Hungarian Film 1929-1947

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Hungarian Film 1929-1947

National Identity, Anti-Semitism, and Popular Cinema

Gábor Gergely

most látom, milyen óriás ő

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The fact that I'm a modern girl, and I go dancing unaccompanied, and I smoke,
doesn't mean that I'm as modern as you think I am.[1]

Head office? Permit? Damn them all! We'll do it the Hungarian way![2]

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[1]   *Az én lányom nem olyan/My Daughter Is Not that Kind of Girl* (László Vajda, 1937). I assume responsibility for all translations, including film titles. Any deviation from the exact original form or meaning is my mistake.
[2]   *A harmincadik/The Thirtieth* (László Cserépy, 1942).

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A Note on Accents, Pronunciation, Names, and Spellings

A few remarks are made necessary by the difference of Hungarian from commonly spoken European languages, and by the potentially confusing proliferation of accents. They do not mark emphasis as they do in Spanish. In Hungarian, the emphasis is always on the first syllable.

The accent marks a shift in pronunciation, turning the 'a' of alma, pronounced a bit like hot in British received pronunciation, into the 'á' of Gábor, pronounced like the vowel in garb. 'E', pronounced as in bet becomes 'é', like the vowel in eight without the *jod*; the 'i' of hit becomes 'í', pronounced as in sheen; 'o' is indistinguishable for the English ear from the Hungarian 'a', but with an accent becomes 'ó', as in awe; 'ö' is much like the schwa of 'the'; 'ő' is the word-final French 'e' of a *chanson*; 'ü' is the sound of the French definite article in the feminine *une*; and 'ű' is the same, but exaggerated.

The consonants are a little more straightforward. Each is pronounced fully, except: 'c' is the final sound of cats, unless followed by an 's', in which case it becomes 'cs', which is the 'ch' of which. 'G' is always hard, except when followed by 'y', which makes it a 'gy' as in dew. 'J' and 'ly' are the *jod* of hew in British received pronunciation; 'ny' is pronounced as in news, while 'ty' is the onset of Tuesday. Finally an 's' is a 'sh' and 'sz' is an 's', and the zed is the final consonant of 'is', but a 'zs' is the first sound of *jus* and *girolle*, and a 'dzs' is the onset of juice. Everything else is normal.

In Hungarian, surnames come first and given names come second. My name, in Hungarian, therefore, is Gergely Gábor, pronounced with three hard g-s and a final jod in my surname. However, conforming to the typical Hungarian acquiescence with English practice, I have reversed all Hungarian names so that they appear with first names first, followed by surnames. Refusal to do so would create unnecessary confusion. This is neatly illustrated by Zsazsa Gábor. Gábor's surname, Gábor, is my first name, a male given name. My surname is also a male given name. The director Lajos Lázár has a given name for a surname, too. As does the actress Marcsa Simon. And then there is *An Affair of Honour*'s Andor Virág, a man whose surname is a female given name.

The period that this book takes as its focus was one in which an aspiration to authentic Hungarianness and nobility found expression in people spelling their names with a final 'y', indicating nobility by reference to origin (this is the equivalent of the German *von* or the French *de*). Katalin

Kanczler assumed the professional name Katalin Karády, although she was not from Karád and had no title. Lajos Berger became Básthy, only to opt for the common spelling of Básti at war's end, when a must-have noble birth became a mustn't-have. Miklós Hajmássy was not from Hajmás, and Zita Szeleczky was not from Szeleczk. Nonetheless, they spelled their names with a final 'y'. Some appeared in a bewildering range of versions; e.g. Béla Mihályfi, who was also Mihályffi, Mihályfy, and Mihályffy. Where several versions were current, I stuck to the spelling that was most frequently used. In the case of Mihályffy, I went with the most pompous version, as this seemed most appropriate for the man nicknamed the 'grand seigneur'.

I hope all this makes at least a little sense.

Preface

I would like to use this space to flag up the importance of Trianon for Hungarian national self-identification. Signed on 4 June 1920, the Treaty of Trianon settled the terms of peace for Hungary after the First World War. It was intended to resolve ethnic tensions in the Central European region by applying the Wilsonian principle of the self-determination of small nations. It imposed severe territorial losses on the formerly multiethnic Kingdom of Hungary. In the process of granting statehood to hitherto oppressed minorities, it also created large Hungarian minorities beyond the country's new borders. For many Hungarians, Trianon remains an injustice that stands alone in history, but any chance of undoing it, and indeed to agitate for its reversal, are beyond reason.

The economy adjusted over time to the new realities of the country's geography, but, politically, the nation has never recovered. Trianon has demanded an answer from all statesmen, great and small, of Hungary's past 100 years. Some chose to strain against it, fomenting regional tension and generating domestic division. Others sought to move on, only to run up against a nation that could not let go. Yet others tried to ignore it, and cover the subject with the weight of taboo. Hungary's complicated image of itself and its neighbours – kin and allies, yet foes, one and all – makes no sense without understanding Trianon and its impact. Under its weight, Hungarian national identity underwent a dramatic transformation. On the edge of modernity, Hungary made an about-face towards an imaginary lost Golden Age in which Hungary was whole and great. Myths about Hungarian might, the country's role in defending Christian Europe against heathen invaders from the East, and the concept of a unique Hungarian destiny of martyrdom were mobilized in an effort to rationalize the trauma of Trianon.

Current Hungarian attitudes towards the Second World War, and collective memory of the Nazi occupation, the Hungarian Holocaust, and the invasion of the Soviet Red Army are all inflected by the deep psychological scars of the treaty. Some call on Hungary to face up to its participation in and responsibility for the genocide, which they see as the more or less direct outcome of attempts to reverse Trianon. Others believe that the Holocaust, for which Nazi Germany was alone to blame, has been used to delegitimate the perception of Trianon as trauma, and to equate irredentism, the movement to overturn it, with Nazism. This has led to a deeply damaging split in collective memory: the national community is fragmented according to the group or groups given victim status in competing visions of recent

Hungarian national history, a history that remains, for now, within living memory.

This book looks at Hungarian sound film up to the end of the Second World War, a period in which the narrative of Hungarian victimhood attained the force of a national cult, to trace national self-representations on screen, and to map the country's attempts to work out the psychological trauma and formulate cultural responses to Trianon through the most popular entertainment medium of the period: cinema.

Introduction

The received view of Hungarian filmmaking in the period this book takes as its focus is that a Jewish-dominated profession was fundamentally transformed by anti-Jewish laws, yet certain Jewish scriptwriters continued to supply scripts for the new, putatively racially pure Hungarian film industry up to as late as the German occupation in March 1944. In this received view of the period the war was followed by another fundamental transformation during the denazification of the industry. Certain names are associated with the era: comedian Gyula Kabos and the commanding Gyula Csortos, romantic lead Pál Jávor and his frequent co-star Katalin Karády, the director István Székely and right-wing filmmaker Viktor Bánky and his favoured star Antal Páger, and the actor and Communist dissenter Zoltán Várkonyi. This list reflects the received view: split into Jewish filmmaking (Kabos and Székely), right-wing filmmaking (Bánky and Páger), Communist, opposition filmmaking (Várkonyi), and what is in between, a kind of apolitical tradition of 'Hungarian' filmmaking typified by Jávor and Karády.

This view is not merely a simplified view of the era, but a crucially distorted and misleading interpretation that is the product of the twin legacies of anti-Semitism and Communist era film scholarship. First, the idea that there was a clear dividing line between the 'Jewish industry' of the period leading up to 1938 and the 'racially pure' film sector of 1938-1944 is anti-Semitic nonsense. The industry of the 1930s was not inherently Jewish, although that is precisely what many scholars claim (e.g. Manchin 2012a; 2013). Instead, Jewish Hungarians participated in filmmaking alongside Christian and atheist Hungarians, and other colleagues from a variety of national, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. Plurality existed, albeit in a limited form. The limitations came from state oversight of the industry, which, as we shall see, should be dated to 1920 and the introduction of cinema operator licences. It follows that the post-1938 era differed from the period that preceded it in terms of the level of state control rather than in religious and/or ethnic terms.

The second claim that the postwar vetting of the industry was transformative is plain Communist propaganda. Look no further than Zoltán Várkonyi, a leading figure in the postwar film establishment who played a key role in the vetting committees. These committees did not hesitate to ban people from the theatre and film sectors for life for offences of which Várkonyi himself could have been accused. Mere association with Viktor Bánky and Antal Páger was enough to bring down a ban on some, while

Várkonyi co-starred with Páger in a film by Bánky, which, as we shall see, directly explored the issue of the purity of Hungarian blood. Thus, the vetting committees were corrupted from the outset by personal ambitions, score-settling, and cynical pragmatism.

Third, the focus on the fact that Jewish scriptwriters continued to supply scripts for the putatively racially pure film sector is anti-Semitic. The idea of a significant 'Jewish' involvement is based in our acceptance of the view that 'the Jews' formed a homogeneous community of shared ambitions, and of the notion that the scriptwriter's ethnic or religious origin is of fundamental significance to the work that they produce. It further feeds from the anti-Semitic stereotype of 'the cunning Jew' who profits from her or his own, or his or her coreligionists' misfortune. Although it is true that some unlicensed film writers produced screenplays in the early 1940s, the excessive focus on the few who, in defiance of anti-Jewish legislation, continued to supply the Hungarian film industry with scripts deflects attention from the thousands of film sector employees denied a chance to practise their craft and earn a living in their chosen line of work, downplays the impact of anti-Jewish legislation enacted by sovereign Hungary's Parliament, and distorts our understanding of the history of Hungarian cinema.

