated, if unbalanced, transnationalism attempts to cater to the tastes of many audiences (Finnish, Chinese and so forth) by merging different cultural ideas into a product that can differentiate itself in the global marketplace. Indeed, *Jadesoturi* was a relative success in Finland and China with approximately 70,000 and 150,000 admissions respectively. This makes it one of the most successful Finnish films of all time at the international box office, reinforcing the suggestion that transnational co-production is often an economic necessity for small national cinemas. But when transnationalism is conducted from a strong singular national basis—such as in *Jadesoturi*'s eurocentric depiction of Chinese culture—the result may not reflect true transnational co-operation, as was arguably the case with some of the regional forms of transnational cinema. This is the dilemma of national cinema in times of late capitalist globalization: while economic and cultural decisions increasingly highlight the need for collaboration between different national groups and the adopting of conventions of mainstream cinema, the elements of national culture

retain similar weight in both policy decisions and the marketing of these cultural products. Enforcing traditionalism or supranational commercialism may result in rejection by national and/or international audiences. It seems one cannot have it both ways, so *Jadesoturi*'s mediated "authenticity" provides a productive, if not unproblematic, indicator of how to approach the dilemma of national cinema in a global world.

Conclusion

While we have charted some of the predominant patterns of the globalization of contemporary Finnish cinema, this exploration must remain only an overview of these patterns. For one, we need to consider Andrew Higson's suggestion that national cinema needs to be viewed from the perspective of content, production initiatives, distribution and exhibition. Many of the categorizations established here apply to the cultural lives of the films. For example, the themes of the films are often replicated in the marketing and distribution of the films, as the campaigns of most of the heritage films, to take one example, emphasize their historical content. Similarly, most of *Jadesoturi*'s publicity material focused on its Finnish-Chinese connections and its status as Finland's first kung fu film. Reviewers also tend to discuss the relationship of the heritage films to their national context, sometimes bemoaning their reliance on national traditions while commending them for the same ideas on other occasions. The reception of the different types of Finnish cinema contributes to wider cultural debates on the constant transformation of national culture as the films present alternative perspectives on the meanings and forms of this culture, perspectives that offer both challenges and affirmation of cultural values. These patterns indicate the necessity of conceptualizing national cinema as a heterogeneous, complex framework of meaning. And while such patterns are visible throughout the history of Finnish cinema, ever-escalating interconnection and transnational cultural and economic exchange are increasingly becoming the rule rather than the exception. It is imperative that we view national cinema as contested territory and focus on the interactive, transnational nature of cinematic production as well as its more traditional side.

NOTES

1. *Pölösboxi* DVD-collection, Fennada Filmi, 2002.

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