

**“WE LAUGH WITH TEARS, IT’S SO HUNGARIAN:”
THE NARRATIVES OF HUNGARIANNESS IN GÁBOR REISZ’ FILMS
AND THEIR RECEPTION**

By

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Submitted to
Central European University
Nationalism Studies Program

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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Budapest, Hungary

2019

ABSTRACT

The thesis studies the intersection of nationhood and cinema in contemporary Hungary. For this purpose it analyzes Gábor Reisz' two films, *For Some Inexplicable Reason* (2014) and *Bad Poems* (2018), and their reflexive mode of representing Hungarianness in a specific Budapest context. This case study falls within the theoretical framework of banal nationalism and everyday nationhood, focusing on cultural production and audience reception. Using the films as a lens, a focus group study was conducted with a Generation Y Budapest audience. By employing the thematic analysis method, the present study finds that the participants identify with the ironic stance on Hungarianness conveyed through everyday experiences in the films. As such, the films voice the young urban adults' ambivalent relationship with nationhood, providing a platform for renegotiating a new narrative of Hungarianness in contemporary Hungary.

Keywords: nationhood, cinema, audience reception, Generation Y, Gábor Reisz,

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my two supervisors Luca Váradi and László Strausz. Without professor Váradi's confidence in my work, thought-provoking suggestions, and encouragement to step out of my comfort zone, this thesis would have not been the same. I am grateful to professor Strausz, who despite the distance, always offered his help with the film analysis and his vast knowledge on cinema has been an overall inspiration for my work.

I want to thank the Nationalism Department for making my fieldwork possible and providing such a supportive and stimulating environment throughout the program. I especially want to thank all the focus group participants for their cooperation and enthusiasm to discuss Gábor Reisz' films. I am also grateful to Mike Cragg for reading and reviewing my thesis draft.

A special thanks goes to my colleagues from the program, especially Nino Gozalishvili and Ivan Tranfic who were always ready to offer their help and critical insights as well as they taught me to value my own work. I could not thank enough my friend Arin Agich with whom I got to experience all the ups and downs of this process. Having her by my side during the daily (and nightly) writing sessions transformed this stressful period into a fun and enjoyable time. Moreover, words cannot express the indebt gratitude I owe to my family for always supporting my dreams and for believing in me.

Last but not least, I would like to thank Sanjay Kumar, my academic writing instructor without whom this thesis would not have been possible. The long conversations on cinema and Hungarianness have helped immensely in guiding this work to the finish line.

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1. INTRODUCTION

I clearly remember walking out of a little art cinema in Budapest just after watching Gábor Reisz' *For Some Inexplicable Reason* (2014),¹ and hearing people laughingly say: "This film was us, it was so Hungarian." These types of statements kept on repeating in conversations with friends, on online platforms, and in film reviews. The film's reception was dominated by identity-related comments on how it portrays "*us* living in Budapest," demonstrates "what is it like to be a *Hungarian* young adult today," and examines the "*Hungarian* state of being."² It was unprecedented for a low-budget diploma film to be a commercial and critical success, and believed to be a Hungarian film that was long awaited.³ Ever since, Reisz has been recognized as a new Generation Y film director in Hungary. Consequently, his second feature *Bad Poems* (2018)⁴ was widely anticipated and ended up garnering the same response regarding its themes of nationhood.⁵ Paradoxically, however, both films depict a reality that is far from the imagined Hungarianness; they are concerned with the "disillusioned" Generation Y living in Budapest, a context that is rarely associated with nationhood.

This thesis reveals the role of cinema in understanding how and why does nationhood get reformulated in the everyday for an understudied group of urban, educated Generation Y. Irrespective of conscious or unconscious deployment of Hungarianness in these films, the

¹ *For Some Inexplicable Reason*, directed by Gábor Reisz (2014; Budapest: Cirkofilm, 2014), DVD, 90 min.

² Dóra Matalin, "Harmincasok! Ez nektek kötelező," [People in your thirties! This is mandatory for you], *Index*, accessed December 20, 2018, http://index.hu/kultur/cinematrix/2014/10/30/van_valami_furcsa_es_megmagyarazhatatlan/; Parraghramma, "VAN Valami Furcsa És Megmagyarázhatatlan - Ilyen Ma Magyarak Lenni," [This is how is it to be Hungarian today], *Geekz*, January 3, 2019, <http://geekz.444.hu/2014/11/03/van-valami-furcsa-es-megmagyarazhatatlan-ilyen-ma-magyarak-lenni>; Sándor Baski "VAN Valami Furcsa És Megmagyarázhatatlan," [For Some Inexplicable Reason] *Filmvilág blog*, accessed February 28, 2019, http://filmvilag.blog.hu/2014/12/05/van_valami_furcsa_es_megmagyarazhatatlan_850, emphasis added.

³ "Évek óta erre a filmre vártam: VAN valami furcsa és megmagyarázhatatlan" [I've been waiting for this film for years] *Librarius.hu*, accessed October 20, 2018, <https://librarius.hu/2014/10/21/evek-ota-erre-filmre-vartam-van-valami-furcsa-es-megmagyarazhatatlan/>.

⁴ *Bad Poems*, directed by Gábor Reisz (2018; Budapest: Cirkofilm, 2018) 97 min.

⁵ "Olyan Lesz Mint a Van Valami Furcsa És Megmagyarázhatatlan, És Mégsem," [It's going to be like For Some Inexplicable Reason yet different] *Index* accessed December 29, 2018, https://index.hu/kultur/cinematrix/2017/09/29/reisz_gabor_rossz_versek_magyar_film/.

work of Reisz creates a narrative of Hungarianness that especially resonates with the young adults in the country. Through the case study of these films, Hungarianness is approached from two perspectives with two different methodologies. On the one hand, it relies on a close reading of cinematic texts focusing on quirky cinematic representations that formulate nationhood on the screen in a reflexive way.⁶ On the other hand, it employs the focus group research method to study the audience reception of thirty Budapest-based young individuals who are followers of Reisz' work. By employing the thematic analysis method the thesis reveals the main patterns that emerged in discussing the Hungarianness of the films and through that unveils nationhood's construction and significance for the participants beyond the films.

Current literature on Hungarianness focuses on its changing yet re-emerging importance within the context of a global identity crisis.⁷ These studies primarily concentrate on transborder Hungarianness and its formulations as a political tool while neglecting the context of everyday nationhood and its relevance for younger generations. Moreover, there has been a gradual decline in the scholarship on Hungarian cinema in considering films as significant texts that argue for concepts related to nationhood. This thesis suggests a new way to study national narratives from the bottom up with the help of a visual medium. The novelty of this thesis stems from both the film analysis and focus group analysis part. Reisz' filmmaking has not been approached from a perspective encompassing both cinema and nationhood. Moreover, audience reception as a methodological tool to understand contemporary formulations of Hungarianness is non-existent. As such, it offers identity formation on a ground level using a specific filmic perspective and urban context.

⁶ James McDowell, "Notes on Quirky'," *Movie: A Journal of Film Criticism*, no. 1 (2010), http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/film/movie/contents/notes_on_quirky.pdf.

⁷ To name a few scholars prolific on the topic: Valér Veres, "Identity Discourses on National Belonging: The Hungarian Minority in Romania" 14, no. 1 (2014): 25.; György Csepeli, "Competing Patterns of National Identity in Post-Communist Hungary," *Media, Culture & Society* 13, no. 3 (July 1, 1991): 325–39, <https://doi.org/10.1177/016344391013003004>.; Agnes Batory, "Kin-State Identity in the European Context: Citizenship, Nationalism and Constitutionalism in Hungary," *Nations and Nationalism* 16, no. 1 (2010): 31–48, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8129.2010.00433.x>.

The thesis aims to contribute to the field of banal nationalism and everyday nationhood in involving audience reception of cinematic texts. Film discussions allow for individuals' constructions of nationhood to be approached without them having been imposed by the researcher. Furthermore, it intends to stress the importance of cinematic texts as relevant analytical viewpoints through which to study relational signifiers of nationhood on a visual level. Beyond the context of Hungary, the relevance of this work lies in its involvement of film consumption as an innovative way of understanding younger generations' attitudes towards the national collective. It would be intriguing to see whether other young directors in the Eastern European region include nationhood as a concept in their films, and how it gets reformulated by the domestic audience.