Fourth, the view that in between the 'Jews' and the extreme right-wingers were the Hungarian filmmakers who, unaffected by and uninterested in politics made their films, is the outcome of the Communist era reinvention of Hungary as a blameless victim of the war. In this fanciful vision of Hungarian history the war was the story of the Hungarian majority watching helplessly the deportation of 'the Jews' by the Germans, aided by a small group of Germanophile accomplices. The truth was that 'a large scale, popular accommodation' with Germany was part of a broader effort to '[draw] the maximum benefit from the German alliance [while] preserving at least a modicum of independence as an assurance for the future, especially in case the Third Reich would lose the war' (Deák et al., 2000, 3-8). The fanciful vision of the past that elides wilful Hungarian collaboration with Germany helps those scholars who hope to celebrate the artistic achievements of the era, and pick out texts that, in their view, stand out from the rest (Nemeskürty 1974; Király 1989; Pintér and Záhonyi-Ábel 2013; etc.).

This book aims to complicate the simple view described above. It sets out to explore how, in the interwar and war periods, a group of Hungarians were labelled as different from, and unassimilable into the national community and how, after the war, this process of exclusion was blamed on a small number of extremist figures in politics and the arts. This book hopes to show that this discursive separation of the nation – into the mutually

exclusive and arbitrarily defined groups of 'Jews' and 'Hungarians' – can be apprehended in all film texts of the period regardless of the ethnic origin, religious beliefs, or political affiliations of the filmmakers. It further aims to trace how a relatively diverse film industry under loose state oversight was gradually taken over by the state with the help of those who hoped to profit from increased centralization. The book argues that the state sought this increased control in order to ensure the effective dissemination of visions of national identity that served its goals. These goals included the articulation of a racially conceived Hungarian identity, a vision of Hungarian greatness and exceptionalism, an inalienable claim to the Carpathian basin, the legitimacy of unorthodox succession, and the absolute need for the reunification of fragmented estates. These are linked to the Hungarian desire to overturn the Trianon Treaty, the view of Hungarian history that underpinned Hungarian arguments against the rationale for the territorial decisions set down by the treaty, and the person of Miklós Horthy, self-styled regent of the Kingdom of Hungary, installed in a military putsch.

The Hungarian film industry was not split into Jews, Hungarians, and Nazis as Frey would have it. Frey's as yet unpublished *Jews, Nazis and the Cinema of Hungary* sees the stakeholders as 'Hungarian cultural and political elites, Jewish film professionals and financiers, Nazi officials, and global film moguls'.[1] Although Frey's ambition is to chart the history of this period in Hungarian film in all its complexity, his view of the Hungarian film world remains firmly lodged in the problematic Jewish-Hungarian dichotomy. This is true of virtually all who have written on the subject. The idea that Hungary's anti-Jewish laws affected Jewish citizens (not Hungarians) is a seemingly innocent, but deeply problematic view. In truth, Hungary's anti-Jewish laws affected Hungarians who were defined in the eyes of the state as 'Jews' under their terms. To write, as Kovács does, that 'the estimated number of Jews and their descendants affected [by Act 4 of 1939] was about two hundred thousand persons' (1994, 105), frames the Jewish as always and already apart from the imagined national community. This is illustrative of the vision of the Hungarian nation that continues to shape Hungarian scholarship, as well as current political and public discourse. This book then takes one of the key battlefields of Hungarian nation-building, the cinema,

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1   I take this quote from the blurb on the IB Tauris website: http://www.ibtauris.com/Books/ The%20arts/Film%20TV%20%20radio/Films%20cinema/Film%20theory%20%20criticism/ Jews%20Nazis%20and%20the%20Cinema%20of%20Hungary%20The%20Tragedy%20of%20 Success%2019291944.aspx?menuitem={4A034B28-9D98-40FE-A2D4-AF977314676D} [Accessed on 22 December 2015].

to tell its story anew and, in the process, argue for the desperate need to undo the discursive separation of Hungarian and Hungarian through the seemingly mutually exclusive labels of Hungarian and Jewish.

Although Hungarian scholarship has not neglected the period, there is much that remains to be said about the films, which have been dismissed as uninteresting, not worthy of serious textual analysis, and as offering little to the non-specialist readership. The discussion needs to move beyond superficial debates about the place of a very small number of privileged texts in the international canon (Pintér and Záhonyi-Ábel 2013), location shooting (Nemeskürty 1974; Balogh et al. 2004) and genre typology (Király 1989; Király and Balogh 2000; Benke 2013; Lakatos 2013; Vajdovich 2013b). We need to resist a binarist approach that sees the Hungarian industry as always dependent on and acting in response to German cinema (Frey 2011). We must ask questions about representations of Hungarian national identity, Jewishness, images of the Roma, questions of home and abroad, interiority and exteriority. This book moves this debate on by suggesting, among other things, that Hungarian cinema's perceived reluctance to go outside is linked to a Hungarian preoccupation with the national self, and that it is the resultant interiority, rather than a lack of location shooting, that gives Hungarian cinema an inward-looking feel. It further argues that anti-Semitism was not a preserve of Bánky and Páger, but can be apprehended in virtually all films of the period, whether made by Jewish Hungarians or campaigning anti-Semites.

No Dividing Wall between Hungarian and Hungarian

I take the title for this section, which suggests a way of reasserting the Hungarianness that has been denied to Hungary's citizens of Jewish faith, origin, or self-identification, from Viktor Bánky's anti-Semitic problem film *Dr István Kovács* (1941). It is my hope that this section will point us towards the adoption of less problematic labels that will make visible the connecting tissue between Hungarians of different religious, ethnic, and national backgrounds and identities.

This book argues for a break with the shorthand labels, in common currency in Hungarian popular, political, and academic discourse, that continue to perpetuate ethnic divisions. Words and expressions coined during the zenith of the eugenics movement, which, as we will see was remarkably vibrant in Hungary (Turda and Weindling 2007; Gyurgyák 2007), remain in use, allowing the current Hungarian Prime Minister to praise the

qualities of the Hungarian *fajta,* usually translated as 'kind', but, in truth a variant of the word *faj* or race, and escape opprobrium.[2] We find countless examples in academic writing as well. On page one of a compendium of early film criticism, the editor declares that 'globalizing and cosmopolitan (in the positive sense) reform and modernizing initiatives prepared the ground in Hungary for the cinema' in the late eighteenth century (Kőháti 2001, 9). The interjection may raise an eyebrow even among those who are not aware of the loaded meaning of the word 'cosmopolitan' in the context of Central and Eastern Europe. That meaning is: 'Jewish'. In Kőháti's reasoning, then, Hungary first began to move towards embracing cinema in the late eighteenth century, when Hungary was opened up to positive (read: non-Jewish; or perhaps: Jewish in a positive sense) forces of globalization. The main concern here is linking the moving image – at its very outset – to a highly loaded debate surrounding Jewishness and cosmopolitanism, Hungarianness, and an ethnic and cultural identity that is usually, and damagingly, located in a transnational space between, rather than within, nations. Kőháti goes on to describe Jewish Hungarians involved in filmmaking as *magyarzsidók* or Hungarian Jews (the distinction may seem subtle, but is crucial, as I explain later on), and goes to great lengths to specify that some of the early investors in Hungarian film were German-speaking *magyarzsidó* traders. The Hungarian expression *németajkú* is problematic, too. Literally, it means German-lipped. This identification of 'Hungarian Jews' as having German speech organs is part of the discourse that places Jewish Hungarians outside of the national community. By contrast, the many Hungarian-identified film industry players with similarly complex and layered – even fragmented – identities, from Henrik Castiglione to Géza Radványi to Tivadar Bilicsi, are left without comment. Even when care is taken to avoid essentializing descriptions, Hungarian scholarship unpicks Jewish Hungarian identities and renders them as complex and complexly

2   A transcript of the interview in question has been published on the Hungarian government portal. 'Orbán Viktor a Kossuth Rádió „180 perc" című műsorában'/'Viktor Orbán on Kossuth Rádió's "180 minutes" programme' was posted on 6 December 2013. 'We can have economic growth in Hungary, if the people are willing to work more. And people will be willing to work more if they see the point in doing so. The Hungarians are a diligent *fajta* [kind/race]. There are *népek* [peoples/races] where this is not so obvious, but, in Hungary, the thing is that, if there is more space, if people see that more work leads to a better life, then they will be willing to work more and work better.' In addition to the barely coded racist language, by arguing that the Hungarian 'kind' need space to work and achieve a better life, Orbán drifts astonishingly close to espousing the notion of *Lebensraum*, the concept that legitimated the Nazis' territorial ambitions. http://www.kormany.hu/hu/miniszterelnokseg/miniszterelnok/beszedek-publikaciok-interjuk/ orban-viktor-a-kossuth-radio-180-perc-cimu-musoraban-20131206 [Accessed 29 April, 2014].

constructed identities structured around Jewishness, but allows non-Jewish Hungarian identities, however complex, to masquerade as self-evident and natural.

Kőháti goes on to describe cinema as a whole as a 'global, cosmopolitan mode of expression' (Kőháti 2001, 10). Film is thus labelled, from the outset, a foreign phenomenon championed by cosmopolitan German-lipped Hungarian Jews. The medium is lifted out of the Hungarian context, and all those associated with it are placed beyond the Hungarian national community. This is a damaging and, crucially, misconceived conceptualization of the cinema in Hungary, which links film to Jewishness from the outset. The debate is skewed from the start and prevents us from seeing the very real diversity of a cultural industry peopled by Hungarians whose individually complex identities reflected the heterogeneity of the Hungarian national community in general. The painstaking elaboration of the complexity of Jewish identity without a complementary excavation of non-Jewish identities serves to reinforce the discursive separation of 'Jews' from other Hungarians. This makes it impossible to understand 'Jews' as Hungarians. It also contributes to the myth of an excessive Jewish(-as-opposed-to-Hungarian) presence in the sphere of the popular (and profitable) arts. This feeds from and, in turn, reinforces the stereotypical anti-Semitic image of the 'Jew' who is at the vanguard of all change, sniffs out profit and acts with cunning to exploit any opportunity, thereby blocking an imaginary group of Hungarians from making the same investments and profits. And this is where the discursive exclusion of Jewish Hungarians from the body of the nation can be seen to pave the way towards expropriation: the profits of Jewish Hungarians are described as the opposite of Hungarian profits. Although Kőháti is at pains to stress that he condemns anti-Semitism (2001, 10), writing clumsily in a language that continues to enshrine unequal power relations, he ends up reinforcing the arbitrary separation of Jewish Hungarians from other Hungarians.

