Introduction

If there is a [global] village, it speaks American. It wears jeans, drinks Coke, eats at the golden arches, walks on swooshed shoes, plays electric guitars, recognizes Mickey Mouse, James Dean, E.T., Bart Simpson, R2-D2, and Pamela Anderson.

Todd Gitlin (2002: 176)

If Hollywood is indeed the acknowledged dominant cinema in the world, the ways in which minority cultures appropriate and make use of that dominant discourse can prove instructive for both narrative film studies and cultural studies.

Andrew Horton (1998: 173)

While subjected peoples cannot readily control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own, and what they use it for.

Mary Louise Pratt (1992: 6)

On 14 December 2015, the seventh instalment in the Star Wars franchise, Star Wars: The Force Awakens, premiered in Los Angeles. Highly anticipated as the first instalment since Disney acquired Lucasfilm in 2012, the film was positioned within the wider media discourse as an attempt to reinvigorate the franchise after the relative critical failure of the earlier prequel trilogy. On a budget estimated to be $200 million, considerably higher than the $11 million spent on the 1977 original, the film was a substantial commercial success – grossing over $750 million within twenty days of release, and swiftly becoming the highest-grossing film of all time in North America (McClintock 2016). Nevertheless, while the overall critical reaction was positive, the film received a significant amount of negative criticism focusing on its many resemblances to the first film in the franchise. From Vox’s list of ‘Five ways the new movie copies the original film’ (VanDerWerff 2015) to Geek Crusade’s ‘Eighteen ways The Force Awakens ripped off A New Hope’ (Jun Heng 2015), there was a considerable amount of online commentary that positioned The Force Awakens less as a new instalment in a developing franchise than as a ‘rip-off’ of
the original film. Even director J. J. Abrams acknowledged this reaction, admitting in an interview that ‘I can understand that someone might say, “Oh, it’s a complete rip-off!”’ (McMillan 2016) in reference to the various ways the film paid homage to the George Lucas original. In a year in which the *Spider-Man* franchise is being rebooted for the third time since 2002, and in which presold franchises are becoming an ever more dominant part of the media landscape, it is clear that this reaction to the new *Star Wars* film reflects a wider critical debate about the cultural industries’ tendency to remake and recycle earlier texts.

Of course, this is far from a new phenomenon and *The Force Awakens* is certainly not the first film to have been criticised as a derivative rip-off of *Star Wars*. Within America, there have been numerous examples ranging from exploitation films, such as the Roger Corman–produced *Battle Beyond the Stars* (1980), through to the various fan films, porn parodies and other unlicensed adaptations of the franchise that have appeared in subsequent years. Moreover, this phenomenon is not limited to the USA, with a plethora of unlicensed adaptations of *Star Wars* appearing in film industries around the world. In Brazil, for example, Adriano Stuart directed the comedy *Os Trapalhões na Guerra dos Planetas* (*The Tramps in Planet Wars, 1978*), in which the eponymous ‘tramps’ are transported into the world of *Star Wars*, complete with a central villain Zuco closely modelled on Darth Vader and a co-pilot Bonzo bearing more than a passing resemblance to Chewbacca. In the same year, Italian director Luigi Cozzi directed *Starcrash*, a space opera that avoided direct imitation of costumes and plot but featured numerous borrowings including an opening sequence that evoked the initial shots of the Imperial Star Destroyer and a central character, Akton, whose preferred weapon was a lightsaber. Meanwhile, within the Japanese industry, *Star Wars* was clearly the model for the Kinji Fukasaku directed *Message from Space* (1978), a relatively high-budget science-fiction film starring Sonny Chiba and Vic Morrow that Toei Studios rushed into production to capitalise on the global success of Lucas’s film. Moreover, not only were films being made that resembled *Star Wars* in terms of costume, characterisation and plot, but, in a case that I will discuss in more depth later, there was even a theatrically released film that appropriated actual footage from *Star Wars* – the Turkish film *Dünyayı Kurtaran Adam* (1982). Rather than attempting to recreate the space opera on his rather limited budget, director Çetin Inanç simply took a print of *Star Wars* and spliced its special-effects sequences directly into his own film. As these examples indicate, *Star Wars* was not only the first film in a hugely successful Hollywood franchise but was also the inspiration for a whole
series of homages, parodies and ‘rip-offs’ produced in film industries around the world.