This chapter is followed by the theoretical and conceptual framework of this thesis that considers both the field of nationalism and film studies. The chapter reviews nationhood's presence on a textual basis, its everyday circulation in popular culture, and its construction in the context of the everyday through individuals. The third chapter establishes the current post-socialist context of Hungary with a special focus on youth, as well as considers contemporary cinema culture and Reisz' position within it. The fourth chapter is dedicated to film analysis in order to see how nationhood is presented via cinematic means in Reisz' work. Moving beyond textual analysis, the fifth chapter of the thesis outlines the methodology chosen for the study, i.e. qualitative research methods relying on focus groups. This is followed by the sixth chapter that analyses the patterns and topics that emerged in the focus groups. The thesis concludes with a summary of the main findings, contributions, and further implications that this study entails.

2. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter presents the key theoretical concepts in the study of cinema's position within the field of nationalism. Firstly, I identify nation as a category on the screen and review the analytical viewpoints in the study of films and nationalism. This is followed by narrowing down the focus to Eastern European film studies and the main approaches to studying nationhood in Hungarian cinema. Secondly, I rely on the foundations of banal nationalism and everyday nationhood's key concepts in studying the cultural reproduction of national identity on a quotidian level in order to see its effects on the audience. I conclude with the main objectives of this research leading to my research questions.

Firstly, the key concept of nationhood has to be assessed. After 1989 there has been a prevalent tendency towards an ethnonationalist definition of nationhood in Eastern Europe: that is, one based on common ancestry, culture, and language, which establishes a clear "us" vs. "them" division.⁸ The issue of Hungarianness is under constant study often stressing how the nation and state do not correspond, making nationhood open to constant redefinition.⁹ Often, nationhood, national identity, and national belonging are used interchangeably, where nationhood seems to encompass both identification and a sense of attachment. I rely on Brubaker's definition of nationhood or nationness as a "conceptual variable," a practical category rather than a substantial entity.¹⁰ Brubaker sees nationness as an event, "a precarious frame of vision and basis for individual and collective action."¹¹ In order to understand nationhood as a practical category, its usage for individuals as a way of formulating thinking and experience will be the main focus in the thesis, for which discussing films functions as a

⁸ Antal Örkény, "Hungarian National Identity: Old and New Challenges," *International Journal of Sociology* 35, no. 4 (December 2005): 28–48, <https://doi.org/10.2753/IJS0020-7659350402>.

⁹ Rebecca Ann Haynes and Gavin Sullivan "Hungarian National Identity: Definition and Redefinition", *Contemporary Nationalism in East Central Europe*, ed. Paul Latawski (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 87–104.

¹⁰ Rogers Brubaker *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 16.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 19.

trigger. The following section, therefore, outlines how nationhood could be evoked through visual means in cinema and then specifically looks at its relevance in Hungarian film production.

2.1. Nationhood on the Screen

The ubiquity of both nations and films have sparked several debates which have considered their relation to each other.¹² Classifying cinemas along national lines has been commonplace, as the modern nation-states emerged around the same time as the birth of cinema.¹³ Therefore, positioning cinema into the theoretical framework of nationalism began in order to study the ways that cinema visualized nation-specificities, supporting an essentialist understanding. This developed into a constructivist approach that sees the underlying link between cinema and nationalism in envisioning a fictitious entity heavily dependent on context. In this internalist interpretation, the moving image is treated as a textual tool articulating about the nation and its circulation as formulating national collectivity. Therefore, as Susan Hayward asserts, national cinema builds on two key concepts: identity and difference.¹⁴ Films create imaginary boundaries that encourage identification for individuals as part of a common culture, but also make them oppose themselves to others.¹⁵ As such, cinema, just like print-capitalism, offers a “common spatio-temporal horizon”¹⁶ for individuals, but it can lead to exclusionary tendencies, for which the role of the audience needs to be considered.

According to Pierre Sorlin, cinema-goers have a key role in constructing national cinemas across successive generations. Through his analysis of the Italian case, he reveals that regardless of the sounds and images, domestic or foreign locations, the audience

¹² Ed. Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie, *Cinema and Nation* (Psychology Press, 2000).

¹³ Alan Williams, “Introduction,” *Film and Nationalism*, ed. Alan Williams (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 1.

¹⁴ Susan Hayward, *French National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1993) Quoted in *Cinema and Nation* (Psychology Press, 2000).

¹⁵ Philip Schlesinger, “The Sociological Scope of “National Cinema,” in *Cinema and Nation*, 17-28.

¹⁶ Hayward here builds on Anderson’s framework of imagined communities from Benedict Anderson *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991)

appropriate films as national since they signify national culture and tradition.¹⁷ For this reason, Andrew Higson suggests a processual perspective on national cinema: examining films in relation to already existing systems, economics, criticism, exhibition, and consumption beyond a text-based approach.¹⁸ According to him, the imagined communities that cinema depicts are more likely to be local or transnational, yet they are perceived as national.¹⁹ This statement strongly resonates with Reisz' films, where the Budapest context becomes associated with the nation as a whole. In the constructivist approach nation is not an inherent or fixed concept in cinema but functions as “a communicative space,”²⁰ the relevance of which is further challenged in a globalized world.

Contrary to Sorlin and Higson, Barber proposes to see globalization and nationalism as different but closely related features when assessing the national in cinemas. He does not try to avoid the concept of national cinema but emphasizes its refinement and different ways of continuation.²¹ This is especially relevant with rising new technologies, national television networks, social media, and the distribution of moving images through the Internet, which all complicate the understanding of today's “national mediascapes.”²² Nationhood's definition is shifting, adapting, and continuously maintained: nonetheless, even in today's world films are able to circulate values and behaviors associated with a nation, as well as provide a cluster of narrative strategies giving a layered conception of one's nationhood.²³ For the post-1989 context, Thomas Elsaesser proposes a “post-national” approach to cinema. Here a self-conscious use of parody defines identity, resulting in various—often paradoxical—signifiers

¹⁷ Pierre Sorlin, *Italian National Cinema, 1986–1996* (London: Routledge, 1996) Quoted in *Cinema and Nation*, 25.

¹⁸ Andrew Higson, “The Concept of National Cinema,” *Screen* 30, no. 4 (December 1, 1989): 36–47, <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/30.4.36>.

¹⁹ Higson, “The Limiting Imagination of National Cinema,” in *Cinema and Nation*, 57–68.

²⁰ Schlesinger, The Sociological Scope of “National Cinema,” 17.

²¹ Benjamin Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995) Quoted in *Cinema and Nation*, 2.

²² László Strausz Angelo Restivo, “Cinema and National Identity” in *Nations and Nationalism: A Global Historical Overview*, ed. Herb, Guthram and David Kaplan. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO. 2008. 1327–42.

²³ Williams, “Introduction,” 3.

of nationhood in contemporary films.²⁴ However, he specifies this only for Western Europe, whereas for Eastern Europe he observes a “renewed concern for a national cinema.”²⁵ This claim has met with much disagreement from scholars concentrating on movie production in the Eastern region, to which I aim to contribute likewise with the study of Reisz’ films.

According to Anikó Imre, one of the founding scholars of Eastern European cinema, the two key notions through which Eastern European films are generally approached are the category of nation and the (post)-socialist context. The national as a prevalent category for these films is mainly due to the socialist context, where nationalism was “the primary source of identification”²⁶ for this region and its culture. Dina Iordanova states that cinematic texts thus offer relevant insights into the cultural studies of this region, as they communicate the complexities and discourse formations leading to the (re)development of national cinemas in Eastern Europe during and after the Cold War.²⁷ The legacy of being marginalized in relation to the West has made these films part of “a broader, unspoken claim to national exceptionalism,”²⁸ which often produces self-colonizing tendencies in an aim for recognition. Overall, however, the scholars of Eastern European cinema attempt to challenge these categorizations and argue for ways to rethink this region’s cinematic production as an asset to film theory globally. Imre therefore proposes an “un-nationalization” shift in considering contemporary Eastern European cinema which challenges by whom and on whose behalf accounts of national cinema have been written,²⁹ where once again the audience’s position is decisive.