Historians, too, can be caught using the language of anti-Semitic pre-1945 Hungary in a dangerous assumption of knowledge. Problematic and loaded words can be found in their writing in Hungarian, although these loaded expressions are usually weeded out from the English translations of their work. This suggests that the problem is with an unreformed language. The anti-Jewish laws passed by the Hungarian government from 1938 onwards are known, in Hungary, as *zsidótörvények* or 'Jewish laws'. Eminent historians such as Gerő[3], Gyurgyák (2007), and Ungváry (2012) have used

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3   For instance: 'A fogalmak foglya. Bibó István a XIX. század második felének magyar történelméről' a conference paper presented by Gerő at the 'István Bibó and the history of

'*zsidótörvények*' to describe Acts of Parliament passed to limit the rights of those defined as Jews. Perhaps significantly, in translation, many of them use 'anti-Jewish law' or 'anti-Jewish measure' (e.g. Kovács 1994, 101-106), where in Hungarian they write 'Jewish law'. The former is used in Ungváry's *Battle for Budapest* (2011), while the latter is used, albeit not exclusively, in his *A Horthy-rendszer mérlege* (2012). Anti-Jewish laws were popularly known as *zsidótörvények* in anti-Semitic, Nazi-ally Hungary, and the term, whose function was to separate 'Jews' from Hungarians, and whose sting has not been drawn, remains in use today.

Thinking with Judith Butler (1993), when we write about anti-Semitism in Hungary, we are forced to engage with a language that is itself part of the problem. Belonging is performative and iterative. If one is said to belong, one belongs. If one acts in a manner that expresses belonging (and this is not met with resistance), one belongs. The separation of Jewish Hungarians from other Hungarians was and is performative and iterative. Just as language, in Butler's analysis, is devised to perpetuate existing power relations between the sexes, so too, language acts to perpetuate the separation of Jewishness from Hungarianness. We can clearly see this in Kőháti's use of *magyarzsidó*, literally: Hungarian Jew (2001, 10). The reiteration of the Jewishness of Jewish Hungarians, Jewishness being the chief attribute that is inflected by Hungarianness, serves to reassert the difference and acts to reinforce the separation of 'Jews' from 'Hungarians'. The language that had been used to blur ethnicity and nationality into one (in the word 'Hungarian') in order to separate Jewish from Hungarian, and thus create a 'Jewish community' clearly demarcated from the 'Hungarian community', has remained unchanged. This can be linked to what Butler, writing about the process whereby non-normative sexual identities reinforce the normative, calls an 'exclusionary matrix' (1993, 3). Normative (and therefore exclusionary) discourse thus produces two large groups: a domain of the norm, and one consisting of 'those "unlivable" and "uninhabitable" zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject' (Butler 1993, 3). Substituting citizen for subject helps us see how Butler's theory of the construction of gender and sex through iterative performativity and normative discourse can be productively applied to the way in which Hungarianness has been shaped to exclude Jewishness via the iterative performance of a normative national identity. Those placed

Hungary in the 20th century' International Conference, Trento, 26-27 October, 2001. http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:4UWlBuKZukJ:www.csseo.org/Papers/paperGero.rtf+&cd=9&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=uk [Accessed 30 April, 2014].

beyond the national community by discursive practices that deny their belonging, to re-read Butler, 'constitute that site of dreaded identification against which – and by virtue of which – the domain of the subject will circumscribe its own claim to autonomy and to life' (Butler 1993, 3). The 'Jews' are thus perpetually (re)created in language as a race apart and are thus put to work in the creation of a Hungarian national identity.

The old blurring of Jewish religion into race remains encoded into language. Even in academic texts, we find evidence for this discursive merging of race and religion. Ungváry, in his study of anti-Semitism and social policy in the Horthy era, for instance, writes about the Jewish community (a religious group) and the German minority (an ethnic group) as two subsets of one group: minorities in Hungary (2012, 15; 17). He ascribes to these two groups collectively-felt emotions and shared goals. He sees no need to address the heterogeneity of these groups. Neither does he acknowledge the fundamental difference between the two: one is a religious community and the other an ethnic group. He does not seem to think that this distinction, or its elision, is significant in any way. As this example shows, the Hungarianness of Hungarians is presented as natural, fixed, and unquestioned. The difference of those cast as not Hungarian is fluid, flexible, and externally imposed. The Hungarianness of minority groups is thus continuously under question.

In her analysis of Irigaray's work, Judith Butler suggests, in *Bodies that Matter*, that the only way to dismantle phallogocentrism (the patriarchal power encoded in language) is by resorting to catachresis, or violence against language itself (1993, 27-56). Misusing language in a manner that points to the unequal power relations enshrined in it is, for Butler, the key to challenging patriarchal power. We do not need to go quite so far as to break language. But we might learn useful lessons about the way language has been used to perpetuate the exclusion of minority groups from the body of the nation in the Hungarian instance, if we use a foreign language (say English) to talk about Hungarian national identity and anti-Semitism. In translating the many loaded words and phrases that remain unquestioned in their original form, we begin to contest them. This is well demonstrated by the examples of Hungarian historians writing 'anti-Jewish laws' in English and '*zsidótörvények*' or 'Jewish laws' in Hungarian. By opting for a language other than Hungarian for our enquiry, we are forced to consider the meaning of words we thought we knew and understood, and we can begin to unpick and reassemble the Hungarian terms that have, for so long, been used to iterate and perform the separation of certain groups from the body of the nation.

The other solution is less convenient. It is to avoid convenience.[4] Instead of saying 'Jewish', I propose that we always say 'Jewish Hungarian', reasserting the Hungarianness that has been denied to those of Jewish faith or origin in Hungary. Instead of the 'Jews' or even 'Jewish community', which I put in inverted commas throughout this study to show that these terms have been used to mean more than they appear to mean at first, I suggest that we say 'the diverse and by no means homogeneous subset of the Hungarian population who claim to be or are said to be Jewish'. (I admit: it is very likely that a better phrase can be coined.) More importantly, we should also open up and problematize the term: 'Hungarian'. It is no good piling a multiplicity of labels on to minority identities if we do not do the same to majority identities. Referring to layered and complex Jewish identities while retaining the convenient catch-all Hungarian would do more harm than good. We must problematize nationality by divorcing it from ethnicity. We should embrace what Hamid Naficy calls 'hyphenated' identities (2001, 15-17) and seek to contest and unravel terms that deceive by offering convenience and brevity. Admittedly, this will make it far more difficult to stay within set word counts, but embracing verbosity in the name of eliminating the discursive separation of an arbitrarily defined group from the heterogeneous mass of multiple identities that masquerade as a 'simple' self-evident label is a price worth paying.

I will use, as I have already done, Jewish Hungarian to refer to those Hungarians whose faith, cultural background, or ethnicity has, at one point or another, been labelled as Jewish. (To reverse the order and say Hungarian Jew is, as I indicated earlier, to assert the eternal Jewishness of 'the Jew'.) I will use Christian Hungarian, German-Hungarian, Christian Transylvanian-Hungarian, etc. to refer to those Hungarians who were, in an attempt to make the separation of Jewish Hungarians from the body of the nation possible, labelled plain and simple Hungarians(-as-opposed-to-Jews). As this last example shows, I also aim to render visible, wherever possible, the binary opposition implied by the deceptive simple form.

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4   It is a solution that has been proposed before in scholarly writing on the process of rendering certain identities 'other' while asserting a false simplicity and self-evidence for majority identities. In the context of film studies, the work of Richard Dyer has sought to destabilize the mutually exclusive binary opposition between majority and minority labels, and my own work draws on his *White, Essays on Race and Culture* (1997). Hamid Naficy and his work on émigré and exile filmmakers (*An Accented Cinema*, 2001) also informs my work. In the context of Jewish studies and the discourse of difference, the work of Sander Gilman (*Difference and Pathology* 1985; *Jew's Body* 1991; *Health and Illness* 1995) is a crucial point of reference.

Christian Hungarian should not be confused, then, with *kereszténynemzeti* or Christian-national, a key concept I introduce in Chapter 1.

Setting the Scene

The two decades to the end of the Second World War was a time in Hungarian history when global crises exacerbated home-grown conflicts and the country's political elite played a losing game trying to exploit deep discontent and contain the increasingly radical grassroots movements that their policies knowingly engendered, while striving to achieve Hungary's sole foreign policy goal of reversing the Trianon Treaty, and retaining national sovereignty at the cheapest possible price. The breathtaking gamble did not pay off. The total death toll is estimated at 1,000,000 Hungarian citizens (Krausz and Varga 2013, 7). Over 500,000 Hungarians died in Nazi death camps (Braham 2000, 251-254), a price the Hungarian leadership was willing to pay for the restoration of 'Greater Hungary'. Virtually the whole Second Hungarian Army, 250,000 soldiers under the command of Colonel-General Gusztáv Jány (Braham 2000, 43-44) deployed on the Eastern Front to support the German invasion of the Soviet Union, was destroyed in the Soviet counteroffensive (Kenez 2006, 9). Up to 200,000 Hungarian women were raped by Red Army soldiers on their way to Berlin (Kenez 2006, 44), a trauma that remains largely taboo to this day. Millions of Hungarians lost all they had ever had. Many ten thousand residents of Budapest died alongside close to 160,000 Soviet, German, and Hungarian soldiers in the brutal battle for the city in winter 1944-1945 (Ungváry 2011, xv). Budapest suffered irreparable architectural damage with 80 per cent of housing damaged, and 36,000 families left homeless, including 40,000 children as one invader was expelled by another, no less hostile army (Kenez 2006, 37-38). The country was laid open to a half century of Soviet rule that profoundly transformed, and further corrupted a country already burdened by profound moral guilt.

