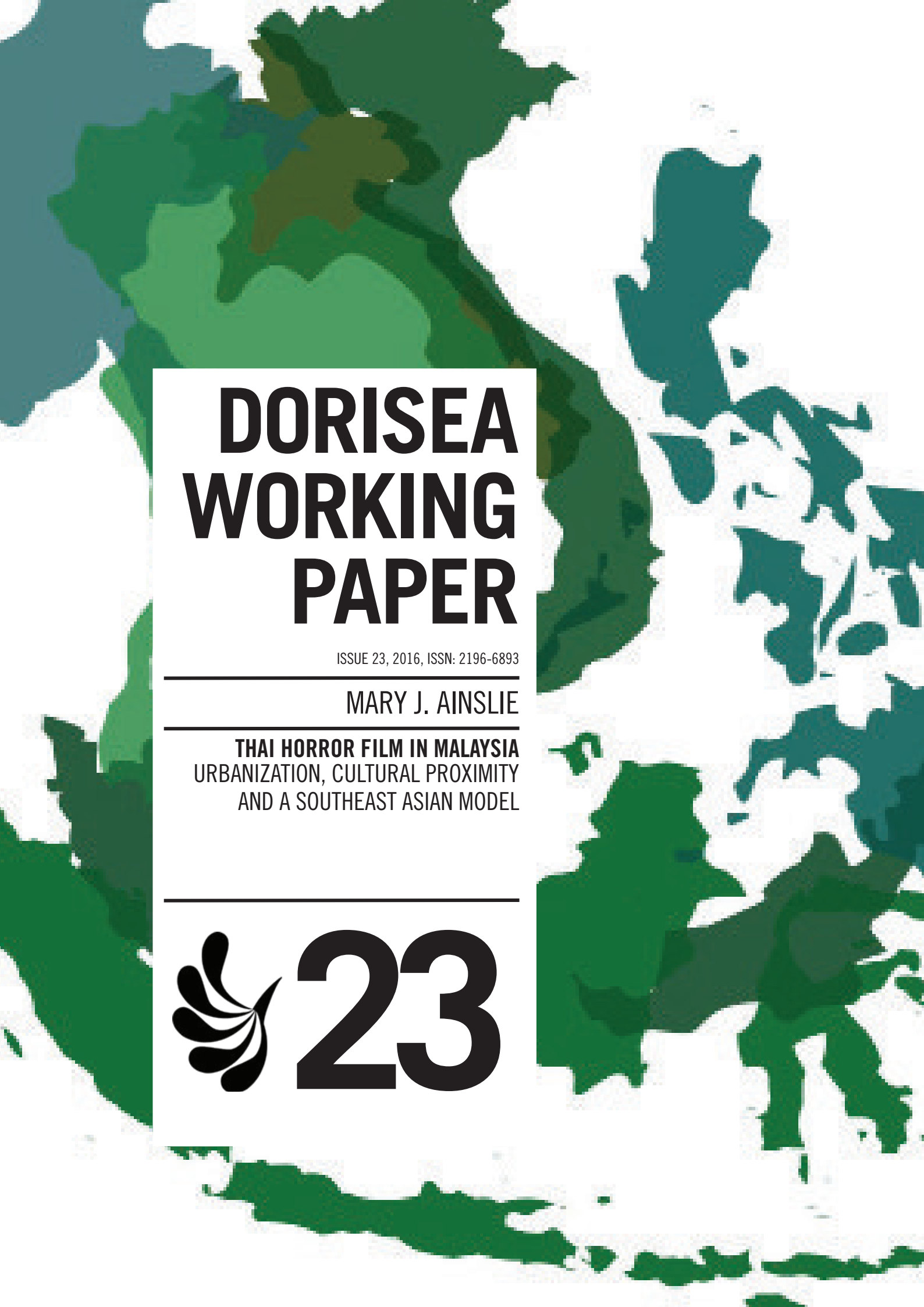

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MARY J. AINSLIE

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URBANIZATION, CULTURAL PROXIMITY AND A SOUTHEAST ASIAN MODEL

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DORISEA
Dynamics of Religion
in Southeast Asia

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THAI HORROR FILM IN MALAYSIA: URBANIZATION, CULTURAL PROXIMITY AND A SOUTHEAST ASIAN MODEL

ABSTRACT This article examines Thai horror films as the most frequent and evident representation of Thai cultural products in Malaysia. It outlines the rise of Thai horror cinema internationally and its cultivation of a pan-Asian horrific image of urbanization that allows it to travel well. Through a comparison with Malaysian horror, the paper proposes a degree of 'cultural proximity' between the horrific depictions of these two Southeast Asian industries. This similarity then points to a particularly Southeast Asian brand of the horror film that is best understood through attention to structure and genre. Despite these similarities, I also argue that in the changing and complex context of contemporary Malaysia, the 'trauma' that is given voice in Thai horror may offer the new urban consumer an alternative depiction of and engagement with Southeast Asian modernity not addressed by Malaysian horror.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, increased attention has been paid to the movement of cultural products across national borders within the Asian region. Such a development is due, at least in part, to the success of East Asian Popular culture which displaced much American cultural domination in the region. This began with Japanese cultural products in the late 1990s, and is now arguably dominated by the ubiquitous 'Korean Wave', which has received much academic attention and continues to be a source of much influence and enjoyment across Asia. With the rise and conglomeration of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Southeast Asian region has also become the subject of increasing inter-Asian cultural analysis. The study of inter-ASEAN cultural exchange has been recognized as particularly important in light of its role in creating and furthering much needed economic links, increasing cultural contact between countries that were formerly separated by the colonial powers and then influenced by strong nationalist movements.

Recent research indicates that ASEAN people feel a strong cultural connection across the region, and believe that they share key values (JWT Asia Pacific and A. T. Kearney 2013). However despite this, awareness of cultural products and brands from other ASEAN countries is still relatively low, suggesting that these are not yet circulating across the wider region and are not yet connected to a distinct image of Southeast Asian-ness (JWT Asia Pacific and A. T. Kearney 2013). Building upon this, scholars note that there are two dominant regional circuits of cultural products within Southeast Asia. Firstly, there is a northern corridor across Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and, to an extent, Myanmar. This area is largely dominated by Thai cultural products such as *lakon* soap operas. The second circuit is southern, reaching across the archipelagic region of Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei and consists of Malay-language products (Chua Beng Huat 2014; Jirattikorn 2008). The Philippines likewise appears to interject into both circuits to some extent, while Vietnam and Singapore enjoy a much closer cultural relationship to China. Alongside this, South Asian and Chinese products also circuit, largely due to the substantial Indian and Chinese diasporic communities across the region. However, there is a notable absence of Thai cultural products below the Southern Thai border and, likewise, there is no substantial presence of Malay language products north of it.