It is important to remember, however, that Star Wars was not itself a wholly ‘original’ text. George Lucas designed the film as a tribute to a number of earlier sources including Flash Gordon and Buck Rogers serials, Hollywood war films such as The Bridges at Toko-Ri (1954), and Joseph Campbell’s study of mythological archetypes, The Hero with a Thousand Faces. Furthermore, Star Wars also took inspiration from numerous examples of critically acclaimed world cinema. Most famously, Lucas’s original plot outline closely resembled the plot to Akira Kurosawa’s The Hidden Fortress and this ultimately inspired the strategy to tell the story from the perspective of the film’s lowliest characters, C-3PO and R2-D2 (Stempel 2000: 204). Moreover, the iconography of the film was also heavily influenced by German cinema – from Fritz Lang’s silent Metropolis (1927) through to Leni Riefenstahl’s propaganda film Triumph of the Will (1935). While I agree with J. Hoberman that Star Wars is ‘arguably the quintessential Hollywood product’ (2004: 319), it is important to note that the film was adapting and reworking numerous elements borrowed from world cinema, and, also, that it would subsequently become the inspiration for films produced in the popular film industries of Brazil, Japan, Turkey and Italy.

This account of cross-cultural borrowings and syncretism points to the deeply interconnected histories of Hollywood and world cinema, yet it is notable that scholarship on Hollywood cinema tends to neglect this wider impact on world cinema while, conversely, scholarship on world cinema tends to neglect the transnational influence of Hollywood. The central argument of this book is that we need to address this interrelationship in order to better interrogate the complex cultural dynamics underpinning the transnational circulation of cinema. Theories of globalisation often position American culture as a hegemonic global force which dominates over local traditions, yet there is a need for an understanding of what precisely happens when these American products are appropriated and reworked by other cultures. There are well-established traditions of adapting Hollywood cinema in the film industries of Turkey, India, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Mexico, Italy, Brazil, Indonesia, Nigeria and Japan, among others – in fact, it is my contention that this process has taken place in nearly every country that has had a thriving popular film industry in the twentieth century. As Ana M. López has argued, ‘Hollywood’s international presence has had acute effects not only on Hollywood itself – upon its production and textual practices – but on all other filmmaking nations’ (2000: 419). From the Nigerian remake of
Titanic (1997) titled Masoyiyata (My Beloved, 2003) and the Indonesian reworking of The Terminator (1984) titled Pembalasan ratu pantai selatan (Revenge of the South Seas Queen, 1989), through to the Mexican version of Batwoman titled La Mujer Murcielago (The Batwoman, 1968) and the Brazilian parody of Jaws titled Bacalhau (Codfish, 1975), there is an extensive history of films produced around the world that rework elements borrowed from Hollywood. It is this phenomenon that I am terming ‘The Hollywood Meme’ – using the structuring metaphor of the ‘meme’ to investigate the numerous ways in which Hollywood cinema has been spread and adapted around the world. Yet this syncretic relationship between Hollywood and world cinema has rarely been addressed in scholarship and it is clear that we need to interrogate this further.