As these facts painfully demonstrate, this was a period that inflicted deep traumas, and shaped Hungary's postwar history, its present, and its future in dramatic ways. For this reason, this is a period that needs the kind of deep, rigorous, and scholarly investigation that it has not yet received. The purpose of this book is to undertake this work in relation to the cinema, and can be thought of as a national cinema book in this sense.

The period was one of lively transnational exchange of culture, technology, and best practice. Hungarian filmmakers worked all over Europe and in Hollywood, and for every well-known émigré filmmaker, there were dozens

Illustration 1. The Riding School and Krisztinaváros in ruins. 1945.

who returned home to make their biggest contributions to Hungarian cinema. (Indeed, the myth of a debilitating brain drain, and that Hollywood cinema is, in truth, mostly Hungarian, are enduring and damaging assumptions in Hungarian public discourse and, to an extent, scholarship, and need debunking.) The first years of the 1930s were dominated by multinational co-productions shot in several languages across Europe. Hungary had its share of French and German productions. Hollywood-trained Pál Fejős took a French crew to shoot *Ítél a Balaton/The Waters Decide* (1932)[5], and *Tavaszi*

5   The French version of the film was released as *Tempête*, and the German version as *Menschen im Sturm*. The film survives in the French version. A largely Hungarian cast that included Gyula Csortos and Antal Páger was dubbed for the French release, featuring the voices of Maurice Bringo, Romeo Carlès, Saint-Allier, and Janine Vauthier.

Zápor/Spring Downpour (1932)[6], and the German Heinz Hille took a German crew to the Hunnia sound stages in the same year for *A vén gazember/The Old Scoundrel*. Hitler's rise to power in 1933 started an eastward flight, too, as well as the more widely known migration to Hollywood. Many Jewish Hungarians returned to Budapest, as their careers in Berlin were put to an end by racist laws. Perhaps surprisingly, Hungary's adoption of anti-Jewish legislation in 1938 precipitated another migration from Berlin: this time, expatriate filmmakers who had carved out more or less successful careers in Nazi Germany returned to Budapest, keen to rise to greatness on the back of successes under Goebbels, and to exploit vacancies newly created by Hungary's own race laws. There is, perhaps understandably, less talk of this brain gain.

Technology and know-how were also subject to transnational exchange, not all of it aboveboard. The Hungarian Pulváry sound recording system, for instance, was a Tobis-Klang rip-off,[7] and, alongside Kovács and Faludi film stock, Hungarian producers also bought Agfa and Kodak stock. French-made Debrie cameras were the industry standard (Dáloky 1942, 71). The early years of the war were a period of lively exchange between Hungary and its Axis allies beyond Nazi Germany. Italy, Bulgaria, and Finland, and occupied territories Croatia and Estonia, were important markets for Hungary, where film production continued uninterrupted until the final months of the war. Indeed, Croatia, which signed an exclusive agreement with Hungary, acquired all its foreign films via Hungarian distributors, a major source of income for Hungary. These factors stretch this study into a transnational dimension.

Hungary is a nation whose image of itself does not correspond to its actual geography. This means that Hungary as a nation imagined (and continues to imagine) itself in a transnational plane. Hungarians refused to recognize the Trianon borders as legitimate, and continued to regard Hungary as extending beyond the borders imposed on it by the international community. Thus, Hungarian films of the period imagined a nation that did not end at the country's official borders. The imagined, geographical, political, ethnic, and cultural communities that we might, at various times and with different justifications, call Hungarian do not overlap. It therefore follows that the corpus of films discussed in this book does not

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6   The film featured *Napoléon* (Abel Gance, 1927) star Annabella.
7   This infringement of intellectual property rights meant that Hungarian films using the Pulváry system were barred from the German market until the Hungarian party agreed to pay Tobis-Klang for use of its patent in 1942 (*Magyar Film*, 1942. 10, 9).

correspond to the corpus of films that might be said to be the Hungarian national cinema output by another definition. For those who refused to accept the Trianon borders, the moviegoing public of 'Rump Hungary' was a fragment of the whole. Moreover, many commentators, especially those on the extreme right, felt that true Hungarianness, the population of Hungarians that reflected the real values and virtues of what they thought of as the Hungarian 'race', were to be found in the former frontier regions beyond the nation's externally imposed borders. Because of the above, it is all the more important to write a Hungarian national cinema book, but we must remain vigilant. The slippage between the imagined nation and the geographical image of the nation gives Hungarian national identity, and our project a twist that will take some effort to untangle. Hungarian films spoke to a nation that is diasporic, yet static, dislocated, yet not dispersed. Hungary's border-dysmorphia demands that the film historian conceive of a national cinema in a transnational setting. Thus, the aim of this study is to situate the Hungarian output within Central Europe, where the question of Hungarianness remains acutely divisive to this day.

Film arrived in Hungary in 1896 with a Lumière brothers showcase in central Budapest (Cunningham 2004a, 5). The new medium was immediately popular. Cinemas popped up everywhere, and public appetite for film was further reflected in an emerging scene of film criticism, and, eventually, the beginnings of domestic film production (Nemeskürty 1974, 12-15). A film industry appeared and grew rapidly in the first half of the 1910s. During the First World War, imports from enemy nations were banned. Some of the most prolific producers of cinema were caught in the net. American, French, British, and, after 1916, Italian films were excluded from the market, and the Hungarian industry expanded to fill the vacuum. In 1918, the last year of the war, 36 films were made in Hungary[8] and cinemas screened over 100 Hungarian films (Balogh et al. 2004, 21).

After this promising start, the collapse of Austria-Hungary and the attempt at root-and-branch reorganization during the Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919 caused the domestic industry to stall. Communist historiographers sought to paint the memory of the Red Terror rosy, but 'the world's first nationalization of cinema' was far from 'the most beautiful and exciting chapter in the history of our silent cinema' (Garai 1969, 5). Although this first

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8   All figures relating to domestic output come from the Hungarian film institute *Magyar Nemzeti Digitális Archívum*'s (MaNDA) electronic catalogue, a digitized, searchable, and extended version of *Magyar Filmográfia 1931-1998* (Varga, 1999), unless otherwise indicated. It can be accessed at: http://filmintezet.hu/uj/filmkereso/.

traumatic ideological shake-up of the industry was indeed accompanied by an upsurge in production in 1918-1919, it failed to inaugurate a golden age. Rather, the emerging domestic film sector, which had expanded rapidly in the second half of the 1910s, was dealt a blow from which it struggled to recover. The industry, reeling from the forced, albeit half-completed, nationalization of production, distribution, and exhibition, the political purge of the cultural industries and the many other crises of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, endured a second shock as foreign imports flooded the market (Balogh et al. 2004, 36). The sector's failure to recover was due to several other factors, including the loss of key filmmakers who emigrated to Berlin, London, and Hollywood as 'White Terror' followed the days of 'Red Terror'. The introduction of film censorship in 1920 (Záhonyi-Ábel 2013b, 90), and the failure of state intervention to yield immediate results were also contributing factors.

However, crucial measures were introduced in this period that laid the groundwork for the rapid boom of the 1930s. The *Filmipari Alap*, the Film Fund, was set up in 1924 (Balogh et al. 2004, 40-41). The fund's operations, and the subsidies it offered to domestic productions, were financed from duties paid by distributors for every foot of foreign film released in Hungary. The protectionist state policy gave the Hungarian industry the means to respond to the upsurge in demand for the domestic product on the back of the advent of sound.

A total of 367 feature films were made in Hungary between 1931 and the end of wartime film production in autumn 1944. Remarkably, 80 per cent of this corpus survives. Over two-thirds, 257 films, were made in the second half of this period, making it an extraordinarily productive seven years in the history of Hungarian cinema. Of the 338 films held by MaNDA, only 23 are incomplete, of which only six are classified as a 'brief fragment'.[9] We have, in other words, a very nearly intact record of a country's fiction film output from a period of great upheaval and trauma. This is an extremely valuable resource. These films are a window onto a time that is now fading from living memory. As we shall see, these films strain against as much as they underpin Hungary's often contradictory private, official, and scholarly histories of its hugely contested twentieth century past.

In 1931, when the first Hungarian sound film *A kék bálvány/The Blue Idol* (Lajos Lázár) was released, Hungary was a country still reeling from the

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9   This information comes from a list compiled by MaNDA and given to me by Gyöngyi Balogh. The list includes details of number of copies in the institute's possession, and whether a film is incomplete. I owe her a debt of gratitude for this priceless resource.

impact of the terms of peace imposed by the Allies after the First World War. The many negative ramifications of Trianon were amplified by the effects of the Great Depression a decade later. There was runaway inflation, endemic joblessness, and a wholly imbalanced economy with entire industries cut off from their supply chains, employers from potential employees, and manufacturers from their target markets. Yet, this was also a period of growth in some segments of the economy. The 1930s were, therefore, a curious decade of simultaneous bust and boom. The economic crisis created opportunities for some, but ruined countless others. Film emerged as a viable business and weathered early storms to show itself to be recession-proof. The alliance with Nazi Germany generated demand for Hungarian agricultural and industrial goods, which prompted relatively rapid growth in certain sectors. 'The years 1938-44 in Hungary [...] were a boom period of industrialization financed in large part by German capital. In only two years, from 1938 to 1940, the growth of manufacturing industry exceeded that achieved over the preceding two decades' (Deák et al 2000, 19). Trade with Germany grew rapidly from below 20 per cent in the early 1930s, and by 1940 Germany was Hungary's premier trade partner, accounting for half of all Hungarian imports and exports (Kovács 1994, 102). However, unemployment among the educated middle classes was rampant (Kovács 1994, 52-53). The accelerating anti-Jewish drive, given fresh boost by Nazi support for Hungarian anti-Semitism, created a substantial group of jobless graduates and cash-starved businesses, aggravating the country's already acute unemployment problem and choking off much needed venture capital.