While these two circuits may otherwise seem quite distinct (with exceptions due to niche fan communities and those with their own familial connections across such borders), there is anoth-

er instance of cultural exchange within ASEAN and further across East Asia that must be added to such regional dynamics. This is the continuing popularity of Thai cinema across the region, which in its most visible and consistent form seems to comprise mainly of horror films and, to a lesser extent, romantic comedies. These continue to dominate the horrific representation of Southeast Asia internationally and cross borders over which Thai cultural products do not otherwise flow. In doing so, they may bypass and break down these two circuits.

Such is the case in Malaysia. While Thai pop music and TV-dramas are beginning to challenge the hegemony of the previous Japanese and Korean products (and are gaining increasing popularity in the northern region of Southeast Asia and in China) these do not appear to have a substantial, recognizable presence in Malaysia. Rather, it is Thai horror films which are the most frequent and evident example of Thai cultural products in Malaysia. The vast majority of Thai films released cinematically in Malaysia are horror films. Six out of seven Thai releases in the top 200 highest grossing films in Malaysia for 2013 were horror films, and five out of six in 2014. Likewise, a substantial portion of the Thai DVDs available in Malaysian stores are marketed as horror films. They outnumber both romantic comedies and even *Muay-Thai* boxing films.

Online Malaysian discussions indicate that these Thai horror films have constructed a very definite and discernible presence and reputation, something that runs contrary to the previously noted lack of awareness of ASEAN cultural products and 'brands' within this region. For instance, popular Malaysian forum www.lowyat.net—said to be Malaysia's largest online forum—has many discussion threads attesting to the significant presence and popularity of Thai horror films among Malaysian viewers.[1] In a thread entitled "What country punya horror movie gooding? (sic)" Thailand is mentioned again and again as having the best ghost stories. As one commenter put it: "Thailand has improved a lot and their horro (sic) movies are often creative and unique compared to the other countries (sic)."[2] The 2004 blockbuster *Shutter-Kòt-Dtìt-Win-Yaan/ Shutter* (dir. Banjong Pisanthanakun and Parkpoom Wongpoom 2004) is mentioned a number of times and appears to feed into a construction of Thai horror used to promote new productions. In a thread entitled "Scariest horror movie you have watched", *Shutter* is the first entry and *Program na winyan akat/Coming Soon* (dir. Sophon Sakdaphisit 2008) the second, both of which are mentioned before any American or East Asian horror films.[3] There is even a thread solely discussing recommended Thai ghost films, with commenters displaying an impressive knowledge of Thai horror films, mentioning *Shutter*, the *Long Khong* series, *Nang Nak* (dir. Nonzee Nimibutr 1999), *Coming Soon*, *Long Tor Tai/The Coffin* (dir. Ekachai Uekrongtham 2008),[4] *Faed/Alone* (dir. Banjong Pisanthanakun and Parkpoom Wongpoom 2007), *Dek Hen Pee/Colic* (dir. Patchanon Thammajira 2006), *Si Phraeng/4bia* (dir. Parkpoom Wongpoom et al. 2008), *Buppah Rahtree/Rahtree Flower of The Night* (dir. Yuthlert Sippapak 2003) and even older, more obscure films such as *303 Klua Kla Akhat/303 Fear Faith Revenge* (dir. Somching Srisupap 1998).[5] In another thread which opens by listing "top asian horror films (sic)" for Japan, South Korea and Hong Kong, the first reply moves the discussion straight to Thailand stating "I find Shutter from Thailand quite scary". The discussion then turns almost completely to Thai horror, with commenters mentioning favorite films and giving examples of scary scenes from Shutter, while one poster then states that "thailand very pro in making horror movies (sic)".[6]

In light of such success, this paper will examine the significant and continuing presence of Thai horror films in Malaysia. Despite its considerable expansion since the late 1990s, there is still very little academic analysis of Thai cinema and even less attention to the recent success of Thai cultural products across Asia. Such success speaks of the recent rise in economic prominence of Southeast Asia and ASEAN as a future economic and cultural hub. ASEAN appears to be carving out its own inter-Asian cultural flows and could potentially challenge both the traditional Western, and more recent East Asian, dominance. The paper will first address the rise of Thai horror cinema internationally, focusing on its cultivation of a pan-Asian image of urbanization which allows it to travel well. Through a comparison with Malaysian horror, I will then propose a degree of 'cultural proximity' between the horrific depictions by these two Southeast Asian industries. This points to a particularly Southeast Asian brand of the horror film, one based largely upon the effects it is concerned with eliciting. Despite these similarities, I will then argue that in the changing and complex problematic context of contemporary Malaysia, Thai films may offer the urban Malaysian consumer a depiction of Southeast Asian modernity perhaps more appropriate than that represented in the dominant incarnations of Malaysian horror.

[1] Such threads are largely in English and are written in local colloquial dialects.

[2] https://forum.lowyat.net/index.php?showtopic=2927734&hl=thai+horror

[3] https://forum.lowyat.net/index.php?showtopic=3260481&hl=thai+movie

[4] While this is actually a South Korea-Thailand-Singapore-USA coproduction, commentators notably refer to it purely as Thai, demonstrating this connection displaces any other association in both its marketing and reception.

[5] https://forum.lowyat.net/index.php?showtopic=2723109&hl

[6] https://forum.lowyat.net/topic/2123128

Any discussion of Thai-Malaysian relations inevitably points towards the 'southern issue'[7]. This dominates Thai references to and representations of Malaysia on both an academic and popular level. However, while the Thai construction of and attitude towards Malaysia is frequently analyzed through this issue, there has been little research addressing attitudes and constructions in the other direction: that is, from Malaysia towards Thailand. Indeed, this is something which becomes significantly more important given the increased movement of both people and cultural products between these two countries. While Malaysia's state relations with Thailand have been less problematic and challenging than its relations with Indonesia and Singapore, these bilateral relations remain very much under-developed (Khalid and Yacob 2012). They are also changing fast due to increased ASEAN integration under the emerging ASEAN Economic Community. Trade between the two countries is growing, with tourism from Malaysia to Thailand increased by 20 per cent from 2010 to 2011, while Thailand remains an important destination for Malaysian exports to name just two examples. This article will therefore contribute to a significantly under-researched geographical and inter-Asian cultural flow which is becoming increasingly important in the contemporary age.

THE INTERNATIONAL GROWTH AND URBANNESS OF THAI CINEMA

A study of the increased international presence of Thai horror, and Thai film in general, is likewise a study of the changes that Thai cinema has undergone since the late 1990s. These changes have made Thai cinema a viable and profitable industry that could be exported internationally, placing it very much apart from other Southeast Asian film industries and beginning to explain how these texts have come to have such a substantial presence throughout the region.