This is not to say that scholars of world cinema are unaware of the global presence of Hollywood. Indeed, as Lucia Nagib has argued, world cinema has often been defined explicitly in opposition to Hollywood, with various national cinemas held up as offering alternatives to the dominant American paradigm (2006: 30–1) Moreover, scholars are often making manoeuvres similar to Dipesh Chakrabarty’s celebrated strategy to provincialise Europe (2000), in that they are attempting to reframe and refocus our attention elsewhere in the globe. Hollywood is already positioned as the dominant centre within film studies scholarship more broadly, and therefore scholarship on world cinema is often underpinned by a political desire to draw attention to other industries. Bhaskar Sarkar is representative of this gesture when he asks: ‘What if Hollywood’s hegemony is strategically bracketed . . . so that non–Hollywood cultural circuits come into analytical focus?’ (2009: 36).

While I am certainly sympathetic to this desire to bring attention to other cultural circuits, the key question here is whether bracketing Hollywood’s global dominance challenges its status or simply recentres it as the unacknowledged standard. This is not a simple question to answer and I acknowledge that the approach I am taking in this book is not without its own drawbacks. To some extent, I am committing the gravest sin that a scholar of world cinema could possibly commit – I am positioning Hollywood at the centre of global film production. I can already imagine the future critiques that see this project as little more than an attempt to recentre Hollywood within discourses of world cinema. There is likely a good reason that such a project has not already been done. Moreover, I am not attempting to argue, as Jane Mills does in her recent book Loving and Hating Hollywood, that studying the exchanges between Hollywood and various national cinemas ultimately functions to decentre Hollywood (2009: xii). I acknowledge that the project I am attempting here does
position Hollywood somewhat as a centre. However, it is my contention that Hollywood is a dominant force within global film production and has had a major impact on filmmaking traditions around the world, and that despite this, the impact of Hollywood on world cinema is in fact an understudied phenomenon. Our attempts as scholars to position world cinema in opposition to Hollywood, or to strategically bracket Hollywood away from scholarship on other national cinemas, have led us to lose sight of the overlapping, intersecting nature of world cinema production. It is not enough to acknowledge Hollywood’s dominance and yet neglect the impact that it has had on world cinema – we need to interrogate what exactly happens when these Hollywood films become the source texts for films made in other national cinemas.

Furthermore, there has been a tendency when dealing with Hollywood to position it as the norm from which all other cinemas deviate – the standard against which other cinemas are defined – and therefore we require site-specific histories that interrogate exactly how Hollywood has impacted other contexts. As Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto has argued, ‘We need to put the Hollywood cinema in specific historical contexts; instead of talking about the Hollywood cinema as the norm, we must examine the specific and historically changing relations between the Hollywood cinema and other national cinemas’ (Yoshimoto 2006a: 36). This book therefore attempts to historicise the dynamics between Hollywood and other national cinemas within specific socio-historic contexts, and therefore to go beyond a conception of Hollywood as the un-interrogated standard. Indeed, it should be noted at the outset that I do not see Hollywood as simply synonymous with the district in Los Angeles that has historically been the centre of film production in America. While the term functions in many respects as a metonym for popular American cinema, I will be testing the limits of such a notion throughout this book.

Moreover, there are a number of centres of film production and I am certainly not claiming that global flows need be associated exclusively with the spread of Hollywood. As I have discussed elsewhere (Smith 2013), South Korean cinema has recently become the model for a series of Bollywood adaptations, and there is an extensive history of exchanges across a range of national film industries. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that Hollywood has had the most significant global impact of any national film industry and these processes of transnational adaptation are still very much structured by broader relations of power. Even if we want to assert that Bollywood, for example, is at least as significant a centre of film production as Hollywood, it is nevertheless the case that the Bollywood industry remakes a significant number of Hollywood films every year,
while the reverse is rarely the case. There are still power differentials shaping these cultural exchanges that we need to address and, while I am sympathetic to attempts to provincialise Hollywood, it is important that scholarship nevertheless interrogates the impact that Hollywood has had for many decades on the popular cinemas of the world.