The broad narrative of Hungarian anti-Jewish measures can be mapped against the film sector, from the undoing of equal rights before the law, to the expropriation of Jewish Hungarians, and their final exclusion from the national body. Although the first anti-Jewish law affected all Jewish Hungarians, its provisions were most completely enforced in the film sector (Hegedűs 1942, 501-505).[10] The euphemistically termed *átállítás* or 'transition' from an industry in which Jewish Hungarians participated with equal rights compared to other citizens[11] to one in which no one who

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10   I use Hegedűs advisedly. His book on the 'changing of the guard', published in 1942, is a radical anti-Semitic work celebrating the achievements of anti-Jewish legislation, and lamenting its shortcomings.

11   Not exactly equal rights. As we shall see, a fit and proper test was introduced for film exhibitors under a 1920 statutory instrument (8454/1920 M.E.), which also revoked all existing cinema licences. The implementation was anti-Semitic: Jewish Hungarians were refused licences, whether new applicants or owners of long-established exhibition businesses (Sándor 1992, 35-36).

was a 'Jew' under the law was tolerated, was rolled out across the nation and in all areas of life between 1941 and 1944. By the end of the Second World War, Hungary was in ruins, its people – victims, perpetrators and witnesses alike – brutalized by the Holocaust and the Soviet offensive against German and Hungarian forces.[12] The economy was once more in crisis. This narrative of rags to riches to rags via the systemic violation of human rights is reflected in the Hungarian film output. An initial period of early successes and false starts in 1931-1935 was followed by an era of prestige vehicles and routine cash-ins amid industry reorganization and anti-Jewish legislation from 1936 to 1941. It concluded with a return of the dark days of shoestring productions under the most basic conditions as the war, and Nazi Germany's demands on Hungarian resources, gradually drained the finances from the film sector in the last two years of the war.

Key Questions

It is my intention to combine a historical overview with textual analyses more typically found in works organized according to a theme (see: Hake's introduction to *German National Cinema*, 2008, 1). My concern is the film output of a nation. But my concern is also the nation itself. What I am hoping to do is to analyse Hungarian films in the early sound period and, through a detailed investigation of the films, to illuminate, deepen, and nuance our understanding of Hungarian national identity. This book is then a continuing balancing act where a text-first approach helps to make sense of scholarship on film and history, while film scholarship and historiography are revisited to ask new questions about the films in focus. My contention is that the narrative legitimated by scholarship has shaped Hungarian visions of the nation and its recent past. In this vein, I ask what image of the nation emerges from the films of the 1930s and 1940s, and I explore how what has been written about the nation and its films have, in turn, shaped the nation. I go on to trace this narrative through subsequent scholarly accounts, and try to answer how it has filtered through to the popular view of the films and the period.

A forerunner of this project, by virtue of its investigation of the prewar and wartime cultural production of an Axis state and its focus on an epoch linked to a moment of historical trauma, is Kracauer's *From Caligari to*

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12   For more on the Soviet liberation/occupation of Hungary, see: Kenez 2006, 11-80. For more on the siege of Budapest, see: Ungváry 2011.

Hitler, first published in 1947. This hugely influential work has curiously not been seen as a national cinema project, but has been perceived instead as an examination of an exceptional historical moment and an exceptional industry. This book was rooted in its author's belief that the rise and crimes of Nazism were foretold by and could be read in Weimar cinema. Kracauer's insistence in the introduction (2004, 1-11) that Weimar cinema and what came after affords us an insight into the German soul, that an analysis of the film texts could reveal the psychology of the German mind, is the great flaw of his work. The claim about a German collective mind-set and soul denies the heterogeneity of the (German) nation, taps into the notion of collective guilt, and can be said to maintain the exclusionary discourse of the Nazis that had singled out the 'Aryan race' as separate from (in the Nazis' formulation: superior to) all others.

As Quaresima notes in his introduction to the 2004 revised edition, Kracauer was sharply criticized for a perceived Marxist bias (2004, xvii) and perhaps more damagingly, his work has been dismissed as a product of 'a priori assumptions rather than [...] empirical reading' (2004, xxxii). Citing Barnouw, Quaresima states that the analysis 'appears too rigidly preshaped by an ideological message' and goes on to acknowledge that 'Kracauer pushes his agenda relentlessly even when a film manifests tendencies that oppose authoritarian scenarios' (2004, xxxiii). I am well aware that a similar charge of rigidity and a preexisting ideological message not always warranted by individual films might conceivably be made against this present study. It is my chief ambition to address such a charge before it is made and I point to Quaresima's footnote on Elsaesser's assessment that the work's rigidity and ideological bias are rooted in Kracauer's selectivity in drawing up his corpus (2004, xxxii). In order to avoid such a charge against this study, I have watched as many films of the corpus as I was able in the time available, and base my analysis on the close viewing of over 200 films. I resisted the lure of those extraordinary texts that have been singled out for criticism by scholars in whose footsteps I undertook my own research,[13] and have chosen to include many films that are analysed in detail in this book for the first time. That is not to say that I sought out other extraordinary texts that might help me refute scholarship drawn up on the basis of an original

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13   I shall never forget the colleague – who had once been my teacher – who, when told that I was watching the period's films indiscriminately, asked me: 'Why don't you just go straight to Bánky?' Precisely because, I thought to myself while politely ignoring the question, no one has so far bothered to look again at the unexceptional films to see if the ones declared extraordinary were indeed out of the ordinary.

set of extraordinary texts. Rather, I aimed to identify the run-of-the-mill, the ordinary product of the Hungarian film sector so as to be able to gain and give a sense of the overall picture. If I make my points rigidly forcefully at times, it is to emphasize the importance of the key observation that existing scholarship has made relatively typical texts seem extraordinary to create the impression of Hungarian cinema as a site of resistance and a source of national pride.

Kracauer's psychoanalytical approach is another aspect of his work that has attracted criticism (Quaresima 2004, xxx-xxxi), and which I try not to emulate. It is this approach that prompts him to remark, in his discussion of films dealing with the subject of sex in the early 1920s, that:

> Debaucheries are often an unconscious attempt to drown the conscious-ness of deep, inner frustration. This psychological mechanism seems to have forced itself upon many Germans. It was as if they felt paralyzed in view of the freedom offered them, and instinctively withdrew into the unproblematic pleasures of the flesh.

Kracauer 2004, 46

Kracauer's conviction that the films provided a window onto the German soul, coupled with his psychoanalytical approach, lead him to some gen-eralizations about 'the German mind['s] unique opportunity to overcome hereditary habits and reorganize itself completely', and the air being 'full of doctrines trying to captivate [the German mind], to lure it into a regrouping of inner attitudes' (Kracauer 2004, 43). In this book, I keep psychoanalysis at arm's length, and I will not point to Hungarian cinema to infer the pre-disposition of the Hungarian mind-set for anti-Semitism or other forms of intolerance. It is a subtle but vital distinction that I will instead try to show how Hungarian films of the 1930s and 1940s give evidence of widespread anti-Semitism and how they can be seen to articulate – and also normal-ize – far-right ideologies.

Kracauer's book provides another example to avoid: its back-to-front thesis. The claim that Weimar cinema carries within it the signs of what was to come applies an interpretive framework that determines the meanings attributed to the texts under discussion. In this framework, the films seem to gain the status of tragically unheeded prophecy. If I look for evidence that *Das Kabinett des Dr Caligari/The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1919) anticipated the horrors of the Holocaust, the interpretation offers itself readily that a madman uses 'hypnotic power to force his will upon

his tool' (Kracauer 2004, 72-73). An approach that is informed, but not determined, by awareness of the historical context would yield different readings, perhaps linking the film's horror to anxieties surrounding the new science of psychoanalysis and fears of a kind of mental abjection, a breach of the intangible inside, the mind, the soul, the subject of Freud's investigations in contemporary Vienna. Thus, to give an example from the corpus of films analysed in this study, I will not read *Hyppolit, a lakáj/Hyppolit the Butler* (Székely, 1931), a film about a tyrannical butler, as modelling and commenting on the blind faith of Hungarian elites in the self-styled Regent of the Kingdom of Hungary, Admiral Miklós Horthy, although such a reading might be fascinating and perhaps even ultimately productive. Instead, I will show how the film reflects on debates of the possibility of a 'Jew' ever to become fully Hungarian.

I agree with Quaresima (2004, xxxii) that Kracauer's flawed approach must be understood in relation to the time of writing, when a shocked humanity sought to make sense of the horrors of the recent war. However, Kracauer's suspicion that a study of Weimar cinema might help us piece together a range of ideas and discourses that reflected on contemporary developments and proposed scenarios that could be interpreted as articulations of real, perceived, or imagined national hopes and fears is one that must not be dismissed.