Since the late 1990s, when the so-called 'New Thai Cinema' was born, Thai film has moved away from its position as lower-class provincial entertainment to a firm fixture in Bangkok multiplexes and at festivals around the world. Through deploying lavish depictions of 'old Thailand' in high quality aesthetics, big budget productions such as *2499 Antapan Krong Muang/Daeng Bireley and the Young Gangsters* (dir. Nonzee Nimibutr 1997), *Nang Nak* and *Bang Rajan* (dir. Tanit Jitnukul 2000) were able to capitalise on the growth of cinemas in urban areas in the previous decade. In so doing, they moved Thai cinema to the more respectable swathe of urban middle-class consumers and, likewise, to international festival audiences. Horror played a notable role in this development. The 1999 ghost film *Nang Nak* was the most successful Thai film made until that point, and forged a definite turning point in the development of Thai cinema. It was also one of the first Thai films to achieve widespread international acclaim, winning twelve awards at a variety of international festivals. These new Thai films had significantly higher production values than earlier Thai horror films, which had largely catered for rural and provincial viewers outside the target audience of sophisticated Hollywood productions (Knee 2005; Ingawanij 2006; Knee and Chaiworaporn 2006).

In the contemporary age, the increased experience of Thai filmmakers and the decreasing price of film equipment enabled Thai film to become both better organized as an industry and more profitable as an enterprise (Ancuta 2011). Filmmakers now work within a well-organized, streamlined oligopoly similar to the classical Hollywood-style production system. Due to low production costs, this system is increasingly functioning as an international hub for filmmaking, with facilities often hired by foreign, notably Chinese, companies. This is evident in the formation of the major Thai film studios (many of which are conglomerations of previous smaller companies), including GMM Tai Hub (GTH), Five Star Production, Phranakorn Film, Sahamongkol Film International, and Kantana Group. Filmmakers, producers, performers and writers work under the same roof for a company also responsible for distribution.

With these developments, Thai film has arguably become the most 'international' of all Southeast Asian film industries. As it has become increasingly 'globalized' in terms of distribution, the subject matter and *mise-en-scene* of its productions have also become definitively urban. Reflecting the environment and lifestyle of its new primary audience, this depiction shifted away from both the earlier provincial village setting evident in pre-1990s productions as well as the heritage aesthetic that had kick-started the late-90s industry. Productions began to represent and engage with the lives of urban

[7] This refers to the southern Thai provinces which border Malaysia. In contrast to the majority of Thailand, provinces such as Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat are ethnically Malay and Muslim, putting them in a difficult position next to the dominant state-defined Buddhist-led discourses of *Thainess*. There is a small separatist movement which wishes to break away from Thailand and many acts of violence have been committed in response to an, at times, quite violent process of suppression of internal cultural difference. While this situation is complex, scholars understand economic disadvantage to be a major motivator of such a movement and continuing anger at perceived discrimination and human rights abuses). Notably, while references to Malaysia from within Thailand (from both popular and academic sources) focus overwhelmingly on this situation and often blame Malaysia for instigating or supporting potential secession, there is little reference to or interest in what is considered an internal Thai problem from within Malaysia itself other than warning potential tourists when violence flares up.

professional characters, their lifestyles and their environment, reflecting what had now become—through the network of urban multiplexes—the primary audience of Thai cinema. Indeed, the changes on-screen reflect the economic changes that Thailand and other East and Southeast Asian countries have experienced since the late 1990s. Most notably, these changes include the movement of rural workers to the cities, the rise of suburban living and the rise of the Thai middle-classes who have become the new urban elite (Siriyuvasak 2000).

As well as representing general social changes within Thailand and the Asia region, the shift in Thai cultural products to address and depict the urban professional was also part of the successful incorporation of East Asian aesthetics into Thai cultural products. High quality East Asian products had long targeted the urban, middle-class Asian consumer. These products had travelled well due to the growing economic proximity of the East and Southeast Asian nations. Many such products are part of the much studied 'Korean Wave': the exporting of Korean TV dramas, films, pop music and stars throughout the region during the mid-to-late 2000s which replaced the previously dominant Japanese cultural products. Although such products may be most well-known through historical dramas such as the phenomenally successful *Dae Jung Geum/Jewel in the Palace* (dir. Lee Byung-hoon 2003-2004) series, these texts also place a strong emphasis on depicting metropolitan life, an urban *mise-en-scene* of coffee shops and offices as well as professionally competitive characters and, most significantly perhaps, the depiction of a new metrosexualized Asian masculinity which has led to much analysis of changing masculine and feminine depictions across East and Southeast Asia (see Thu Ha Ngo (2014) for more discussion of this). Likewise, Thai cultural products have also changed to depict such subject matter in terms of plots and *mise-en-scene*.[8]

Notably, this change in depiction is most evident in Thai horror movies and romantic comedies, the contemporary incarnation of which are notably urban-based and deal with issues facing city residents. Romantic comedies such as *30+ Soht On Sale/30+ Single On Sale* (dir. Puttipong Pormsaka Na-Sakonnakorn 2011), *ATM: Er Rak Error/ATM* (dir. Mez Tharatorn 2012) and *Bangkok Traffic Love Story/Rot Fai Fa Ma Ha Na Thoe* (dir. Adisorn Tresirikasem 2009) are set largely within an urban city environment (most often Bangkok) and begin to incorporate urban-based issues into their depiction. In particular we see a concentration on the new urban professional young woman who is sexually active, goes on many dates with men and struggles to make relationships work while searching for a partner who is faithful, considerate, and compatible. Large parts of the films take place in the workplace, with the heroine struggling to hold down a full time job and trying to succeed in the business world.

As a genre and a marketing label, Thai horror has also carved out a highly successful regional market and international presence. These films are advertised through their filmmakers' and studios' connection to previous Thai horror films—as shown in the international posters for *4bia* and *The Swimmers*. This demonstrates how since the birth of New Thai cinema, Thai horror has cultivated a recognizable and successful image through which it can promote future productions (figure 1, figure 2).

Figure 1. International poster for 4bia

Figure 2. International Poster for Fak Wai Nai Kai Ther/The Swimmers

[8] This impact can be very direct one: the popular Thai films *Kuan Meun Ho/Hello Stranger* (dir. Banjong Pisanthanakun 2010) and *Love Sud Jin Fin Sugoi* (dir. Thanwarin Sukhaphisit 2014) both depict protagonists who are obsessed with East Asian pop culture, even travelling to South Korea and Japan respectively to indulge their fantasies. This indicates that Southeast Asian industries and viewers are not passive receivers but are actively responding to and incorporating such signifiers into their own environment.

This also demonstrates how Thai horror has notably changed from the heritage discourses and the 'localized' village-based comedies of the late 1990s to an urban model which fits alongside recognizable East Asian horror films. High-grossing horror films such as *Shutter*, *Buppah Rahtree*, *Body...Sop 19/Body* (dir. Paween Purijitpanya 2007), *Laddaland* (dir. Sopon Sukdapisit 2011), *Cheuat Gon Chim/Meat Grinder* (dir. Tiwa Moeithaisong 2009), *4bia* and *Alone* are different to the pre-1990s depiction of horror and the 1999 heritage horror film *Nang Nak*. Rather, these newer productions are notably urban in both their subject matter and *mise-en-scene*. Similar to the contemporary romantic comedies they are set in urban areas and address issues relevant to the city-dweller: protagonists live in apartment blocks, must work or study hard and worry about how to pay the rent. The subject matter also addresses the inherent frustrations and unfairness of city life and, in particular, the hidden underside of exploitation and oppression that horror can address so well.