²⁴ Thomas Elsaesser, *European Cinema Face to Face With Hollywood* (Amsterdam Amsterdam University Press, 2005), 72.

²⁵ Ibid, 70.

²⁶ Anikó Imre, ed., “Introduction. *Eastern European Cinema From No End to the End (As We Know It)*,” *A Companion to Eastern European Cinemas*, The Wiley-Blackwell Companions to National Cinemas (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 7.

²⁷ Dina Iordanova, *Cinema of the Other Europe: The Industry and Artistry of East Central European Film*. (Wallflower Press, 2003),

²⁸ Imre, “Introduction,” 8.

²⁹ Ibid, 8.

Although nation in cinema remains a “constructive taxonomic tool,”³⁰ through the case study of Reisz’ films I propose to examine the strategies through which the theme of nation is evoked and then interpreted by viewers. The following sections will deal with banal nationalism in more detail; however, it remains important to recognize how films can reproduce nationhood due to their outreach, their accessibility, and their mass appeal in today’s image-driven world. Unlike other art forms, film as a medium has its own complex language that encompasses several layers of communication through content, aesthetics, sound, and its ability to formulate all this spatially. Defining how the content of the films can be understood and claimed as Hungarian by the audience, however, is what offers an insightful viewpoint into the connection between cinema and nationhood. Higson’s framework is especially beneficial for understanding the ongoing discourse around Reisz’ films, though it is Elsaesser’s notion of post-national cinema that I aim to develop further. Despite their Eastern European production, it is the various relational ties to nationhood which are crucial to consider in Reisz’ films in order to then understand audience reactions towards them.

2.1.1. (National) Identity Representations in Hungarian Cinema

To identify the cinematic strategies of referring to the concept of nationhood in Reisz’ films, existing scholarship on Eastern European cinema and specifically on post-1989 Hungarian cinema is essential. As the literature on Reisz is very limited, I will rely on concepts fundamental for the previous generation of filmmakers, termed the “Hungarian New Film,”³¹ and see how continuities are reinforced or challenged in Reisz’ works. The dominant scholars of studies in Eastern European cinema stress the importance of a post-colonial framework for

³⁰ Jerry White, “National Belonging: Renewing the Concept of National Cinema for a Global Culture: New Review of Film and Television Studies: Vol 2, No 2,” accessed October 28, 2018, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1740030042000276653>. 227.

³¹ Film graduates from the Academy of Theatre and Film in Budapest, otherwise known as the class of Simó. These include directors such as Ferenc Török, Szabolcs Hajdu, György Pálfi, Mundruczó Kornél, Kocsis Ágnes.

films produced in a post-socialist context.³² The double post-colonial processes, both from the West and from the Soviet Union, have resulted in questioning the discursive powers, i.e. having the power to present one's experiences cinematically in this region. Accordingly, many of the films present self-colonization tendencies, relying on Western perspectives, genres, or narrative traditions in order to overturn them.

Research on the authorial directors of Hungarian New Film, who started making films in the early 2000s, has been approached from a similar perspective. The societal changes due to the fall of the Iron Curtain came to be reflected in their works through focus on transforming environments, the legacy of the past, the uncertain future, (changing) gender relations and mobility towards the West. The latter in particular has been interpreted through a post-colonial framework to relativize the West's significance and question forms of liberation from previous colonization. As such, this "departing" figure in Hungarian cinema represents both an opportunity to criticize the "nation" or challenge the way of life that it offers, while the consequent return came to be understood as a sign of nostalgia or homesickness. Returning to the familiar was also a way to affirm that the idealized West is unable to provide the good life it claims.³³ Gábor Gelencsér observes how these films represent home as wild, make the body the carrier of the past, and depict experiences of marginalization and alienation.³⁴ Spaces would therefore be depicted as unliveable, and Hungarian "reality" would be presented more through a Western gaze.³⁵ However, in newer films like *For Some Inexplicable Reason*, moving to the West has shifted away from the post-

³² To name a few: Dina Iordanova, *Cinema of Flames: Balkan Film, Culture and Media* (London: British Film Institute, 2001); Luisa Rivi, *European Cinema After 1989: Cultural Identity and Transnational Production* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Eva Mazierska et al., *Postcolonial Approaches to Eastern European Cinema: Portraying Neighbours On-Screen* (London: I.B. Tauris)

³³ György Kalmár, *Formations of Masculinity in Post-Communist Hungarian Cinema* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-63664-1>.

³⁴ Gelencsér, Gábor. "Back and Forth. De-Europeanization as self-colonization in Hungarian film after 1989." *Studies in Eastern European Cinema* 9.1 (2018): 63-75.

³⁵ "Nagy Lilla: A „lakhatatlan” Kelet-Közép-Európa reprezentációi kortárs magyar és román filmekben," [The representation of unlivable Eastern Europe in contemporary Hungarian and Romanian films], accessed March 22, 2019, <https://erdelyitarsadalom.ro/archivum/49-hungarian/korabbi-szamok/xii-evfolyam-1-szam-2014-1/268-nagy-lilla-a-lakhatatlan-kelet-koezep-europa-reprezentacioi-kortars-magyar-es-roman-filmekben.html>.

colonial framework toward an existential debate ³⁶ reinterpreting the mobility motif in Hungarian cinema within the global vs. local dichotomy.

More importantly, however, the mobility aspect of these films alludes to a collective identity in the works of the Hungarian New Film. László Strausz argues that the directors reflect on the hardships of their contemporary post-socialist world through mnemonic strategies such as spatiality (mobility of the characters), temporality, and corporeality.³⁷ Strausz analyzes the generational divide as epitomizing a lack of collective remembering or a direct avoidance of it, paving the way for a new identity. Nevertheless, the characters turn into “memory containers, carrying imprints of the socio-historical contexts surrounding them,” and their bodies become expressive tools of remembrance that ensure continuities.³⁸ Therefore, through unmediated discourses this generation of Hungarian directors is able to create conceptual links between the past and present as ways to convey the quest for identity. Reisz’ films similarly allude to the rapid changes that took place after the fall of communism by concentrating on Generation Y individuals faced with the post-totalitarian shock.³⁹ Anna Bátori, the only scholar who wrote on Reisz’ works specifically, stresses how being stuck between the socialist past and the present consumerist capitalism creates disconnectedness and alienation for the country’s youth, seemingly with no way out.⁴⁰ This is similarly presented through a generational divide and through corporeality; however, Bátori only focuses on the function of space, specifically the city in Reisz’ first feature.

Generally space, as a construction of cultural specificities and power relations, holds great importance for scholarship on Hungarian cinema. As such, it becomes a connecting point for the above-mentioned topics where characters are put into a local historical, societal,

³⁶ Gelencsér, “Back and Forth,” 73.

³⁷ Strausz, “Vissza a múltba - Az emlékezés tematikája fiatal magyar rendezőknél,” [Back to the Past - Mnemonic themes in contemporary Hungarian cinema] *Metropolis* 3 (2011): 20-30.

³⁸ Ibid, 26.

³⁹ Bátori, Anna. “Modern Tales of Anti-Capitalism: Gábor Reisz’s *For Some Inexplicable Reason* (2014) and Mészáros Ujj’s *Liza, The Fox-Fairy* (2015).” *Studies in Central and Eastern European Film and Literature* 2 (2017): 53-70.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 56.

cultural, and institutional context, in order to “emphasise the human subject’s ambiguous relation to history, power and ideology.”⁴¹ The scholarship has built on the understanding of space as societal system and examined identity politics that “take place” in mainly post-1989 films.⁴² In particular, city films and their depiction of human subjects in relation to space offer an analytical lens through which to assess power relations, socio-political struggles or the individual’s role in society.⁴³ György Kalmár, one of the leading scholars on this topic, analyzes (geo-political) space and its relation to identity in a (post)-Foucauldian framework looking at “local modes of inhabitation,” where power is all-pervasive and offers no escape.⁴⁴ In Reisz’ works Budapest plays a crucial role, especially in the first feature: thus, space is able to illustrate what is beyond the wall that still divides Europe.⁴⁵ The portrayal of the urban reality, as means of self-representation strategies, is one of the ways that references to nationhood can be recognized and placed in a specific socio-politico-historical context.