Rather than treating world cinema as separate from, and opposed to, Hollywood, my aims are to investigate the interrelationship between Hollywood and world cinema. What happens to our understanding of Hollywood when we frame it through discourses of world cinema, and conversely, what happens to our understanding of world cinema when we frame it through its engagements with Hollywood? This book is designed both as an introduction to the global phenomenon of transnational adaptations of Hollywood, and an attempt to theorise the broader implications of this form of cross-cultural exchange. This is not an apolitical gesture. In Edward Said’s 2003 introduction to *Orientalism*, he responded to the prevailing climate of fear in post-9/11 America, and proposed that:

> Rather than the manufactured clash of civilisations, we need to concentrate on the slow working together of cultures that overlap, borrow from each other and live together in far more interesting ways than any abridged or inauthentic mode of understanding can allow. (Said 2003: xxii)

In my own small way, I hope that my research here draws attention to the processes of borrowing and exchange through which cultures adapt and live together. Opposing the essentialist positions which envision cultures as ‘pure’ and under threat of being tainted by the ‘other’, this book instead argues for a move away from models of cultural globalisation that rely upon notions of dominance and resistance to examine more closely the interstitial processes through which cultures borrow from and interact with each other.

### National and Transnational Cinemas

*The Hollywood Meme* is therefore the first book to offer a sustained examination of the unlicensed adaptations of Hollywood that appear in film industries around the world. Given that this phenomenon stretches from Hong Kong to Mexico, and from Nigeria to Brazil, this book cannot hope to cover everything, so instead it focuses specifically on three case studies: Turkey from 1970 to 1982, the Philippines from 1978 to 1994, and India from 1998 to 2010. The choice of these three national and historical contexts is significant. While I will give a lengthy explanation of the significance of each context in the introduction to their respective chapters,
it is worth briefly clarifying that each country had a highly prolific film industry within the period under consideration, and the production of transnational adaptations in particular was intensified. By examining the diverse ways in which Hollywood cinema impacted upon these three industries, the book aims to complicate prevailing models of American cultural domination and provide a more nuanced account of the politics underpinning these global flows and exchanges. Critically, the book draws attention to the overlapping processes of borrowing and exchange through which different national cinemas have interacted with American popular culture. At a time when Hollywood is becoming increasingly dominated by the Marvel and DC cinematic universes, this book draws attention to the neglected history of unlicensed films from around the world that also borrow from Hollywood franchises – from the Filipino comedy *Alyas Batman en Robin* in which Batman and the Joker sing 1950s rock and roll songs, through to the Turkish action film *3 Dev Adam* (1973) in which Captain America and Santo the Mexican wrestler team up to battle against a villainous Spider-Man.

Demonstrating how these popular cultural texts are adapted and reworked in different ways and for different purposes around the world, *The Hollywood Meme* points the way towards a more complex understanding of Hollywood’s role within the broader processes of cultural globalisation. Crucially, the book opens up a previously uncharted area of world cinema for academic study and maps out a new direction for studies of global Hollywood. Moreover, *The Hollywood Meme* proposes a new comparative model of adaptation that offers us a critical lens through which to analyse the ways in which American cultural texts evolve and mutate as they are adapted across national borders.

This responds to a broader issue within the study of national cinemas. In his work on Japanese cinema, Darrell William Davis has identified three models of national cinema studies that I think prove instructive for this broader project. First, he identifies the ‘Reflectionist: Cinema as Mirror’ model in which ‘critics look for what is special about a national cinema, its specificity, through the lens of national specificity’ (2001: 63). In other words, this method of film analysis is framed through the ways in which a film is said to reflect the national culture in which it was produced. Centrally, this kind of culturalist reading seeks out the various ways in which a film might be said to reflect the local cultural context and treats national cultures as ultimately discrete and bounded. In contrast to this model, an alternative formulation, which Davis titles ‘Dialogic: Cinema as Interaction’, understands national cinema primarily through its interactions with other national cinemas. Moving away from a conception
of cinema as directly reflecting national context, such a model focuses on the relations between industries – often positioning them in a dialectic relationship. While each of these models has the potential to produce invaluable scholarship on national cinema, it is my contention that they tend to treat national cultures as separate and distinct, thereby neglecting the more porous nature of cultural production under the influence of globalisation.