Recent theorists have specifically analyzed horror as a genre through a branch of theory known as Trauma Studies. Scholars such as Blake (2008) and Lowenstein (2005) seek to explain Thai horror's focus on the difficulties of urban existence. They argue that due to their disturbing and disruptive nature, horror texts are able to engage with traumatic events that otherwise are suppressed. For viewers then, the texts function as a means to mediate traumatic social events and upheaval. For instance, Blake posits that horror films are able to engage with and reopen 'wounds' that otherwise remain sealed and suppressed by the process of 'nation building'. Nation building, she argues, seeks to erase any conflict and resistance in its quest for homogeneity and conformity. One recurring theme within contemporary Thai horror is the return of an abused young woman to take revenge on her male tormentors, a characteristic that can be attributed to the abuse suffered by Thai women, rural dwellers and the lower-classes as part of the Thai economic boom and bust in the late 20th century (Ainslie 2011). This is easily recognized in films such as *Buppah Rahtree*, *Shutter*, *Body* and *Fak Wai Nai Kai Ther/The Swimmers* (dir. Sopon Sukdapisit 2014). However, Ancuta also notes another shift in the development of Thai horror. She argues that contemporary productions reconfigure the formula of the Thai ghost story to incorporate and respond to the difficulties and contradictions of being part of the growing middle-class in contemporary Thailand. In its depiction of Thai suburbia and the middle-classes, a film such as *Laddaland* brings horror much closer to home, with characters trapped within "the temporality of a dream of social mobility and economic success" (Ancuta 2014). Like *Laddaland*, a number of recent Thai horror films engage with the difficulties of urban and middle-class protagonists. These include *The Swimmers*, *4bia*, *OT (Overtime)* (dir. Issara Nadee 2014), *Rak Luang Lon/The Couple* (dir. Talent 1 Team 2014), *Kon Hen Pee/The Eyes diary* (dir. Chukiat Sakwirakun 2014), and *Chit sam phat/The Second Sight* (dir. Pornchai Hongrattanaporn 2013).

Ancuta's argument also fits films such Banjong Pisanthanakun's blockbuster *Phi Mak Phra Khanong/Pee Mak* (2013)—which tells a well-known and often remade ghost story—despite the fact the film features a rural scenario and situation. It is the long hair and perfect skin of Banjong's characters which attaches them to a modern, urban Asian aesthetic and distances them from other, older versions of the story. This contrast with the older ascetic is most evident when compared to Nonzee Nimibutr's 1999 heritage film, with its *mise-en-scene* of desolate rice-paddies and characters sporting the blackened teeth and helmet hairstyle of Thai peasants.

Similar to romantic comedies, these urban Thai horror films also display stylistic influence from East Asia which can be traced to internationally successful films such as *Ringu/Ring* (dir. Hideo Nakata 1998), *Ju-on: The Grudge* (dir. Takashi Shimizu 2002) and *Janghwa*, *Hongryeon/A Tale of Two Sisters* (dir. Kim Jee-woon 2003). Indeed, these influences are particularly evident in the 2004 blockbuster success *Shutter*, which is lauded today (both inside and outside Thailand) as the 'scariest' Thai movie ever. With its long-black-haired and white-faced vengeful female ghost, the film fits the East Asian horror aesthetic which has had a substantial influence on Thai horror (Ancuta 2014). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the film is also often mistaken for a Japanese film by non-Asian viewers.

THAI HORROR IN MALAYSIA—CULTURAL PROXIMITY AND A SOUTHEAST ASIA MODEL OF HORROR?

While Thai films can travel well due to their international image of Asian modernity and urban life, it is Thai horror which is most visible in Malaysia. Studying horror films in Thailand and Malaysia indicates that there are particular commonalities between these products which make Thai horror films especially appropriate to a Southeast Asian, and specifically Malaysian, context. Certainly, both the high quality 'global' aesthetics and the pan-Asian urbanness of Thai horror seem particularly appropriate to the social experiences of fellow ASEAN nations such as Malaysia. As in Thailand, the urban Malaysian population has increased substantially since the 1970s, growing particularly rapidly throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The rate of urbanization and consumption is high, while the population is relatively young and well-connected media-wise (JWT Asia Pacific and A. T. Kearney 2013). Moreover, Ma-

laysia boasts a thriving and successful film industry which has grown significantly in the 21st century, and in which horror films are especially popular. Writing in 2012, the *Free Malaysia Today* website stated that

> *"Three of Malaysia's six top-grossing films are fright flicks made in the past two years, and the genre made up more than a third of domestic movies in 2011".*[9]

While such figures are difficult to verify, the national success of Malaysian horror films is impressive.

In achieving major box office success and winning several awards, the 2004 production *Pontianak Harum Sundal Malam/Fragrant Night Vampire* (dir. Shuhaimi Baba 2004)—which followed a murdered woman seeking revenge as a Pontianak ghost/spirit—was seen as ushering in a 'new era' for Malaysian horror. Since then the success of the horror film has continued to grow. The 2007 production *Jangan Pandang Belakang* (dir. Ahmad Idham 2007) held the record for the highest-grossing Malaysian film for three years. *Congkak* (dir. Ahmad Idham 2008) did similarly well, reaching number 30 on the 2008 box office chart and, notably, out-grossing *Twilight* (dir. Catherine Hardwicke 2008). Capitalising on the success of these two films, director Ahmad Idham then released *Jangan Pandang Belakang Congkak/Don't look back, Congkak* (Ahmad Idham, 2009). The film, a comedy-horror-spoof of the two films became the highest grossing Malaysian film ever. In 2010 *Hantu kak limah balik rumah/Kak Limah's Ghost Has Gone Home* (dir. Mamat Khalid 2010), a sequel to the smaller *Zombi kampung Pisang/Zombies from Banana Village* (2008), won several Malaysian awards and is included in lists of the top ten highest grossing Malaysian films ever. *Ngangkung* (dir. Ismail Bob Hasim 2010) was the highest grossing film of 2010, while *Hantu Bonceng* (dir. Ahmad Idham 2011) was Malaysia's highest grossing horror movie until that point, and its third highest grossing film overall. *Khurafat: Perjanjian syaitan* (dir. Syamsul Yusof 2011), which tells the story of a community practicing black magic for their own gain, was also very successful. The popularity of horror is such that it is also deliberately used to garner high box office takings. Shariman notes how horror films are now a particularly important source of revenue in the Malaysian film industry:

> *"Even a poorly made horror movie can make lots of money if properly promoted. One good example was the recent low-budget Momok The Movie. It made RM2.1 million [approx. 600,000USD]".*[10]

Close analysis indicates that there is a possible degree of 'cultural proximity' between Thai and Malaysian horror films. 'Cultural proximity' is a complex and controversial concept often used to explain the success of the Korean Wave across East Asia. Scholars point to the shared Confucian values, urban setting and Pan-Asian depictions in these texts, all of which are common to East Asian societies (which is the overwhelming market for these products) as a significant part of their pan-Asian appeal. However, others indicate that such conclusions do not account for the attraction of 'difference' within this equation or the popularity of such products across other more culturally and geographically distant nations. The application of this concept to Southeast Asia is likewise complex: Southeast Asianness does not yet constitute a popular or political category through which a cultural representation can be constructed. Yet close analysis of Thai and Malaysian horror films indicates that both models of horror contain markedly similar depictions of the supernatural. As such, they begin to suggest a possible framework for the constitution of a Southeast Asian model of horror, one that is based largely upon structure and genre.