As Hake notes, Kracauer's argument was crucially undermined by the generalization that 'all Nazi films were more or less propaganda films', and she argues that Kracauer and his contemporary Hans Wollenberg relied 'on an epistemology of suspicion through qualifiers like "more or less"' (Hake 2001, 3) to impute Nazism to all films produced in the Nazi era. However, Hake's difficulty in writing a new history of the popular cinema of the Third Reich is that 'unquestioned assumptions about the total control of the Propaganda Ministry over the filmic imagination' (Hake 2001, 3) have prevented a dispassionate interrogation of the continuities and constancies of German film across its various and seemingly distinct periods. The chief difficulty confronting the scholar who seeks to write a new history of Hungarian film in the 1930s and 1940s is the reverse of Hake's headache: most scholars refuse to acknowledge the existence of minute and stifling state control over the film sector and, instead, tend to overstress the fact of private ownership to contrast it with the Communist era's innovation, namely nationalization. In other words, Hake's problem is that received wisdom of Propaganda Minister Josef Goebbels's total control has allowed the assertion of a clean break in the German industry before and after the Nazis, while the Hungarian film historian's problem is that the received wisdom of a

privately owned Hungarian film sector has enabled the assertion of a clean break in the Hungarian industry between the wartime film scene and the Communist command economy in the cinema. Thus, the scholar of German cinema must nuance the view that Goebbels had complete control over the sector, while the scholar of Hungarian film must challenge the notion that the state did not exercise close control over filmmaking.

Negotiation between the stakeholders is a key aspect of any codified and industrialized centre of cultural production. As Kracauer also notes, film is a complex text that is the outcome of wide-ranging cooperation between a varied and diverse collective of professionals (2004, 5). Actors, architects, and engineers, casual physical labourers and hourly paid extras, painters, sculptors and set dressers, catering and transport personnel, electricians, carpenters, accountants and stuntmen and women all lend their voices. The discourse they produce is therefore not a unique utterance by a single privileged spokesperson, but an amalgam of a multiplicity of voices. The scriptwriter's text is uttered under the director's instruction by the actor, recorded by the sound engineer, and pasted into a sequence by the editor. Each of these privileged participants relies on the work of dozens of workers, some highly specialized, others performing relatively uncomplicated tasks that require little or no training. All of them inflect the text by adding their voices, however quiet, to the harmony (or cacophony depending on the collaborators' ability to work together effectively). The voices are often multi-national, accented in diverse ways, informed by strikingly different bodies of knowledge and experience. And this amalgam of complexly unique voices undergoes further transformation in post-production suites, dubbing studios, the censor's offices and as it is received, understood and distorted in a thousand ways by a diverse cinema-going public in whose minds a national cinema takes fragmented, idiosyncratic shape. And it is my purpose here to trace, map and explore this sound as a person outside yet – as consumer and scholar – also a stakeholder situated within that complex amalgam of voices.

Ultimately, Kracauer's project is worthwhile: the film text produced by a nation has to reflect in some ways the concerns, characteristics, and ideas of the community that has produced it. There has to be some direct relationship between national cinema output and national history. The key is to reject essentialist concepts of the nation, and to understand that cinema can be understood as utterance or discourse that is both uttered – by the elites who make films and regulate their production and distribution – and heard or perceived by the masses that consume it. A film text is not necessarily an expression of the psyche of the people who produced it, and

neither does a popular film necessarily encapsulate an essential truth about its audience, which is heterogeneous, fragmented and lacking in coherence. Rather, as I discuss below, films can be understood as cultural artefacts or texts produced by a heterogeneous and complex community that they also, in turn, produce.

The Nation as Auteur

Although Hayward makes it clear that, for her, studies that address a specific epoch do not constitute a national cinema project, her *French National Cinema* is nonetheless an important point of reference for this present study, above all for its conceptualization of the nation (2005, 1-16). For Hayward, the nation is the articulation of a difference from the universal. The nation is born at the rejection of another's idea of themselves, particularly if that idea includes a claim to universality. No wonder then that so many nations today imagine themselves as the antithesis of America. Look no further for such a nation-building strategy than Iran's image of the US as the Great Satan (Anderson 2006, 18). But the nation is also, by necessity, an articulation of a claim to unity and oneness, or homogeneity. It is a difference (from the universal) that unites an imagined 'us' as specific and definite. Therefore, a national discourse is one that produces an image of that which we are not and also of that which we think we are. In this, the notion of the nation functions much like a stereotype, a shorthand mental image of the positive us and the negative them that helps us make sense of the world around us according to Gilman (1985, 15-35).

   As Hayward notes, any departure from the homogeneity narrative, that is to say anything that works against the national discourse that imagines the 'us' as homogeneous and natural, in identifying the imagined nation's other, inevitably, rearticulates the imagined nation, too, (that which we, the other's others, are not) and thus works to construct it. To cite a concrete example: Roma Hungarians are identified as not Hungarian, as racial others, the great ethnic threat to Hungarian national wellbeing by twenty-first century Hungarian racial nationalists, and are thus put to work to construct the Hungarian nation as its 'constitutive outside' (Butler 1993, 3), its own other. The 'Jews' have been cast in this role of the constitutive outside of the nation's imagined 'us' for centuries. As Maccoby explains St Chrysostom's view of the Jews: they were Cain's descendants, guilty of deicide, but, like Cain, not to be killed just so that they may act witness to the truth of Christianity (2006, 18). It is in declaring the dispossessed and oppressed

Roma genetically predisposed to crime that modern-day Hungarian racists create an image of Hungarians as genetically-morally upstanding, and it was in declaring the 'Jews' carriers of the sin of deicide that mediaeval anti-Semites sought to assert Christianity's claim to righteousness. In the early twentieth century, it was by declaring 'the Jews' an inorganic, alien, and treacherous community existing amongst the Hungarians – but situated outside the community of the nation – that Hungarian racist nationalists hoped to demonstrate the coherence and homogeneity of the Hungarian imagined community.

Hayward sounds a warning note: 'if problems arise in defining nation, therefore, it is surely because of its imagined status. It is that which makes "nation" such a slippery concept. As we have seen, it is alternately based on the assumption of difference, and continuity and, finally, imagined otherness' (2005, 4). To this I would add that the slipperiness of the nation is further lubricated by our own not quite knowing how far to go to ascribe agency to it in the production of a national cinema. Hayward sees the national cinema output of France as something that can inform our understanding of the nation through a rigorous analysis of one of the cultural artefacts that construct it, but not as something produced by the nation. But if, as Hayward argues, the cinematic output of a nation can tell us about that nation, then that cinematic output produces a vision of that nation. Others, such as Jarvie (2000, 75-87) have got bogged down in the usefulness or otherwise of a protectionist regulatory environment to create a national industry. Higson, too, possibly the fiercest critic of a theory of national cinema, ends up discussing the desirability or otherwise of a national cinema industry (2000, 72). I argue that the question of national cinema is more than a question of state infrastructures and a mode of production defined in opposition to the Hollywood model.

O'Reagan complicates the view of national cinema by adding production companies into the national cinema matrix to show national cinemas as 'a series of sets of relations between national film texts, national and international film industries and the films' and industries' socio-political and cultural contexts' (Hayward 2000, 92). This is a hugely helpful intervention in the debate as it helps us to see that a national cinema is not necessarily a body of texts produced automatically, out of thin air, but that national cinema is a product of a set of relations situated in sociopolitical and cultural contexts. This helps us to apply the national cinema model to societies in which the state exercises close oversight of cultural production, and also those in which the film sector is relatively free of state efforts to shape a 'national' discourse. It does so because we can conceive of national cinema

not merely as a set of texts united by a place of production, but as a set of texts that occupy a particular position in relation to a range of institutions, companies, creative and technical personnel, audiences, commentators, and scholars. Indeed, this book focuses chiefly on the relationships that exist between and around these market players.

It is a yawning gap in scholarship, one that this project has not been able to close, that audience data is difficult to access and few primary sources have been located to address adequately the position of the audience in the series of sets of relations sketched by O'Reagan. Where possible, I make reference to box office figures and audience responses, but these are admittedly few and far between.

The question of the nation as producer goes back to Kracauer, who saw the output of German national cinema in the 1920s and 1930s as evidence that can tell us about the psyche of the nation under discussion. He saw cinema as something produced by the nation in which the nation's characteristics can be apprehended, similarly to the way in which a psychosis can be unpicked and unpacked from a patient's dreams according to Freud and his followers. Kracauer's view of a national mind-set has been ill-received, and the idea of a collective psyche has found few followers, and many detractors. Indeed, as Quaresima notes, *From Caligari to Hitler* is both Kracauer's most well-known, and least-discussed work (2004, xvii). Scholars have been very careful not to follow in his footsteps, and have tended to avoid ascribing any real agency to the nation as active producer of (filmic) discourse. I suggest an approach that formulates the nation as producer and product, always and already both, of the discourse that constitutes (constructs) the nation. In this understanding of the nation, we can insert it into a matrix of texts where, similarly to the auteur in its more complex formulation as text, it figures as part of a weave, of which we as scholars, students, audiences, etc., are also a part, and which we therefore cannot see entirely from the outside.

Higson – writing in the very different context of Margaret Thatcher's Britain, but prefacing his remarks with theoretical comments of a general nature on the construction of the nation – denies the possibility of defining the nation. He suggests that to do so would be to presume to know that which one sets out to study. Higson also denies the possibility of demonstrating what the nation is from its output, arguing that it is impossible to define the corpus without *already* having a fixed idea of what the nation is (2000, 67). Higson suggests that national identity is 'not dependent on actually living within the geo-political space of the nation, as the émigré experience confirms' (2000, 64), and postulates the transnational, a concept that does away with the national altogether, to account for 'the cultural

difference and diversity that invariably marks both the inhabitants of a particular nation-state and the members of more geographically dispersed "national" communities' (Higson 2000, 66). Higson acknowledges that these ideas are rooted in the historically specific example of the British film industry of the 1980s-1990s (Higson 2000, 64) and it is important to bear this in mind when weighing his contribution to the debate on the national in this different context. But Higson's comments that seek to undermine, and even delegitimize debates surrounding the national in a broad sense as hubristic exercises in futility remain relevant outside of the narrow scope of Thatcherite Britain. He concedes that national cinema might be apprehended at the level of state policy (Higson 2000, 69), only to note that state policy is not formulated in a vacuum, and that protective measures tend to have the effect of promoting diversity by fostering a kind of cinematic production that is explicitly opposed to Hollywood (Higson 2000, 69-71). Of course, this diversity is only that when looking at it from the outside. So a Hungarian protectionist regulatory environment in the Horthy era, or today, may produce diversity by promoting a mode of production in opposition to Hollywood but, looking at it from the inside, it produces a hegemonic culture that denies diversity by asserting its Hungarianness as a rejection of Hollywood's claim to universality.