The third model that Davis proposes, and the one that is closest to the position I take in this book, is ‘Contamination: Film as Syncretism’. This model is underpinned by the idea that national culture is ‘fabricated piecemeal out of various available bits and fragments, often from outside national borders’ (Davis 2001: 65). Rather than seeking out the ways in which a film reflects some essentialised aspect of its national culture, or responds in a dialectical fashion to another discrete national culture, this model instead positions all culture as inherently hybrid and focuses on the ways in which cultures intersect and borrow from each other. Through a comparative methodology that I will outline in Chapter 1, this book follows this model of film as syncretism in order to investigate the permeable nature of national culture more broadly.

To a certain extent, then, this book is attempting to answer the call Paul Willemen made in a series of articles in the early 2000s for a comparative film studies (2002, 2005, 2013a, 2013b). Frustrated by the ways in which national cinema histories have tended to reproduce romantically nationalist visions of a unified national culture, Willemen proposes that, ‘If we jettison the inherited framework of film history that locates a film at the intersection between “universal values” and “nationalist” specificity . . . it becomes possible to reflect on the ways in which the encounter between “national” histories and the capitalist-industrial production of culture intersect’ (2002: 168). Willemen is very careful to avoid equating this ‘capitalist-industrial’ production mode with Hollywood and while I agree with him that we need to avoid ‘falling into the trap of equating American (Western) cultural forms with the forms generated by the industrialization of culture itself’ (2005: 103), I nevertheless think that it is important that we do address the impact of the historical dominance that Hollywood has had. Moreover, while Willemen acknowledges that it is ‘possible that, in some cases, the Hollywood forms have been taken as the norm to be emulated’, he argues that this ‘mainly applies to films made for export, that is to say, films expressly produced to try and reap profits in the US market’ (2005: 103). As I will demonstrate in this book, this is not an accurate summation of Hollywood’s impact on world cinema – indeed, Hollywood films more often function as the model for films produced
for the local, domestic market and these films are rarely exported to the US market. So, while this project is undoubtedly indebted to Willemen’s pioneering model for a comparative film studies, I believe that my findings here complicate some of the hypotheses he posited that such a model would discover.

Ultimately, therefore, The Hollywood Meme fills a pressing need for an analysis of international film production that engages directly with Hollywood’s relationship to world cinema. As Tom O’Regan has argued, ‘it is in cinema’s nature to cross cultural borders within and between nations [and] to circulate across heterogeneous linguistic and social formations’ (2004: 262). ‘The challenge is to be able to discuss these border crossings in a way that finds points of difference without exacerbating national stereotypes and finds points of similarity without losing recognition of cultural specificity. In the words of Sonia Livingstone, ‘comparative research is challenging because one must balance and interpret similarities and differences while avoiding banalities and stereotypes . . . [and] what is really at stake is a series of epistemological issues which at their most stark pose researchers with the contradiction between the apparent impossibility and the urgent necessity of comparison’ (2003: 491).

To balance national specificity with the broader comparative project I am undertaking, I have structured this book into four sections. The first chapter, ‘Tracing The Hollywood Meme: Towards a Comparative Model of Transnational Adaptation’, describes the worldwide circulation of US film and television and outlines an understanding of global Hollywood that goes beyond existing models of dominance and resistance. Arguing that such processes are significantly context-dependent, the chapter introduces an approach to globalisation that compares the heterogeneous ways in which American popular culture is made use of around the world, and analyses how different strategies are shaped by their respective socio-historic contexts. Specifically, the chapter considers the factors at play within the export of Hollywood cinema and looks at the regulatory frameworks which intercede in the transnational circulation of media. Developing Ien Ang’s argument that local responses need to be taken into account if we are to understand the contradictory dynamics of today’s global culture – an argument centred on film reception but here applied to film adaptation – the chapter proposes a comparative model that is attentive to the underlying disjunctures and ambivalences within processes of transnational adaptation.