Certainly, the *mise-en-scene* and subject matter of successful Thai and Malaysian horror films is decidedly Southeast Asian, with tropical foliage, beaches, wet markets, motorbikes, street vendors and characters wearing loose-fitting clothing and sandals. These function as signifiers of everyday life, even when such productions are decidedly urban-based. Moreover, Thai and Malaysian horror films contain depictions of the supernatural which are in keeping with belief systems in both countries. These depictions may be representative of the wider cultural position and development of the supernatural in the region. Beliefs in various animistic spirits and their supernatural powers are common across Southeast Asia, and indeed there are a number of shared characteristics across Malaysia and Thailand in terms of both the spirits and their social effects. In each country, local spirits which are familiar and recognizable across the country are often the protagonists in the films. In Malaysia, numerous horror films depict Hantu and Pontianak Malay spirits, while Thai films such as *Nang Nak* (dir. Nonzee Nimibutr 1999), *Krasue Valentine/Ghost of Valentine* (dir. Yuthlert Sippapak 2006) and *Baan Phii Pop 2008* (dir. Bunharn Taitanabul 2008) also depict similar local Thai spirits and supernatural beings. Such spirits notably exist alongside dominant Islamic and Buddhist beliefs in each country, with religious figures and places of worship featuring significantly as characters try to rid themselves of these beings. While Thai films such as *Shutter* and *Nang Nak* portray Buddhist monks and their chants to pacify spirits, Malaysian films such as *Jangan Pandang Belakang* and *Hantu Bonceng* use Is-

[9] http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2012/03/21/horror-films-rise-from-the-dead-in-malaysia/

[10] http://malaysiacinema.blogspot.com/

lamic holy men for exorcisms and have protagonists chant verses from the Quran for protection.

Rather than seeking similarity through depictions of spirits, which have changed radically over the decades and often have very different social functions in films, the most concrete example of cultural proximity seems evident in the growth of the popular sub-genre 'horror-comedy' in both countries. In Malaysia, films such as *Hantu Bonceng*, *Ngangkung* and *Hantu Kak Limah Balik Rumah* include many instances of physical slapstick comedy, often mixing these with graphic horror. Filmmaker Shuhaimi Baba argues this sub-genre makes Malaysian horror somewhat distinctive:

> *"Our local horror films are mainly comedy horrors anyway... Real horror films don't do well at the Malaysian box office."*[11]

While it may have derogatory connotations, this distinction between Malaysian horror and what Baba calls 'real horror' suggests that filmmakers recognize this as a significant characteristic of Malaysian horror. In Thai cinema, this combination tends to be most evident in productions that do not travel widely outside of the country and which still depict rural village life, such as *Wor Mah Ba Mahasanook* (dir. Bunjong Sinthanamongkolkul 2008) and *Baan Phii Pop 2008*. Yet high-grossing films such as *Buppah Rahtree*, *Khun krabii hiiroh/Sars Wars* (dir. Taweewat Wantha 2004), *Mo 6/5 pak ma tha phi/ Make Me Shudder* (dir. Poj Arnon 2013), *Mathayom pak ma tha Mae Nak* (dir. Poj Arnon 2014) and *Pee Mak*, all of which have been successful at the Malaysian box office, can also be described as horror-comedy. Even Shutter, a film which seems to leave 'local' characteristics behind in its decidedly East Asian *mise-en-scene* still contains a surprising scene depicting a ladyboy joking about sex and defecation. This indicates how comedy can be inserted liberally within the genre, even when films may seem to have moved beyond a Southeast Asian aesthetic.

Further connecting these two styles of filmmaking, comments on Malaysian film blogs about *Pee-Mak* (which was extremely successful in Malaysia) laud the film's mix of comedy and horror:

> *"It's quite impressive how they mesh the horror and romantic comedy genres in a movie. They use the story of Nang Nak (a Thai tale of horror) as the base of the horror part while the buffoonery of Nak's four best friends are the core of comedy. Every scene in the movie is so damn funny."*[12]

Such an emphasis problematizes the existence of horror as a genre in Southeast Asia, or at least horror as defined by both the Euro-American and East Asian models. These models typically focus on suspense structures and clearly distinguish horror from other genres through their concentration on generating the emotional effects of fear and disgust (Carroll 1990). Neale posits that answering much of the confusion and dispute over genre as a term and set of categories requires

> *"(...) thinking of genres as ubiquitous, multifaceted phenomena rather than as one-dimensional entities to be found only within the realms of Hollywood cinema or of commercial popular culture." (Neale 2000, 28)*

This observation is particularly appropriate when considering both the function and composition of horror films in Southeast Asia. The region may represent a new dimension to the horror film, examination of which, as Blake argues, can tell us a great deal about the culture from which such arguments or readings emerged (2008, 6).

Indeed, studying the historical development of entertainment within this region may offer an example of and source for the proliferation of horror-comedy in both nations. Ironically, it may be the diversity of the region itself that is the main characteristic of living in Southeast Asia. Like many of the ASEAN nations, Thailand and Malaysia are divided by borders which are still relatively recent. Both countries themselves are made up of diverse ethnic groups, all of which possess their own distinct languages, cultures, and religions which have changed and blended over time. In its early development, filmmaking across the region was faced with the problem of overcoming internal differences and bridging cultural barriers in order to become financially viable, especially in an unfunded and then economically unstable industry. Visual entertainment adapted to cater for the many diverse consumers within these nations. Films from the region can therefore often be distinguished by characteristics such as the existence of a 'blended' narrative which incorporates elements from many different genres within a single text, and an increased emphasis upon visual display and 'excess' as a source of stimulation. That is, characteristics associated with the horror genre are typically mixed with elements from traditional forms of entertainment throughout the region such as slapstick comedy, romance, action and other similarly visceral genres. Such characteristics are able to bridge linguistic and cultural barriers and overcome divisions that may otherwise problematize wide appeal in diverse nations. They also function well in rowdy upcountry communal viewing scenarios which do not engender the close relationship between the viewer and text that is part of following a complex

[11] https://sg.news.yahoo.com/malaysian-horror-controversy-094400054.html
[12] http://komplikasiduniawi.blogspot.com/2013/07/pee-mak.html

suspense-based narrative.[13] This blended narrative and its emphasis on excess is particularly evident in 'horror-comedies' which consistently meld graphic horror and slapstick comedy. Indeed, a discernible Southeast Asian model of horror which stretches across the two countries may have emerged which helps explain the particular success of Thai horror in Malaysia.