Films that specifically address sociological issues in the characters’ immediate proximity are labelled as generational “közérzet”⁴⁶ films in Hungarian cinema, mostly associated with young emerging directors who assess these topics through their own perspective. According to Attila Benke, these types of films since 1989 often portray an identity crisis embodied in the young characters, whom he divides between “someones” and “no ones.”⁴⁷ Whereas the former develop and construct their identity in the course of the plot by finding a group they identify with, and formulate their identity accordingly,

⁴¹ Kalmár, *Formations of Masculinity in Post-Communist Hungarian Cinema*, xvi.

⁴² Kalmár and Zsolt Győri, “Tér, hatalom és identitás viszonyai a magyar filmben,” *Tér, hatalom és identitás viszonyai a magyar filmben*, [Space and Power, Identity Relations in Hungarian Cinema] ed. György Kalmár and Zsolt Győri (Debrecen: Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó, 2015) 7-25.

⁴³ Ibid, 10.

⁴⁴ Works such as Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish, Birth of the Clinic, Heterotopia* or Benjamin’s “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility” and Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space*.

⁴⁵ Kalmár, “Inhabiting the Post-Communist (*Kontroll*. Nimród Antal, 2003)” in *Formations of Masculinity in Post-Communist Hungarian Cinema*, 89.

⁴⁶ For a lack of a better word, the thesis will rely on this translation “the way one feels in the surrounding environment.”

⁴⁷ Attila Benke, Fullasztó ország: A „nemzedéki közérzetfilm”-ek stílusa és témái a rendszerváltástól napjainkig. [Suffocating Country. The generational general feeling films’ style and themes since the regime change to today] *Filmszem* 5.1 (2015): 6-38.

the latter are incapable of acquiring an identity, and are merely drifting in their environment. Although Benke only discusses the character of the first feature, *Bad Poems*'s main protagonist would similarly be described as a “no one” character. However, both characters ultimately undergo development that classifies Reisz' films as positive, according to Benke's framework. More importantly, through the characters' quest for identity Reisz' films are able to show a realistic picture of Hungary and the struggles of its youth, an aspect on which I will focus for understanding nationhood in the everyday.

Overall, the above outlined concepts seem to suggest that films made after 1989 appear to have a self-reflexive take on concepts related to nationhood such as space, memory, social context, or identity in Hungarian cinematography. I rely on Robert Stam's definition of reflexivity in cinema, which works as a subversion of art as transparent and emphasizes the particular means of visual production.⁴⁸ Reflexivity manifests itself in various strategies, like disrupting the narrative, making the author visible or by “stylistic virtuosity” in order to formulate an active thinking audience able to question the dominant forces of society.⁴⁹ Stam, thus, distinguishes three modes of reflexivity: ludic, aggressive, and didactic, out of which Reisz' film analysis will be positioned in the first one.⁵⁰ This will be further discussed in Chapter 4, where the analysis will center on the above-mentioned concepts and Reisz' specific, quirky mode of filmmaking. The following sections will establish the framework for approaching nationhood from the perspective of cultural production in order to reveal the significance of studying Reisz' films from the audience's perspective.

⁴⁸ Robert Stam, *Reflexivity in Film and Literature: From Don Quixote to Jean-Luc Godard* (Columbia University Press, 1992), xi.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, xi.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, xvi-xvii.

2.2. Nationhood and Cultural Production

For moving beyond the textual level and identifying how nationhood is reinterpreted through cinematic means, it is crucial to establish films as part of cultural production. This connects to the subfield of nationalism studies that considers nationhood from the bottom-up in order to see its presence and circulation in the everyday. Michael Billig's banal nationalism,⁵¹ followed by Tim Edensor's addition of popular culture into the framework,⁵² provide the grounds for linking cultural and nationalism studies together in order to see how films can reproduce nationhood. There has been a significant shift in nationalism studies towards the expression of nationhood on a quotidian level, thereby considering the lived experiences of identity and belonging in social reality. A range of studies have attempted to focus on various elements, such as practices, symbols, material objects, and utterances that enabled study of the ways in which nationhood is being understood and redefined on a daily basis.⁵³ Consuming cinema and discussing it consequently can become "an event"⁵⁴ for nationhood as well.

Billig's theory of banal nationalism is among the first to assess that "the world of nations is the world of the everyday."⁵⁵ This fundamental text describes the importance of the everyday interactions, routines, and habits surrounding individuals that reproduce their national identification. Billig recognizes the role of language, landscape, buildings, memorials, logos, and stereotypes of character as engraved markers of nationhood, which often pass unnoticed, but serve to sustain national identity in the mundane.⁵⁶ This turn from elite-imposed ideas of nationhood offered an explanation for the "hot" forms of nationalism, which Billig asserts derive from the unconscious discursive structure ready to be mobilized in

⁵¹ Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage Publications, 1995)

⁵² Tim Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2002).

⁵³ For example, architecture, diet, motoring habits, postage stamps, street signs just to name a few study topics.

⁵⁴ Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, 19.

⁵⁵ Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 6.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 61.

“salient situations.”⁵⁷ The everyday “flagging” of the nation is present in well-established democracies at times of peace, which is the case for Hungary through its contemporary populist governance strategies.⁵⁸ If this is repeated on institutional and organizational levels, it leads to a division between “us” and “them,” creating a world thought out and divided along national lines.⁵⁹ Reisz’ films represent a banal form of aboutness,⁶⁰ both on the narrative and formal level, which mirror the current Hungarian reality. Therefore, Edensor’s framework on how popular culture supports banal nationalism is essential to assess as a next step.

Edensor offers the pivotal analytical viewpoints for this thesis in acknowledging the cinematic medium as a reproducer of national identity, along with theater, music, architecture, and fashion, circulating in the everyday. He asserts that cultural production becomes a common organizational strategy of societies in a globalized world. Building on the legacies of Stuart Hall and Colin Barker in cultural studies and cultural identities,⁶¹ Edensor examines intertextual codes that generate national belonging with a “shared milieu of feeling and knowing.”⁶² Nationhood is thus formed and renegotiated through places, objects, and practices that people can identify with in a myriad of ways. Here the local is connected with the national, the quotidian with the spectacular, and the discursive fragments with larger texts.⁶³ Hence, films’ relation to nation is not understood here historically or politically, but rather culturally, which prepares the ground for considering audience reception. In sum, the reproduction of nationhood within popular culture happens through four means: spatialization, performativity, materialization, and representation.⁶⁴

⁵⁷ Ibid, 69.

⁵⁸ Fidesz’ strategies, the current government party’s in Hungary, are further outlined in Chapter 3.

⁵⁹ Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 68.

⁶⁰ Mette Hjort, “Themes of Nation” in *Cinema and Nation*, 95-110.

⁶¹ Edensor especially considers Hall’s book *Question of cultural identity* and Barker’s *Television, Globalisation and Cultural Identities*.

⁶² Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life*, 140.

⁶³ Edensor, “Sensing National Spaces: Representing the Mundane in English Film and Television” in *European Cinema and Television: Cultural Policy and Everyday Life*, ed. Ib Bondebjerg, Eva Novrup Redvall, and Andrew Higson, (Springer, 2016), 60.

⁶⁴ Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life*, 11.

Firstly, space is understood as capable of holding and signifying borders, acquiring a symbolic quality that forms a “habitual and affective sense of national identity” into the notion of home.⁶⁵ Often the local and national exist interconnected in space, conjuring up a variety of identifications where elements like shops, restaurants, transport, or even road signs and street furniture become “quotidian fixtures.”⁶⁶ Edensor together with Shanti Sumartojo suggest that this leads to the creation of “a home” that brings together diverse people.⁶⁷ When these “national spaces” are represented in film or television the everyday can become a sensual space and a source of familiarity. Although the mundane could be detectable for viewers outside the country, its aspects would be collectively foreign, whereas for local viewers the setting “conjures up a host of familiar sensations.”⁶⁸ The urban space is one of the central features to be considered for Reisz’ reconfiguration of nationhood on the screen and its appeal to the Budapest audience. Edensor’s conceptualization of how places can become “ideologically loaded,” with sites and places exhibiting certain characteristics on a national level, are thus essential aspects to look for in the audience’s relation to the films.⁶⁹

Secondly, performing an identity is also determined spatially, providing the stage for both enacting the nation and for daily routines.⁷⁰ National identity can be performed both in a public setting during national celebrations or individually by rituals and customs that reconstruct a sense of collectivity.⁷¹ This connects back to Billig’s realization of how national identity is “a form of life, which is daily lived in the world of nation-states.”⁷² Therefore, if this “life form” is presented on the screen it can lead to national imagination also through its

⁶⁵ Ibid, 37.