The second chapter, ‘Hollywood and the Popular Cinema of Turkey’, then uses this model to investigate the boom in adaptations of American popular culture within 1970s Yeşilçam cinema in Turkey. Focusing on
films produced between the military coup of 1971 and the subsequent decline of the industry in the early 1980s, the chapter identifies the conditions which helped stimulate a booming industry with an annual production that reached over 300 movies in 1972 yet was so reliant on appropriated material that almost 90 per cent of these movies were remakes, adaptations or spin-offs. The chapter then examines four representative case studies – 3 Dev Adam, Turist Ömer Uzay Yolunda, Şeytan and Dünyayı Kurtaran Adam – and uses them to mark out certain indicative tendencies that contribute to our broader understanding of the factors shaping specific forms of transnational adaptation.

The third chapter, ‘Hollywood and the Popular Cinema of the Philippines’, builds on the Turkish case study by comparing this to a later production boom in the popular industry of the Philippines in 1978–94. Specifically looking at titles produced subsequent to the Lumauig Bill in 1978, a period in which the cinema of the Philippines began to reach out to an international audience both through the development of new institutions like the Film Academy of the Philippines and through an influx of foreign investment and co-production initiatives, the chapter considers the specific forms of transnational adaptation in this former US colony. Starting with a brief historical account of the development of the film industry, the chapter attends to the considerable tensions and debates surrounding the notion of a ‘popular’ film industry in the Philippines, and its relationship with the Marcos regime. Developing the comparative aspects of the book, the chapter then interrogates some of the broader structural factors which helped to mould the particularity of the adaptations in this country. These include the colonial history of the country, the co-production strategies with the US, and the level of US media penetration in the Philippines. Focusing on four case studies – Dynamite Johnson, For Y’ur Height Only, Alyas Batman en Robin and Darna: Ang Pagbabalik – the chapter explores the differences between transnational adaptations produced for the domestic market and those produced primarily for export, a useful contrast to Turkey where this phenomenon was largely restricted to films produced for the domestic market.

Chapter 4, ‘Hollywood and the Popular Cinema of India’, then complicates the dynamics of power in the previous sections by shifting attention to the ways in which Hollywood is adapted and reworked in an industry which rivals Hollywood’s global status: Bollywood. Starting from 10 May 1998 when official industry status was granted to the popular film industry in Mumbai, the chapter explores the factors that have shaped the specific forms of adaptation in this period such as the increasing emphasis on economic liberalisation and the rise of the Hindu right. Historicising
the relationship between Hollywood and Bollywood, the chapter attends specifically to the tensions which underlie their respective positions and explores the contextual factors surrounding what Tejaswini Ganti describes as the ‘Indianisation’ process of adaptation. Identifying some broader indicative tendencies within Bollywood cinema, and focusing on the films *Koi . . . Mil Gaya*, *Sarkar*, *Heyy Babyy*, and *Ghajini*, the chapter asserts that the forms of adaptation utilised in India are considerably different to those employed in the earlier two case studies, and using the comparative model, suggests reasons why this is the case.

Finally, the conclusion brings together the outcomes of each of the case studies in order to suggest some of the predominant tendencies in the transnational adaptation of Hollywood. Given that the book as a whole explores the diverse forms of adaptation in the popular film industries of Turkey, Philippines and India, this chapter offers some conclusions as to the factors which shape the different forms of adaptation encountered in each case, such as the audience awareness of US media, the enforcement of global copyright law and the relative presence of Hollywood studios within the local industry. Ultimately, it will reflect on the utility of the comparative model for studying transnational adaptations and consider how this mode of study can progress in the future.