Higson remains altogether silent on whether individual texts might be read to see ways in which they produce the nation, because, for him, it is never possible to define the provenance of a film with any degree of certainty. Thus the nation being unknowable, and the nationality of films remaining an undeterminable mystery, for Higson, there is no national cinema beyond the efforts of a state to shape the output of a national cultural industry. And yet, as O'Reagan helps us understand, Higson's approach is not far from the very concept of the national he tries to dismiss.

What I propose here is a conceptualization of national cinema as the process of producing the nation through its national cinema by regulation, film production, consumption, and, we must add, scholarship. National cinema is a series of processes, products, and productions. The cinema did not arrive into a vacuum, but into a cultural scene already subject to more or less subtle forms of state control. As cinema evolved, so did the regulatory environment to respond to the specific problems posed by a mass medium produced in an industrial context, on an industrial scale. The state produces regulation and more or less sophisticated infrastructure. The infrastructure – whether consisting of the tax collection agency, a distributor of funds, or a more complex system built on censorship, subvention of appropriate fare, state ownership of production facilities, and regulated ticket prices – is

peopled with industry bosses, and the regulatory bodies are staffed by enforcers. These produce the industry through their application of the rules in relation to film entrepreneurs, actors, crews, and audiences. The sector produces (makes) films, which in turn produce the nation through iterations of the nation and its others (from Hollywood to 'the Jews'). The audience, interpellated by the film text as a linguistic, historical, and cultural community, produces the nation to which the state has come to be hyphenated (Hayward 2000, 89). The Mobius strip of nation-cinema-nation has come full circle: the state produces the regulatory environment, and the industry bosses. This image of the Mobius strip might help us gain a sense of the nation as producer from which the cinema emerges as its output, but also as a text. We could also begin to trace this text of the nation from the nation itself, which produces artists and cultural entrepreneurs, who produce texts. The texts produce images of the nation, subject to more or less intrusive modes of state intervention. (Even Hollywood has to contend with limitations of the First Amendment, and let us not for a moment be taken in by the notion that it produces something other than a nation that claims to be whole, hegemonic, and universal.) And these images of the nation iteratively produce and perform the nation. In this view the nation is the product of that which it produces, and the cinema, the product, is also, always and already, producer of that which produces it. They are text, and thus parts of a complex weave of texts. The nation, through its spokespeople – artists, filmmakers, but also politicians and officials, film industry bosses and cinemagoers, exhibitors and distributors, casts and crews – produces the cinema of the nation. The nation produces fiction, which in turn produces the fiction of the nation.

To sum up: national cinema can be understood as a corpus of film texts that are part of the complex discourse that imagines and thus constructs the nation, and as a body of work produced by a community that imagines itself to be whole and unique. This understanding of the nation helps us to reposition the nation not as a privileged and 'slippery' (Hayward 2005, 4) entity, but as active shaper of a text that in turn actively shapes it. The nation is thus theorized in the Andersonian sense as a fluid but passive product of multiple texts, but can also be thought an active producer of itself as text. This is useful in moving on the debate from questions of a national mindset, or, worse, a national soul, or from the misframed debate about the need for a protective regulatory environment in order to foster a cinema that is national towards a view of national cinema as a corpus of films that are outcome and source of a series of actors that includes all elements of the national community, scholars and readers of scholarship, too. But it

is also helpful in reminding us that the nation in national cinema should be understood to have agency in the production of that national cinema.

As Higson, quite rightly, warns, there is always a larger whole that it is impossible for us to know fully before we begin (2000, 67). Inevitably, the study of a national cinema entails an initial leap of faith on the basis of assumed knowledge, whether of the nation or of the corpus. It is here that I must acknowledge that my own investigation started from a point of presumed knowledge. I had accepted the narrative of a film industry maintained by Jewish scriptwriters and producers working under assumed names in an industry from which they had been banned, and which was now churning out films about the need to exclude 'Jews' from the national body. The introductory section of my article on Géza Radványi's *Somewhere in Europe* is burdened by the same acceptance of the established narrative (Gergely 2012). In my project proposal, submitted to the funding body in February 2012, I wrote: 'Although the industry was purged of virtually all Jewish personnel through the 1930s, perhaps surprisingly, it continued to work from source material by Jewish writers. A chief aim of the study is to explore the articulation of a sense of Hungarianness by the putatively ethnically pure film industry between the introduction of sound in 1929 and the closure of the studios in 1944.' I had had no reason to question the received wisdom that Hungarian films of the 1930s and 1940s were studio-bound melodramas, lacking in variety or any aesthetic or artistic value, or that the film industry of the 1920s had been moribund and that the filmmakers of the 1930s were almost exclusively Jewish. These assumptions, and many others, have been tested, contested and – for the most part – have been proven wildly inaccurate. My own view of the period and its output has been profoundly transformed in the course of my project. What follows is the record and outcome of this process of transformation.

What Is Hungarian Film?

The period this study takes as its focus was one when the question '*mi a magyar?*' or 'what is Hungarian?' emerged as one of the most hotly contested issues. The historian Gyula Szekfű, a key shaper of Hungarian historical self-perception in the Horthy era, for instance through his book *Three Generations* (1920), edited a volume of essays on Hungarian national identity entitled *Mi a magyar?* (1936). This volume offered a series of interventions by influential thinkers on the essence of Hungarianness. Hungary was a country in search of an identity after the trauma of Trianon. From an (almost) equal partner-nation in one of the major European states, Austria-Hungary,

Hungary had become a territorially and politically insignificant minor nation surrounded by emerging and rapidly developing nation-states, all of which had strong claims on lands they annexed under the Trianon Treaty. Hungary was militarily impotent, and its room for foreign policy manoeuvre was seriously limited. Lacking the means or the opportunity to flex financial or military muscle, questions of cultural development came to the fore. Hungary saw itself at a cultural, civilizational, scientific, and moral struggle against neighbours it saw as racially inferior (Apponyi et al. 1928, 3-20). In the region where eugenics was one of the hottest branches of science (see: Turda 2007, 186-221), the national communities that peopled it were seen as clearly separated races. In the official discourse of the Hungarian racist nationalist elite, the essential characteristics of the Hungarian race were contrasted with those of neighbour races to demonstrate Hungarian superiority.

Cinema was identified in the 1920s, in particular during film fanatic Miklós Kozma's term as Hungarian press agency chief, as a key tool for the dissemination of Hungarian cultural values, the advertisement of the nation's civilizational achievements and moral superiority in a nonviolent, but deadly serious competition against neighbours.[14] The level and ferocity of this competition is well demonstrated by the fact that, in 1942, when all three countries were allied to Nazi Germany whose victory in the war seemed a foregone conclusion, Slovakia, Romania, and Hungary kept their markets closed to films made by the other two countries (*Magyar Film* 1942, 15, 2-4).[15] This was the period in which state investment was suddenly forthcoming, and taxpayer-backed institutions were established to promote Hungarian film production. Because of its top-down organization, and its reflection of official discourses of nationhood and race, Hungary's films are hugely revealing about Hungarian concepts of the national character. Not insignificantly, it is this direct and profound state involvement that allows us to ascribe a relatively great degree of agency to the state, which insisted it was coterminous with the nation (see: Bingert 1928, 54), in Hungarian film production. Similarly, the films of the period provide an insight into

14   Kozma spent two years as Minister of the Interior in 1935-1937, a period in which state intervention in the cinema became more intrusive and paved the way for the assertion of full state control from 1938 onwards (Záhonyi-Ábel 2013a, 24).

15   *Magyar Film*, the official film industry gazette and trade paper published by the Chamber of Film and Dramatic Arts from 1939 to 1944, will be a key reference point. In order to avoid adding pages to the bibliography by including a separate entry for each *Magyar Film* article cited, I format references to the paper like so: title of the paper, year, issue number, page number.

contemporary Hungarian perceptions of the various nations, ethnicities, religious groups, and other real and imagined communities in the region.

The radical elite's view, as expressed in particular by Apponyi and Eöttevényi in *Justice for Hungary* (Apponyi et al. 1928, 1-20; 189-250), of a cultural struggle against competing races reinforced the need to answer the question about Hungarian identity. The answer that was eventually proposed was that to be Hungarian was to be not Jewish. This view gained virtually undisputed credence from the 1920s onwards. Even radical leftist atheist thinkers, such as the Jewish Hungarian Oszkár Jászi, author of the seminal *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy* (1929), subscribed to this view (Gyurgyák 2007, 192; Pelle 2001, 74). *Magyar* and *zsidó* became mutually exclusive terms. In *Three Generations*, his programmatic work on Hungarian history from the war of independence in 1848-1849 to the Treaty of Trianon, Szekfű identified the conflict of 'Jewry – Hungarians' as one of five key oppositions that were to blame for Hungary's political and social crises (1989, 416).[16] The insistent probing of what it is to be Hungarian thus brought to light the complementary question about Jewish Hungarian identity and Jewish presence within the drastically reduced nation. The answers given to these questions, and the cultural, legislative, military responses that were their consequences, determined the future of the nation for decades to come. This study then combines Szekfű's question with André Bazin's: *mi a magyar film?* What is Hungarian cinema? Just as the period's commentators and more recent authors of Hungarian film history, I hope to propose an answer to this question by exploring the films and their articulations of a Hungarian national identity.