⁶⁶ Edensor and Shanti Sumartojo, “Geographies of Everyday Nationhood: Experiencing Multiculturalism in Melbourne: Geographies of Everyday Nationhood,” *Nations and Nationalism* 24, no. 3 (July 2018): 553–78, <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12421>.

⁶⁷ *ibid*, 576.

⁶⁸ Edensor, “Sensing National Spaces,” 70.

⁶⁹ Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life*, 45.

⁷⁰ *ibid*, 70.

⁷¹ *ibid*, 69, 99.

⁷² Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 69.

construction of a particular everyday imagery.⁷³ Alexander Dhoest's study aims to reveal how contemporary Flemish television fiction contributes to the national production by relying on pre-discursive patterns and performances of nations that are familiar for the audience. He argues for examining visual cues that might indicate a national understanding by the viewers due to their familiarity, in order to avoid looking for perceived or stereotypical national characteristics. Reisz' plots build heavily on everyday behavior, during which the films offer "familiar and comforting faces and situations."⁷⁴ TV fiction and feature films are different fields of motion picture studies, but both Edensor's and Dhoest's assertions help to define how practices on the screen could be reinterpreted as national.

These everyday gestures, rituals, and customs are also part of shared memory. While everyday nationhood is primarily concerned with the "here and now,"⁷⁵ I argue for the inclusion of memory as storage and an influential factor in everyday nationhood experiences, especially for its ability to challenge human agency in remembering processes and conscious alignment with certain national practices. Edensor builds on Paul Connerton's consideration of memory as a socio-cultural concept that is reproduced in the everyday by ritual performances acted out collectively.⁷⁶ The social codes and rules depends on the mental maps of cultures and spaces which appear in "commemorative ceremonies" performed by habitual automatisms in individuals' bodies.⁷⁷ However, participation is often not voluntary but rather naturally stored in everyday gestures and movements, which reinforce belonging to a collective.⁷⁸ As both of Reisz' films rely on corporeality, Connerton's framework helps to identify how memory becomes operative in bodies and serves to sustain a group, a collective,

⁷³ Alexander Dhoest, "The National Everyday in Contemporary European Television Fiction: The Flemish Case," *Critical Studies in Television: The International Journal of Television Studies* 2, no. 2 (September 2007): 60–76, <https://doi.org/10.7227/CST.2.2.7>.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 73.

⁷⁵ Jon E. Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss, "The 'here and Now' of Everyday Nationhood," *Ethnicities* 8, no. 4 (December 2008): 573–76, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14687968080080040103>.

⁷⁶ Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

⁷⁷ Ibid, 5.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 6.

or a nation. Mnemonic elements shared by a wider collective are thus connected to nationhood, as “one has to remember in order to belong.”⁷⁹

Jan Assmann’s concept of cultural memory also argues for including material culture as a way of reproducing the past in the present, as they preserve the relation between a “remembering mind and a reminding object.”⁸⁰ These “lieux de mémoire” function as exteriorized reminders in order to preserve the shared collectiveness specific to a group.⁸¹ The cultural memory is thus reclaimed as “ours.” It is not a question of awareness or insight: “memory is knowledge with an identity index” that depends on various systems, ties, connections, and memberships in groups.⁸² This connects back to Edensor’s third field of national identity reproduction, the omnipresent material culture surrounding individuals. In a relational network among objects, meanings can be assigned consciously in order to evoke national feeling, but more importantly, their abundance in familial and domestic settings assumes an “intermediary status” between humans and particular habits and practices.⁸³ Edensor stresses the communicative potentials of objects, which can become the topic of a discussion, promote activities or particular values, and enable identification.⁸⁴ He exemplifies the complex relation between how objects stand for “the way things are” while not reflecting on the cultural and social layers from which they arise. The inherently visual aspects of material memory and culture occupy an important role in the films; their connections to nationhood will likewise be assessed in the focus groups. Edensor’s last notion, the representation of national identity, will be considered from the perspective of audience reception.

⁷⁹ Jan Assmann, “Communicative and Cultural Memory,” in *Cultural Memories*, ed. Peter Meusburger, Michael Heffernan, and Edgar Wunder, vol. 4 (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2011), 15–27, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-90-481-8945-8_2. 20.

⁸⁰ Assmann, “Communicative and Cultural Memory,” 17.

⁸¹ Ibid, 17.

⁸² Ibid, 20.

⁸³ Ibid, 104-6.

⁸⁴ Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life*, 104.

2.2.1. Audience Reception

The previously outlined elements that reproduce national identity in the everyday all come together in representational processes. For visual media, representation becomes especially relevant as it is able to encompass in itself space, objects, and performances; accordingly, it can then formulate national identity on TV screens, in advertisements, and in films. Through a case study of the Hollywood blockbuster *Braveheart* (1995)⁸⁵ and its encouragement of Scottish nationalist discourse, Edensor argues that the film should not be understood as “encoded with dominant messages” but rather as a platform onto which contemporary concerns are projected. The analysis demonstrated that a range of identities developed for the main hero of the film, which were influenced by social cues, among which national identity also played a role. Accordingly, with regard to films it is more important to realize the “national” in modes of production and reception, rather than in their narrative or formal features. This understanding of cinematic reception is a necessary consideration for Reisz’ films too, especially since both films are character-driven, meaning the characters can assume different identities projected and understood according to national frames.

Audience reception studies are based on the interpretative relation between cinematic texts and the audience.⁸⁶ Hall’s concepts of encoding and decoding are crucial to consider, where viewers are the decoders or receivers in a communicative exchange which allows researchers to study their responses and definitions of different situations.⁸⁷ This was followed by a turn toward considering the audience as active, thereby seeing the broader and more complex way in which audiences consume certain media and the possibility of multiple comprehension of media.⁸⁸ The transformation of common cultural elements into codes—in

⁸⁵ A film directed by Mel Gibson about William Wallace, a medieval Scottish patriot leading a revolt against the English.

⁸⁶ Stuart Hall et al., *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79* (Routledge, 2003).

⁸⁷ Ibid, 131.

⁸⁸ Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

this case, audio-visual ones—acquire meaning when a certain collective decodes them.⁸⁹ Therefore, the perspective of audience reception offers a bridge between the humanities and the social sciences:⁹⁰ more importantly, it points toward the subjectivities and range of determinants that influence one's consumption of media. Both Billig and Edensor's concepts help to establish the foundations of how to review films as cultural products reproducing national identity. Nonetheless, they remain theoretical speculations rather than methodological interventions, to which everyday nationhood theories will offer a response below.

2.2.2. Nationhood in the Everyday

Everyday nationhood theory builds on the same foundations as banal nationalism; however, it regards individuals within a nation not as passive consumers but active members whose daily experience, practices, and discourse provide new meanings for nationhood.⁹¹ Nationhood is not understood as an unreflexive, elite-imposed, taken-for-granted, or fixed concept, but rather one that gets redefined on practical, specific terms through individuals themselves. According to Jon Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss, the important shift in focus happens in order to see when ordinary social actors become national actors, and what is the particular context that evokes this change.⁹² That is why their framework strongly resonates with especially Edensor's conceptualizations, but they concentrate on individuals' active participation in reproducing national identity. Nationhood as a conscious category appears in both of the films: it is therefore necessary to review this field in order to see whether these national frames are then activated for the individuals' own reassessment of nationness.

⁸⁹ Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life*, 139

⁹⁰ Sonia Livingstone, "Relationships between media and audiences: Prospects for future audience reception studies." In *Media, Ritual and Identity: Essays in Honor of Elihu Katz*, ed. Tamar Liebes and James Curran, (London: Routledge, 1998).

⁹¹ Fox and Miller-Idriss, "Everyday Nationhood," *Ethnicities* 8, no. 4 (December 2008): 536–63, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796808088925>. 539.

⁹² *Ibid*, 541.