DIFFERENCE AS ATTRACTION

Along with a degree of 'cultural proximity', the success of Thai horror is may also be aided by its difference to local Malaysian horror films. Despite the similar historical context and economic experience in both countries, the social depictions and subject matter of high-grossing Malaysian horror films is very different to that of popular Thai horror films. Close examination and comparison suggests that Thai horror may offer an alternative depiction of Southeast Asia for viewers who are perhaps not adequately represented by the depictions which dominate Malaysian horror.

In contrast to the international and pan-Asian depictions of Thai horror, many high grossing Malaysian horror films seem to be significantly less 'international' in subject matter, and more 'localized' in the depiction of a particular social group and situation. These films do not construct the same internationalized and pan-Asian image of urban modernity we see in Thai horror films and, in keeping with its 'local' depictions, do not have an established presence beyond Indonesia, Brunei, Philippines and Singapore (the latter in which it caters largely to the Malay community and the former two in which it can rely upon linguistic and cultural similarities in a similar way to the relationship between Thailand, Laos and Cambodia). It is difficult to find Malaysian films on the European and American DVD racks which Thai cinema has found a place on, and few festivals host Malaysian films beyond the niche independent and art cinema from celebrated auteurs such as the late Yasmin Ahmad.

While Malaysian horror films are not entirely set in rural areas, the depiction of distinct rural and urban areas is a less dominant theme. Moreover, the audience for the films is not split between rural and urban viewers in the way it is for Thai cinema. Indeed, the definition and understanding of what constitutes 'urban' in Malaysia is quite different to Thailand, and may explain the differences between filmic depictions from the nations. Unlike Thailand, the Malaysian population is not concentrated within one or two urban centers, but instead is much more evenly distributed spatially across the country, with smaller urban towns scattered around territories such as Selangor and Johor (Jaafar 2004). Notably, such towns are well-connected (by road) to city centers, and many citizens travel to cities such as Kuala Lumpur for work or to visit malls at the weekend. Urban amenities, such as cinemas, are also much more accessible to the general population (many of whom live in situations that could be called suburban rather than urban), and are more spread across the states. In contrast, Thai cinemas and their audiences are overwhelmingly concentrated within cities such as Bangkok (Ancuta 2011), explaining the very definite urban nature of high-grossing Thai horror productions.

In keeping with its wider audience, Malaysian horror films tend to place less importance on distinguishing between rural and urban contexts. As such, these films are often set simultaneously within these different environments, with characters expressing familiarity with both. Indeed, there is very little overt reference to the stresses of city living, something referenced with abundance in Thai films. Malaysian films appear able to depict *kampung* (village) life and a suburban environment without constructing it as a central politicized point as it is in so many Thai horror films. Films are often situated in or make heavy reference to villages far away from urban centers, as well as to suburban areas on the fringes of cities. This is most evident in posters and DVD covers for high-grossing films such as *Hantu Kak Limah Balik Rumah* (figure 3), *Ngangkung* (figure 4) and *Hantu Bonceng* (figure 5), which contrast markedly with the earlier Thai images in figures 1 and 2. Notably, *Hantu Bonceng* depicts the iconic Petronas towers in the background, indicating the protagonist's suburban status on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur.

Figure 3: Hantu Kak Limah Balik Rumah

[13] While Thai cinema may seem to have left such a context far behind in its urban-audience and multiplexes, this informal viewing context still continues. This is evidenced by the amount of talking, eating and walking around that still takes placed in an urban Thai cinema.

Figure 4: Ngangkung

Figure 5: Hantu Bonceng

If, as Trauma Studies theorists suggest, horror functions to mediate and engage with suppressed traumatic social events and upheaval, then Malaysian horror would seem to be engaging primarily with the issues and contradictions associated with contemporary village life and community. A common theme in films is defeating threats to a community and maintaining the status quo, thereby reaffirming community and traditional ideas against the increasing fragmentation associated with the urbanization of Malaysia and, in particular, the Malay community. The successful 2010 comedy-horror *Hantu kak limah balik rumah*, set in the village Kampung Pisang, focuses its protagonist Husin's attempts to find out what happened to his neighbor on his return to his village after working in Singapore. Such a depiction contrasts with recent Thai horror films in which urban and rural life are often separated, with action taking place purely within one without much depiction of or reference to the other (unless this movement is a specific part of the plot as in *Shutter*). That is to say, as I suggested above, that the 'wounds' addressed in Thai cinema are almost exclusively associated with the pressures of existing in urban middle-class Thailand and so are associated strongly with modernity.

This association of Malaysian horror films within the depiction of rural areas is also evident in critiques from Malaysian authorities, who seem to interpret them as somehow low in quality due to their 'localized' depiction. Former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, who remains a highly influential figure, criticized Malaysian horror films in 2011 when asked about a recent instance of hysteria amongst a group of female students. Mahathir described the depiction of ghosts and spirits in Malaysian films as 'counter-productive' to building a society predicated upon science, suggesting that there is something 'backwards' about films set in a rural context which engage with traditional spirits and beliefs. Norman Yusoff relates Mahathir's concerns to his modernization policy, arguing that horror films do not adhere to and even potentially undermine the 'nation-building' values that Mahathir wishes to see as dominant (Yusoff 2012). Yusoff interprets this as the recognition of the potential of Malaysian horror films to critique. However, it is difficult to detect such a critique given the subject matter of the films themselves lacks the overt engagement with urban lifestyles and pressures typical of Thai films. Nonetheless, these films certainly reinforce suburban and rural life in a nation which emphasizes urbanization as part of a modernizing forward direction, and may indeed provide relief from official modernization discourses.

Aside from the lack of focus on urban settings and issues, the dominant ethnic and cultural depictions of Malaysian horror may also explain the popularity of the Pan-Asian and internationalized depictions of Thai horror. In the multi-racial nation of Malaysia, successful contemporary Malaysian horror films overwhelmingly concentrate on what Zulkifli et al. (2012) refer to as 'Malay-centric' issues.[14]

> *"After nearly eight (8) decades, the Malaysian horror movies largely still maintain its Malay-centric which evidence in the present of Malay language, characters and narratives despites being a multi-racial and multi-cultural society (sic)." (Zulkifli et al. 2012, 175)*

This Malay-centric focus makes such texts problematic in terms of the image they construct of Malaysia. These texts potentially exclude those who may be economically and ethnically removed from Malay majority. For the large, diverse and increasingly affluent urban population of Malaysia, these staple Malay *kampung* depictions are perhaps not so relevant and, alongside the pan-Asianness of imported products, may appear old-fashioned. Furthermore, a large percentage of the urban population are not Malay. These urban viewers do not

[14] Around 60 percent of citizens in Malaysia are of Malay ethnicity, with the other 40 percent consisting mostly of Indian and Chinese populations.

live in rural *kampungs* or suburban communities. Instead, they are more likely to be affected by the complex pressures of urban middle-class-living in the condos and gated-communities represented in Thai horror films.