Documentary evidence is used to explore the filmmakers', industry bosses', and state functionaries' intentions, which are then contrasted with close textual analysis to ask questions about the success of the films in articulating the desired ideas about national character. The book explores the extent to which the films of the putatively racially pure post-1938 film industry were different from the films of the putatively Jewish industry of the pre-1938 period. The difference between the industry in its two guises is considered to determine whether it is as stark as suggested by contemporary observers, and some subsequent scholars of the period. The image of Hungary as a country that emerges from the period's film output

16   The other conflict pairs were: landowners – agricultural labourers; catholics – protestants; the old – the young unemployed; Hungarians in Rump Hungary – Hungarians outside Hungary (Szekfű, 1989, 416). Note that the only conflict pair that imagines a national community in conflict with an imagined community of aliens within it is the 'Jewry – Hungarians' pairing.

is sketched. The national character articulated by these films is explored. Films not explicitly concerned with Trianon are analysed to see how they might still be seen to reflect the recent traumatic loss of territory, and the almost universally shared national goal of its reversal. Films that do explicitly address the trauma of Trianon are analysed for their representation of Hungary and its peoples. The question that echoes through virtually all works of Hungarian art in the early twentieth century will be at the heart of this book: what is Hungarian? And the implicit complementary question will be made explicit throughout: what is Jewish? Or more pertinently: what is Jewish (for a) Hungarian? The book asks questions about the ways in which Hungarian films frame Jewishness where Jewishness is explicitly represented. The complementary question has to do with a Jewish identity articulated by films in which characters identified as Jewish are absent – a 'structuring absence' (Kuhn 1982 via Hayward 2000). The book considers the differences between the Jewishness represented in the putatively Jewish films of the pre-1938 period, and the Jewishness framed by the putatively racially pure Hungarian cinema of the 1938-1944 period. It traces the shifts in representation of Jewishness from 1931 to 1944, and aims to identify the constancies that endured beyond the end of the period.

To answer the questions above, I hope to pull off a careful balancing act and keep the films in focus throughout, even as I discuss in relatively great detail the historical context, the industrial organization, the distribution, exhibition, and production practices, as well as censorship and public reception of the films. Likewise, I hope to keep one eye on the historical context, the industrial organization with all its intricacies, audience demographics and responses, and later critical assessments, as I offer my own reading of the various films. I am determined to avoid reducing this book to a series of extremely detailed case studies of privileged texts, but neither do I intend to limit my analysis to cursory remarks inserted into daunting lists of film titles, directors, and stars.

Even as I insist that I will not privilege certain texts above others, one film, of which only an eleven-minute fragment survives, is a major, frequently recurring reference point. That film is *Magyar feltámadás/Hungarian Resurrection* (Kiss and Csepreghy, 1939), a triumphalist prestige production made to mark what was heralded as the first step towards the restoration of 'Greater Hungary'. This text was privileged in multiple ways. It was directed by the Film Chamber president Ferenc Kiss with help from the established director Jenő Csepreghy. It dealt with the reoccupation by Hungarian troops of border counties awarded to Czechoslovakia under the Trianon Treaty and returned to Hungary as the first Vienna Award, as a consequence of

appeasement at Munich (Boros-Kazai 2005, 362). It premiered amid special fanfare with Horthy and his wife, and the top echelon of the regime in attendance. And it featured a fictional plotline of star-crossed lovers separated by the illegitimate Trianon borders, intercut with documentary footage of Hungarian troops marching through southern Slovakia, and, in the process, performing its transformation into northern Hungary. The film's title renders explicit its makers' hopes of a national miracle, and makes it a triumphalist coda to the canon of Hungarian literature on the death of the nation. For these reasons, I return to it time and again as a key text: a fragment of the promised future of a recovered lost Golden Age.

Structure

At first glance, the reader familiar with canonical works of Hungarian film scholarship might perceive an apparent imbalance in this book. Chapter 3, on the first five years of the sound era, which takes us from 1931 to 1935, a period to which Király and Balogh have devoted a 700-page book (2000), is nowhere near as long as Chapter 5 on filmmaking during the period that marked Hungary's active participation in the war. This imbalance is only in the mind of those used to the periodization used by Király and Balogh. The fact remains that the film output of the first five years amounts to 48 features, of which five do not survive, while the output of the last four years of the war is 159 features, over three times that figure. The difference in volume of films produced in itself explains the perceived imbalance.

The seemingly excessive attention paid to film director István Székely and Gyula Kabos is similarly explained. Székely made 24 films between 1931 and 1937, with twelve credits in 1931-1935 to his name. In other words, he alone accounted for a quarter of the industry's output in the first five years of the Hungarian sound film era, making him an exceptionally important director. He remained a hugely influential presence, until anti-Jewish legislation rolled insurmountable obstacles in his way. Likewise, Kabos dominated the sector until his forcible removal under racist legislation. He appeared in 43 films between 1931 and 1938, nearly twice as many as the other dominant figure of the sector, Gyula Csortos, who had 25 credits, primarily in supporting roles, in the same period. As the industry grew more diverse in terms of the number of directors and stars that made films, so the focus becomes less concentrated on exceptional individuals in this study. Indeed, as we shall see, this privileging of a very small number of key players characterizes Hungarian scholarship in general and accounts for

the curiously exaggerated attention devoted to István Szőts, director of just one feature film in the period. I attempt to keep a balance throughout the book, and allow volume of output and significance in industry organization to dictate the attention key films and key filmmakers receive.

Because the Hungarian industry and its output are relatively little known in the English-speaking world, while the Hungarian readership are put at a disadvantage by unhelpful assumptions and often inaccurate received knowledge, I begin with a chapter devoted to the key concepts. This chapter explains those uncertainties of what constitutes the nation that have a special relevance to our discussion of constructions of Hungarian national identity in the interwar period and during the Second World War. It goes on to theorize the significance of the re-drawing of Hungary's borders in Fragment of Empire, before discussing the concept of *nemzethalál* or death of the nation. A discussion of race and racism and their significance in the Hungarian context concludes this chapter.

Chapter 2 gives an overview of scholarship on the subject, taking in turn the contribution of historians active during the period in question, such as Ferenc Lohr and Miklós Kispéter, the works of Communist-era critics and post-Communist film scholarship. The latter is broken down into three main sections: Hungarian academic scholarship since 1989, nonacademic revisionist film historiography, focusing in particular on the works of those authors who have published books aimed at recovering the films of the 1938-1944 era for the canon by dismissing or at least downplaying the significance of anti-Jewish measures in that period, and English language scholarship, which will be seen to carry the marks of misrepresentations by Hungarian scholars, in particular by Communist-era film historian István Nemeskürty.

The following three chapters and the Epilogue each combine a chronological historical account with a thematic exploration. Thus, Chapter 3 looks at the beginnings of a sound film industry, from the attempts in the 1920s to set up a regulatory environment that offers protection to domestic productions in the competition against imports from world-leading film economies, while exploring the theme of a Jewish difference articulated by the films of this period. The chapter's second half analyses early Hungarian sound cinema to show the beginnings of a rural film genre, and the use of folk motifs to inject authenticity and ethnographic appeal into films set in the countryside.

Chapter 4 takes the boom-and-bust narrative of the middle period of the Horthy era, and explains why a periodization that draws the line at 1935-1936 and at 1940-1941 is more sensitive and productive than the typical approach that puts the dividing line at 1938-1939, when anti-Jewish legislation was

rolled out in the film sector. This historical account is complemented by a thematic investigation of modernity as well as a star study of Gyula Kabos with particular attention to two films: *Lovagias ügy/An Affair of Honour* (István Székely, 1937) and *Papucshős/The Henpecked Husband* (János Vaszary, 1938). I also interrogate Hungarian scholarship's tendency to think in terms of genre typology and suggest that the attention lavished on the 'crime' film genre distorts our understanding of the period's cinema. I return here to the theme of rural films and suggest that the interiority attributed to Hungarian cinema by many scholars is rooted in a filmic representation that gives an impression of interiority through its claustrophobic spatial regime.

Chapter 5 takes stock of the new round of regulations that impacted on the film sector in 1941-1944 before exploring the Hungarian industry's attempts to match Hollywood glamour and sophistication after the ban on new imports from the US, and gives an account of the transformation of the star system as power concentrated in the hands of a few state-appointed film industry bosses. The much-repeated claim about the disappearance of an explicitly anti-Semitic propaganda cinema in 1942-1943 is explored before an analysis of the films of director Viktor Bánky and his favourite star Antal Páger, followed by sections on films about surgeons and race dramas. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the circumstances of filmmaking in the final months of the war.

The Epilogue looks at the postwar 'Reconstruction' era and shows that – despite much talk of new beginnings, taken to an extreme by Nemeskürty with his notion of a 'new public' (1974, 142) – , the postwar cinema can be seen as a reassertion of old trends. The work of the vetting committees, set up to investigate collaboration and collusion in the Hungarian film and theatre scene, is reviewed. I discuss in detail the case of Béla Mihályffy to show how cynical pragmatism robbed these committees of any claim to fairness and ensured that the film and theatre scene of the Communist era would be tarnished by the same brush of corruption that characterized the entire system. The Epilogue concludes with an analysis of *Valahol Európában/Somewhere in Europe* (Géza Radványi, 1947) to show the many constancies – of personnel, industry structures, and representational strategies – that connect the postwar moment with the interwar and wartime eras.