Fox and Miller-Idriss identify four main ways in which nationhood is (re)produced in the mundane: talking, choosing, performing, and consuming the nation. For assessing an audience's reaction to films it is only methodologically possible to review the talking aspect of constructing national identity in the mundane. The authors assess nation as a "discursive construct"⁹³ consisting of ordinary people expressing their imagination of it unselfconsciously informed by a national order. This happens in two ways, namely how "ordinary people" talk about and with the nation in ways that are meaningful to them. Fox and Miller-Idriss argue that talking about the nation tends more to reveal the individuals' "currents and rhythms of their everyday concerns and predicaments" rather than imposed and fixed conceptions.⁹⁴ Once the talking with the nation is approached, however, the temporal frame is crucial to consider since nation here is understood is invoked only in certain contexts. Reisz' films allude to several such situations in their plots; moreover, the thesis will see whether watching and discussing films collectively can also establish the grounds for these discursive constructs to come to the surface.

As Edensor underlines the performative aspect of national identity, Fox and Miller-Idriss similarly devote attention to national symbols, holidays, sports, and television. However, they stress the individuals' engagement and interpretation with them as influential factors. The films' narratives allude in several ways to events which might invoke the same frames in individuals. Lastly, consuming the nation comes not only through framing Reisz' films as national; the films strongly feature consumption in their plots. Choosing to consume certain products or maintain particular tastes can occur along national lines, but this does not necessarily entail the presence of a nationalistic mindset. It does, however, contribute to making nationhood a salient aspect of the mundane where products are redefined along national lines and, therefore, capable of maintaining national attachment or even pride.

⁹³ Ibid, 538.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 539.

Last but not least, Rogers Brubaker, in his fundamental collaborative book investigating ethnicity and nationhood in the everyday,⁹⁵ applies ethnicity as a category in order to put forward a constructivist and non-groupist understanding.⁹⁶ While the scholars of everyday nationhood tend to evaluate the nation's presence as a salient part of individuals' lives through ethnographic observations and interviews, the authors were able to see how ethnicity works and becomes relevant in the everyday without assuming its salience and ubiquity. This thesis aims to build on their findings, showing that ethnicity is a perspective on the world, not an imposed homogeneous unreflective group membership phenomenon in one's life. Accordingly, besides understanding what and when, it is even more essential to recognize nationality as a cognitive category influenced by a multitude of factors which helps to understand it as a process of happening. Therefore, after assessing what the national actually is in Reisz' films, and when it occurs, it is also vital to consider whether it matters, and if yes then why,⁹⁷ especially for the audience specifically chosen for this project.

Research questions

To sum up, considering this conceptual and theoretical framework I formulate my research questions accordingly. Considering the interdisciplinary framework of nationalism and film studies I aim to address the following questions:

- 1. Why is cinema a relevant tool for studying national narratives?**
- 2. How and why do Reisz' films represent a specific narrative of Hungarianness?**

⁹⁵ Rogers Brubaker et al., *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town* (Princeton University Press, 2006).

⁹⁶ Rogers Brubaker, "Ethnicity without Groups." *European Journal of Sociology* 43, no. 2 (2002): 163–89. [doi:10.1017/S0003975602001066](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003975602001066).

⁹⁷ Skey's framework explains the significance of nationhood in the everyday as a source of ontological security, see further: Michael Skey, *National Belonging and Everyday Life* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2011), <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230353893>.

3. How and why do these films' narrative of Hungarianness resonate strongly with a young urban audience?

The following parts of the thesis will attempt to find answers for these inquiries through textual analysis of the films and qualitative content analysis of the focus groups. First, however, the relevant context for this study requires explication.

3. CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the contextual background for the young generation in Budapest and their relation to nationhood and film culture today. The chapter aims to consider Generation Y's disillusionment and uncertainties within the post-socialist context of Hungary. It specifically focuses on the urban space under the influence of both globalization and renationalization, leading to contested identities. Lastly, I consider the role of cultural consumption for this young generation in order to explain the relevance of Reisz' films for them in contemporary Hungary.

3.1. Generation Y in the Post-Socialist Context

Arguably, young adults are the most important “barometer” of how to measure social changes that have occurred in the region.⁹⁸ The Generation Y, roughly born after 1980, have gone through three distinctive socio-political periods in Hungary: the Kádár consolidation from 1963 to 1989, the crisis of transformation between 1990 and 1995, and the post-socialist period after 1996. Although the change of system came with the intention to ensure social integration and a welfare state, the new capitalism in Hungary brought even more economic and financial difficulties. This generation was exposed early on to the consumer market, open borders, globalization, touristification, and the digital revolution which resulted in existential fears, enlarged social inequalities, and unpredictable career paths. This all delayed their detachment from their parents, starting their own family, or gaining independence.⁹⁹ Moreover, these challenges made socio-political matters less relevant for them: in fact, Hungarian young adults were found to be the least politically invested from the East Central

⁹⁸ Danilo Mandić and Tamara P. Trošt, “Changing Youth Values in Southeast Europe: Beyond Ethnicity,” *ResearchGate*, accessed May 10, 2019, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319931859_Changing_Youth_Values_in_Southeast_Europe_Beyond_Ethnicity.

⁹⁹ László Laki and Andrea Szabó, “Szempontok az ifjúsági folyamatok értelmezéséhez,” [Perspectives for Interpreting Youth Processes] in *Arctalan (?) nemzedék: Ifjúság 2000-2010*, eds. Bauer Béla and Szabó Andrea (Budapest: Nemzeti Család- és Szociálpolitikai Intézet, 2011), 22.; Levente Székely, “Fogyasztás, gazdasági helyzet, kultúra, média, infokommunikáció,” [Consuming, economic situation, culture, media, infocommunication] in *Új Ifjúsági Szemle* 6.2. (2008): 67-74.

European region.¹⁰⁰ Researchers have argued that the “quietness” of this generation is an outcome of the Kádár period, as they learnt from their parents to keep their distance from political socialization, in addition to their loss of trust in institutions and politics.¹⁰¹ As Ildikó Szabó claims, nationhood in Hungary is an influential factor of political socialization:¹⁰² thus, the passivity and disillusionment of this generation are the first indicators of its complex connection to nationhood.

Recent findings have demonstrated that income poverty and the increasingly poor public mood in Hungary seem to be the most influential motivators of outmigration.¹⁰³ The fall of the Iron Curtain has sparked mobilization towards the West generally from Eastern European countries, which has been increasing since the states’ accession to the EU. In Hungary, however, it has escalated rapidly since 2010 especially with young educated adults leaving.¹⁰⁴ A nationwide survey on contentedness found that Generation Y, especially those members from Budapest, turned out to be the least satisfied with their surroundings and circumstances.¹⁰⁵ Although inhabitants of the capital are predominantly proud of their Budapest identity, young people tend to leave due to general dissatisfaction and the

¹⁰⁰ “Az Y-generáció politikai értékrendje Magyarországon és a régióban,” [The Generation Y’s political value system in Hungary and the region] accessed May 10, 2019, <http://www.policysolutions.hu/hu/hirek/396/az-y-generacio-politikai-ertekrendje-magyarorszagon-es-a-regioban>. The results have shown that there is a rising tendency for the young generation to opt for right-wing parties.

¹⁰¹ Bittner et al, “A 15-29 éves magyar fiatalok jellemzői (a tudomány iránti érdeklődés, informálódás, online magatartás, szabadidő, médiahasználat, értékek) – kutatási jelentés,” [The characteristics of 15-29 year old youth (their interest in science, getting informed, online behaviour, free time, use of media, values) – research report] *Tudománykommunikáció a Z generációnak* (Pécs: Pécsi Tudományegyetem, 2013) 29; Levente Székely, “A magyarországi 15-29 évesek nemzeti identitása,” [National Identity of 15-29 olds in Hungary] in *Magyar Identitás. Határon innen és túl - Új Ifjúsági Szemle* (2014): 145. Young adults’ take the beliefs and values of their parents and do not want to challenge the status quo, their passivity toward civic engagement, detachment from politics and public life is growing.

¹⁰² Ildikó Szabó, *Nemzet és szocializáció. A politika szerepe az identitások formálódásában Magyarországon* [Nation and socialization. The role of politics in identity formation in Hungary] Budapest: Láharmattan, 2003. 1867-2006.