Indeed, online accounts indicate that some consumers are embarrassed by Malaysian horror. In making comparisons to Thai cinema, some viewers express frustration at what they see as the inferior and less advanced nature of Malaysian film. Malaysian IMDB reviews of the 2010 film *Hantu kak limah balik rumah* are split between lauding the 'localized' nature of this film (particularly its jokes) and also expressing anger at the low-budget, low-quality special-effects which seem to embarrass some viewers.[15] In a thread on lowyat.net discussing the best country for horror movies, one commenter referring to Malaysian horror films states:

> *"There are still some decent ones but most of them are just stupid horror comedic/romantic types with cheesy scripts and poor quality directors. Pontianak Harum SM had some great story despite mediocre scare factor, Jangam Pandang Belakang kind of a big change in our horror industry with its good use of sound effect and gloomy scenes, after that, its all rehashes of the same thing (sic)".*[16]

In a 2008 review of the historical fantasy *Puen yai jom salad/Queens of Langkasuka* (dir. Nonzee Nimibutr 2008),[17] a Malaysian blogger directly contrasts the Thai and Malaysian industries, expressing frustration as well as anger at the state of the Malaysian film industry:

> *"Sadly it is not a Malaysian movie—it is a Thai movie… When will we be able to produce an epic like this? No, please do not compare this movie with Putri Gunung Ledang as doing so would insult the Langkasuka movie. Sad that we are more interested in trying to make movies about drifting automobiles and mutant human cicaks, than something like this which really catches the eye of world cinema".*

Another commentator on the blog agrees: "yes I'm embarrassed that we wasted so much money utilizing CGI on movies with shit concepts like Brainscan and Cicakman."[18] Prominent Malaysian filmmaker James Lee also laments the state of Malaysian filmmaking.[19] While seeming to critique the lack of originality of Thai film, he also expresses frustration at how Malaysian films cannot yet stand alongside East Asian productions, indicating that he views this international pan-Asian construction as desirable:

> *"When I go to Hong-Kong Filmart and see Thai films, HK films and Korean films, they all look alike. If you take the poster of a Thai film and change the title into Korean, it could become a Korean film. Same with Japanese films, they all look alike. Malaysia is worse. We haven't even reached the point where we have good mainstream cinema."*[20]

Likewise, in a lowyat.net thread discussing which horror film someone should watch, one commenter states:

> *"Well for horror genre, i will go for Thai cause more surprise and plot twist, Malaysia horror film tend to be more straightforward and predictable but as Malaysian, i will ask you to support local horror film (sic)."*[21]

A post later in the thread states: "Malaysia horror film lack those scary and eerie atmosphere which we always see in Thai and Japan horror (sic)."

Clearly however, the high-grossing nature of these Malaysian films indicates that they are still very popular and, in some cases, can stand alongside major Hollywood productions at the box office. This suggests that criticism of such films may be more connected to their differences with the Pan-Asian depictions of Thai and East Asian horror than it is to issues of 'low quality' and their 'local' nature. Indeed, the above quotes indicate that despite the huge popularity of imported movies and TV dramas, there is a significant and profitable market for such 'local' depictions within Malaysia and the rest of the Malay world. In a review of *Hantu kak limah balik rumah*, one Malaysian blogger states

> *"Story wise, the movie is filled with funny takes on the administrations, the people and the Malay culture itself. This is something that had rarely been done since the era of P. Ramlee's movies and it felt refreshing to see something like this appeared on movie screens once more (sic)".*[22]

[15] http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1787073/reviews?ref_=tt_urv

[16] https://forum.lowyat.net/index.php?showtopic=2927734&hl=thai+horror

[17] A story which they claim is Malaysian rather than Southern Thai.

[18] http://sayaanakwayang.blogspot.com/2008/12/thai-produced-malay-movie.html

[19] James Lee is a prolific and award-winning Malaysian filmmaker who has been involved in both avant-garde art productions and more general mass-released films. He has directed Malaysian horror films *Histeria* (2008), *Claypot Curry Killers* (2011) and *Tolong! Awek Aku Pontianak* (2011).

[20] http://film.culture360.asef.org/magazine/interviews/discussion-with-james-lee-on-the-dv-film-making-in-malaysia/

[21] https://forum.lowyat.net/index.php?showtopic=3276427&hl=thai+horror

[22] http://www.ariefzainal.com/2011/02/hantu-kak-limah-balik-rumah-a-review/

The reviewer evidently likes the way these films emphasize Malay culture and *kampung* life. Indeed, it is easy to understand how such Malay-centric suburban and rural depictions can be appealing, especially in an increasingly globalized world in which pan-Asian products such as Korean dramas have become ubiquitous. The director of the successful 2011 film *Hantu Bonceng* cites the depiction of Malay life as a major source of appeal behind these films:

> *"Horror films have struck a chord because they reflect the country's village culture and the traditional superstitions that trouble Malay hearts… Horror movies are the type that will be close to our culture."*[23]

CENSORSHIP

The difference between the Thai and Malay models of horror is also exacerbated by the particular restrictions facing Malaysian film and horror films in particular. The wider social and political context of Malaysian horror potentially curtails the genre and its filmmakers in ways that would make it difficult for films to cultivate the international Pan-Asian image so successful in Thai and East Asian horror. Subsequently, in engaging with subject matter and situations which could be more problematic for local filmmakers, Thai horror may be able to offer an alternative social engagement for Malaysian viewers.

As a genre concerned with the supernatural, Malaysian horror occupies a particularly sensitive position within current religious, political and ethnic discourses. As such, horror has had a problematic recent history. While Thai film has historically always been subject to political censorship under laws which can be draconian, such as the controversial lese-majesty laws, the depiction of ghosts and spirits has never been a specific cause for authoritarian concern. Indeed, such beliefs appear to exist quite comfortably alongside dominant Buddhist discourses. This was also true in Malaysia. Older animist discourses have always existed alongside Malay Islam—which became the majority religion in the country around the 16th century—in the form of particular ghosts and spirits as well as *bomohs* (witch-doctors), all of which are an important part of social life and the organization of society.