¹⁰³ Patrik Galavits and Zsolt Wágner, “Elhagyni Magyarországot - Elvárások a külföldi élettel kapcsolatban; a hazatérés lehetőségei,” [To Leave Hungary – Expectations towards life abroad, the opportunities to return home] (Budapest: Ostrakon Hallgatói Szervezetért Egyesület, 2016).

¹⁰⁴ Monika Mária Várad, “Mennek, maradnak, visszajönnek,” [They go, they stay, they come back] *Tájak, régiók, települések térben és időben*, ed. Sikos T.– Tiner (Budapest: Dialóg Campus Kiadó, 2016), 461-71.

¹⁰⁵ Bittner et al, “The characteristics of 15-29 year old youth,” 35.

problematic housing situation.¹⁰⁶ The precarious nature of their surroundings paradoxically strengthens this generation's relationship with their family. Consequently, the main factors influencing return migration from the West are familial and friendship ties, as well as holding on to their home and birthplace.¹⁰⁷ This suggests signs of attachment to their local environment, a factor very important in Reisz' films as well, for which the Budapest context has to be explained in detail.

3.1.1. Urban (and National) Identity Crisis

The societal, economic and political changes, as well as the newly open borders, have changed the East vs. West dichotomy in recent years. In particular, EU accession has led to stronger cooperation where there is no longer an "Eastern other" since it is envisioned within a dominant neoliberal agenda to be modern, capitalist and European.¹⁰⁸ This is demonstrated in the Westernizing and globalizing trend of Central and Eastern European capital cities, which then become a locus for the contemporary identity crisis. On the one hand, there are attempts to attract foreign investors, boost tourism, and reinforce commercial development; on the other hand, the urban landscape can also be a setting for cultural-political narratives. The "nationalization" of urban space as a way to cast off the "unwanted past" is a common movement in the post-socialist countries with both material and symbolic discourses.¹⁰⁹ Budapest has therefore changed internally and externally where identity formation happens across regional, global, local, and national lines.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Zsuzsanna Bögre and András Keszei, "Budapestinek lenni. A helyhez való viszony meghatározó tényezői Budapesten," To Live in Budapest. Factors Influencing Place Attachment in Budapest.] In *Hely, identitás, emlékezet [Place, Identity, Memory]* edited by Zsuzsanna Bögre and András Keszei, 93–115. Budapest: L'Harmattan.

¹⁰⁷ Székely, "The Identity of Hungarian 15-29 year olds," 139.

¹⁰⁸ Craig Young and Sylvia Kaczmarek, "The Socialist Past and Postsocialist Urban Identity in Central and Eastern Europe: The Case of Łódź, Poland," *European Urban and Regional Studies* 15, no. 1 (January 2008): 53–70, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0969776407081275>.

¹⁰⁹ Alexander C. Diener and Joshua Hagen, "From Socialist to Post-Socialist Cities: Narrating the Nation through Urban Space," *Nationalities Papers* 41, no. 4 (July 2013): 487–514, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2013.768217>.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 489.

Emilia Palonen's study on the representation of nationhood in Budapest focuses on the recent attempts of the governing party Fidesz to rewrite the urban narrative of the capital city.¹¹¹ As a prolific writer on Hungarian populism, Palonen claims that Fidesz already started reinforcing their discourse on nationhood around the millennium during their first term in office. Publicly-sponsored institutions such as the Millennium Park and the House of Terror Museum, contested for expressing a certain version of history and nationalism, were supposed to break with "the left-leaning metropolis"¹¹² and its globalization. Fidesz' rhetoric greatly depends on national symbols, the tricolor, national heroes and historical legacy, overall stressing the exceptionality of the Hungarian nation based on culture, economy, and history. More importantly, Fidesz' fixation on the nation in their discourse makes Hungarianness omnipresent and foregrounded in every sector of social life from media, culture, and consumption to ceremonies.¹¹³ However, as the 2018 parliamentary election results indicate, Fidesz' idea of nationhood and their politics in general get less support from voters in the capital city than anywhere else.¹¹⁴

Although Budapest is supposed to stand for the nation and it is promoted as a quintessentially Hungarian city to the outside, its image does not necessarily coincide with the rest of the country. Budapest has developed into a party destination, while the divide between the capital and the countryside is ever-growing. In the current political discourse Budapest is framed as international and degenerate, whereas it is the countryside where the "pure" Hungarian nationhood is still preserved. Fidesz utilizes a clear dichotomy, where the "us" is

¹¹¹ Emilia Palonen, "Millennial Politics of Architecture: Myths and Nationhood in Budapest," *Nationalities Papers* 41, no. 4 (July 2013): 536–51, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2012.743509>.

¹¹² Ibid, 536.

¹¹³ Edith Olta, *Fidesz and the Reinvention of the Hungarian Center-Right* (Századvég Kiadó, 2012).

¹¹⁴ Retrieved from an official webpage of National Election Office in Hungary. Available at: <https://www.valasztas.hu/web/national-election-office> accessed December 10, 2018.

defined along ethnonational terms including the transborder ethnic Hungarians;¹¹⁵ lately, however, the globalized, cosmopolitan capital often gets associated with the constructed enemies of the nation.¹¹⁶ The framing of Hungarianness as under threat¹¹⁷ is present in the everyday of individuals, however, examining it from the perspective of those who do not necessarily follow Fidesz' meaning-making is equally important. Young, urban, university-educated adults especially were referred to as “only gazing in dusky ruin pubs” by the Prime Minister, according to whom the country needs manual laborers, not more diplomas.¹¹⁸

The Generation Y in Budapest is in the midst of contesting identities. Without delving into the debate of cosmopolitanism vs. nationalism, it is crucial to stress that due to the changing atmosphere of the city, the boundaries of established divisions are crossed and a stronger local identity is in favor rather than a national one.¹¹⁹ Moreover, generally the youth today across the globe is believed to be residing in an “innovative, uncharted borderlands along which the global meets the local.”¹²⁰ Research focusing on young adults has shown that being aware of the exaggerated forms of nationalism leads to distancing themselves from such radical and exclusionary attitudes.¹²¹ While they might enact a national identity unconsciously consisting of daily routines, nationalism meets with indifference and antagonism. As Miller-Idriss asserts, each generation responds to the construction of nationhood and what it is supposed to denote differently.¹²² Although there have been numerous studies on this

¹¹⁵ This has been labeled as transborder nationalism in Zsuzsa Csergo and James M. Goldgeier, “Nationalist Strategies and European Integration,” *Perspectives on Politics* 2, no. 1 (2004): 21–37. 273.

¹¹⁶ László Bertha, “A Vidéki Emberek Védelmében,” [In the defense of countryside people] accessed March 29, 2019, <https://888.hu/piszkostizenketto/a-videki-emberek-vedelmeben-4140670/>.

¹¹⁷ Orbán stresses in his recent rhetoric how Hungarian identity, characterized with a rich language and culture contributing to Europe, is under threat.

¹¹⁸ “Romkocsmák Félhomályában Merengő Diplomásokat Lát Orbán,” accessed January 29, 2019, https://index.hu/belfold/2012/06/25/nem_botokat_vagatna_a_jobbik_a_kozmunkasokkal/.

¹¹⁹ Magdalena Nowicka and Maria Rovisco, “Making sense of cosmopolitanism,” in *Cosmopolitanism in Practice*, ed. Magdalena Nowicka and Maria Rovisco (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009).

¹²⁰ Comaroff, Jean and Comaroff, John, “‘Millennial Capitalism: First Thoughts on a Second Coming’. Public Culture,” 12(3) 2000: 291 –343. In “Changing Youth Values in Southeast Europe: Beyond Ethnicity,”

¹²¹ Steve Fenton, “Indifference towards National Identity: What Young Adults Think about Being English and British,” *Nations and Nationalism*, 2007.

¹²² Cynthia Miller-Idriss, *Blood and Culture: Youth, Extremism and National Belonging in Contemporary Germany* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

generation in Hungary, a deeper understanding of the attitudes and relation toward nationhood is scarce from the urban perspective.