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries however, such beliefs and practices have been targeted as anti-Islamic, and (perhaps unsurprisingly in this context) horror films have become a target for government censors. While a new social space of liberal expression began to emerge in the middle of the first decade of the 21st century, this also spawned increasing political instability in which the dominance of Malay-centric political organizations was perceived to be under threat. In part as a response to this, racist and nationalistic voices appeared which reinvigorated and reinforced the concept of *ketuanan Melayu* (Malay supremacy), an agenda supported by the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO). UMNO is a nationalist Malay party which often calls for Malay Muslims to 'unite', positioning itself as protecting both the 'sanctity of Islam' and the 'Malay agenda', both of which are intimately entwined as it is a constitutional requirement that all Malays are Muslim (Ding and Surin 2011, 107). In this current climate, targeting the depiction of ghosts, spirits, monsters and other supernatural constructions in popular media can be used to display pro-Islamic credentials. Constructing horror films as anti-Islamic, despite the long relationship between Islam and animist beliefs as well as the popularity of such Malay-centric films in the country, is another means by which to reinforce such an agenda. This is part of an increasingly 'performative' state Islam which fits in to a wider process of "making Islam obvious and overwhelming" in Malaysian public life (Maznah Mohamad 2009, 7). While Malaysian films (and foreign imports) are therefore heavily restricted in terms of sex and nudity as well as attitudes towards and depictions of Islam, horror films in particular are targeted.

The genre itself was curtailed in 1994, when the horror film *Fantasi* (dir. Aziz M. Osman 1994) was initially banned, before being altered substantially for eventual release. Attributed to the rise in 'islamic sentiments' since the 1970s, this was the beginning of a climate in which "censors stopped approving scary movies"[24] and Malaysian horror films were 'effectively banned' for "celebrating the other-worldly in violation of Islamic teachings"[25]. This ban was effectively lifted in 2004 with the success of *Pontianak Harum Sundal Malam/Fragrant Night Vampire* (Shuhaimi Baba 2004). This shift was in-keeping with the more relaxed attitude to popular culture at the end of Mahathir's rule. After the election of Abdullah Badawi in 2003 the space for liberal expression opened up further. At that time, locally made horror re-emerged as a genre and quickly became successful.

However, in recent years Malaysian horror has again been a target of religious authorities, indicating the difficulties the genre and its filmmakers face in the contemporary context. Following Mahathir's comments about the 'counter-productive' nature of horror films (which were widely reported), UMNO called for the government to empower JAKIM (*Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia*, the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia) to ban both the production and importing of "horror, mystical and superstitious" films, claiming "such films can weaken the faith of Muslims

[23] http://beta.themalaysianinsider.com/showbiz/article/in-malaysia-horror-films-rise-from-the-dead

[24] http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2012/03/21/horror-films-rise-from-the-dead-in-malaysia/

[25] http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/showbiz/article/in-malaysia-horror-films-rise-from-the-dead

in the country" and "do not carry any positive message, but instead may destroy the faith".[26]

Such controversies have impacted upon filmmakers' readiness to engage with horrific subject matter in a way that Thai horror has not had to contend with. Malaysian directors have to stick to conventional plots and cannot be too innovative in the subjects they tackle. Notably, the Film Censorship Board of Malaysia (LPF) must approve all movies and horror films, in particular, must be seen to have "Islam winning out in the end over the supernatural".[27] Viewers are aware of this situation. One comment on a blog post reviewing *The Legend of Langkasuka* states

> *"I have a feeling that if we ever produce something like this, the censorship board wouldn't allow it to be released. For they need to keep the illusion that melayu = Islam even if that means rejecting our rich legend and folklore."*

With regards to horror, one commentator states that pressure from the censorship board "stunts a promising homegrown genre that faces competition from imported Hollywood and other foreign blockbusters, and shackles directors who need to "think beyond" the conventional to expand their art".[28] This illustrates how filmmakers are aware of the difficulty of their own position and will engage in a degree of 'self-censorship' differently from the way practiced by Thai filmmakers. For instance, recent targeting of the genre by Mahathir and UNMO was evidently of such concern that the Malaysian Film Producers Association (PFM) held a press conference. During the conference filmmaker Shuhaimi Baba stated that "there are attempts by several 'powerful groups' who are eyeing to sanction horror films in Malaysia".[29] While no guidelines from JAKIM were forthcoming (even with pressure from UNMO) and the call to ban horror movies was met with widespread ridicule and no real support, the incident serves as a poignant reminder that horror films remain controversial in Malaysia.

CONCLUSION

It appears that due to the lack of a clear Pan-Asian urban depiction and a heavy focus on the society of a particular ethnic group, Malaysian horror does not enjoy the same level of internationalization as Thai horror. It is the Pan-Asian urban depictions common to internationally successful Korean, Japanese and now Thai horror films which enable them to travel across boundaries which are not usually breached by other cultural products. What is more, internal pressures and sensitivities also impact upon filmmakers' willingness to innovate and explore the horror genre, leading to a degree of frustration and criticism within the country. The urban focus of Thai film as well as its high quality 'look' and 'feel' are definite elements in its appeal and relevance to Malaysian viewers. With its carefully cultivated East Asian aesthetics and depictions of the pressures of urban living, Thai film appears to fill a niche for contemporary consumers who may not feel adequately represented by or able to engage with Malaysian films.

Moreover, close examination indicates that there are many similarities between the cultural products of these two nations. In particular, the popularity and frequency of comedy-horror films across Southeast Asia invites further analysis as a possible version of horror particularly appropriate to the region. This sets these films apart from the more internationally dominant East Asian model, and suggests that the horror genre could represent a very specific form of cultural proximity in the products of Malaysia and Thailand.

As Thai horror appears to be the dominant representation of Thai popular culture in Malaysia, its reception deserves more in-depth examination as an example of cultural exchange which has significant potential to shape relations between the countries. Research must move beyond purely online sources, which can be unreliable and difficult to verify. Direct interviews are needed to assess the relationship between Thai and Malaysian consumers during a period in which this is becoming increasingly significant, especially due to the economic changes throughout this region. Indeed, assessing the relationship between cultural products and consumer perceptions may prove to be a significant means by which to document the changes that the ASEAN region is currently undergoing.

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Ring/Ringu (1998, dir. Hideo Nakata)
Sars Wars/Khun krabii hiiroh (2004, dir. Taweewat Wantha)
The Second Sight/Chit sam phat (2013, dir. Pornchai Hongrattanaporn)
Shutter/Shutter-Kòt-Dtìt-Win-Yaan (2004, dir. Banjong Pisanthanakun and Parkpoom Wongpoom)
The Swimmers/Fak Wai Nai Kai Ther (2014, dir. Sopon Sukdapisit)
A Tale of Two Sisters/Janghwa, Hongryeon (2003, dir. Kim Jee-woon)
Tolong! Awek Aku Pontianak (2011, dir. James Lee)
Twilight (2008, dir. Catherine Hardwicke)
Wor Mah Ba Mahasanook (2008, dir. Bunjong Sinthanamongkolkul)
Zombies from Banana Village/Zombi kampung Pisang (2008, dir. Mamat Khalid)