In contrast to prevalent assumptions that nationhood is losing its significance for the young generation, Levente Székely's recent study on the national identity of Hungarian youngsters between the ages of 15–29 shows otherwise.¹²³ Although he similarly observes that the importance of nationness is more significant in the countryside, it was still a decisive category for the young participants. Hungarianness was associated with a common past, history and culture, within which language and mentality were mostly mentioned. The study thus concentrated solely on the mental spaces of nationhood associations and did not delve into their significance in the everyday. Overall, the participants' reflections on nationness indicated self-reflexivity, irony, and a reliance on stereotypes. This thesis aims to consider these ambivalent relations to nationhood in the Hungarian context from the Budapest perspective specifically. I argue that the above-mentioned paradoxical processes happening in the country—and particularly in the capital—affect how nationhood is considered for the young generation. It is important to acknowledge that nationhood's presence, though dominant in everyday life, might acquire different meanings for Generation Y inhabitants living in the city. I aim to develop this argument by considering the perspective of popular culture consumption, outlined in the following section.

3.2. Mainstream vs. National Popular Culture

Cultural consumption of this generation is important to review because it significantly shapes their self-image, alongside location and close relational ties.¹²⁴ For the previous Generation

¹²³ Székely, "The Identity of Hungarian 15-29 year olds," 145. As the study was conducted five years ago, the age of the participants in Székely's study corresponds with the Generation Y age criteria.

¹²⁴ Péter Somlai, "Nemzedéki konfliktusok és kötelékek" [Generational Conflict and Ties] in *Arctalan (?) nemzedék: Ifjúság 2000-2010*, 25-36.

X,¹²⁵ engagement with popular culture in this region had different implications. Although Kádár's so-called goulash communism allowed exposure to Western media to some extent, the various subcultures following "Western" models were part of underground counter-culture movements. On the contrary, Generation Y's socializing in the neoliberal economic system has brought globalized forms of culture due to TV, radio, and Internet, which is part of the mainstream dictating the cultural consumption of young adults.¹²⁶ This appeal of the mainstream, dominant mass production in culture today has also transformed Hungarian cinema production in recent years, which for this generation is particularly relevant as their main leisure-time activity is watching films.¹²⁷

Since 1989 Hungarian cinema has undergone great transformations aesthetically, ideologically, institutionally, and with regard to production.¹²⁸ Before 2012, the Hungarian Film Law was one of the most liberal in the region, not regulated according to the market or current politics.¹²⁹ The Hungarian Motion Picture Foundation (MMKA), after building up a huge debt and being on the verge of bankruptcy, ceased its operations in 2010 and was replaced by the Hungarian National Film Fund (MNF) in 2011.¹³⁰ Besides its financial control, the MNF is supposed to somewhat regulate artistic and directorial selections as well, transforming Hungarian cinema into an industry rather than an art form.¹³¹ The choice to appoint Andrew Vajna, a Hungarian-born Hollywood producer, as a government commissioner in order to employ new strategies for the preservation and development of the

¹²⁵ The demographic cohort preceding the Generation Y, individuals born from the early-to-mid 1960s to the early 1980s. In the Hungarian context for this generation consuming "Western" culture was not possible.

¹²⁶ Somlai, "Generational Conflict and Ties," 28.

¹²⁷ "Az X és Y generáció tagjai nagyon elfoglaltak, a Z viszont dúskál a szabadidőben," [The Generation Y and X individuals are very busy while Generation Z has a lot of free time] *Új Nemzedék*, May 4, 2018, <http://www.ujnemzedek.hu/életmod/az-x-es-y-generacio-tagjai-nagyon-elfoglaltak-a-z-vizsont-duskal-a-szabadidoben>.

¹²⁸ John Cunningham, *Hungarian Cinema: From Coffee House to Multiplex* (Wallflower Press, 2004).

¹²⁹ Klára Muhi, "Filmrendszerváltás," [System change in film] *FilmVilág* accessed May 9, 2019, http://www.filmvilag.hu/xista_frame.php?cikk_id=10699.

¹³⁰ "Hungary Passes New Film Law – Variety," accessed May 1, 2019, <https://variety.com/2011/film/news/hungary-passes-new-film-law-1118046906/>.

¹³¹ "Nem vonzó a magyar film," [The Hungarian film is not attractive] *Magyar Nemzet* (blog), accessed May 10, 2019, <https://magyarnemzet.hu/archivum/szuperplan/nem-vonzo-a-magyar-film-3946417/>.

Hungarian film industry is one of the indicators.¹³² Moreover, owing to low production costs, existing infrastructure, and numerous qualified professionals, Hungary also became an attractive location for foreign film production.¹³³ In Budapest alone, there were five film shootings on a daily basis last year.¹³⁴ Although the city is predominantly disguised in foreign productions, it is still prosperous for the local economy.

As Balázs Varga argues, the category of Hungarian films now needs to be reconsidered also in terms of changing the manner of production and reception.¹³⁵ The rising number of international coproductions and supranational financial support do not situate films along the criteria of nationality any longer. Moreover, neither the outreach nor the consumption of films are confined within borders; in fact, Hungarian art films are more celebrated among an international audience. This expansion of Hungarian film culture as part of international developments thus blurs the distinction between foreign films and domestic ones, as well as widening the gap between commercial and art films.¹³⁶ Recently there has been significant backlash against such “Westernized” modes of film production. On the one hand, many in the cultural sector disagree with the MNF’s decreasing support for authorial cinema, which was prominent in the 2000s.¹³⁷ On the other hand, a strong attack from conservative news portals emerged that labelled films financed by the MNF as “anti-Hungarian,” while their biggest grievance is the lack of historical films.¹³⁸

¹³² Imre, “Introduction,” 4. Vajna passing away in January 2019, however, presents a new challenge for Hungarian cinema management.

¹³³ Anna Irimiás, “Missing Identity: Relocation of Budapest in Film-Induced Tourism,” *Tourism Review International* 16, no. 2 (November 1, 2012): 125–38, <https://doi.org/10.3727/154427212X13485031583902E-ISSN1943-4421>.

¹³⁴ “Nagyon Olcsó Budapesten Filmet Forgatni” [It’s very cheap to shoot a film in Budapest] *444.hu* accessed May 20, 2019, <https://444.hu/2018/08/03/nagyon-olcso-budapesten-filmet-forgatni>.

¹³⁵ Balázs Varga, “A magyar filmkultúra régi és új határai,” [The Hungarian film culture’s old and new borders] in *Határtalan médiakultúra*, ed. Antalóczy Tímea (Budapest: Wolters Kluwer, 2015) 27–49.

¹³⁶ Imre, “Introduction,” 4.

¹³⁷ Directors from the Hungarian New Film movement are specified in Chapter 2 section 2.1.1.

¹³⁸ “A Filmalap Posztkomcsi Káderei Bohózatot Csinálnak a Hunyadi-Filmből Is?” [The Film Fund’s post-communist Kádereers makes a low comedy even out of the Hunyadi film?] *PestiSrácok*, accessed May 8, 2019, <https://pestisracok.hu/a-filmalap-posztkomcsi-kaderei-bohozatot-csinalnak-a-hunyadi-filmbol-is/>.

This runs parallel to the neo-nationalist takeover of popular culture expanding lately across the country.¹³⁹ In her collaborative work, *Nemzet a mindennapokban: Az újnacionalizmus populáris kultúrája* [Nation in Vernacular: The Popular Culture of Neo-nationalism],¹⁴⁰ Margit Feischmidt identifies two industries of cultural production that build on collective identities: national rock bands and tourism. The volume's authors point out that there is a need for these forms of culture as a way to satisfy the societal need to belong to the national.¹⁴¹ However, this form of cultural consumption is tightly connected to political mobilization for right-wing radical parties and it cultivates extreme exclusionary discourse.¹⁴² Hence an examination of the current state of Hungarian popular culture reveals a rising demand to turn away from globalized forms. Reviewing Reisz' cinema in this context is crucial since his movies mock exaggerated forms of nationalism in contemporary Hungary,¹⁴³ yet his films are predominantly labeled as "typically Hungarian."¹⁴⁴ His appearance in Hungarian cinema is something of an exception: he is a commercial success yet critically acclaimed. Accordingly, the last section of this chapter focuses on Reisz' films specifically in this established framework.

3.2.1. Reisz' Films and their Reception

When Reisz' directorial debut, *For Some Inexplicable Reason*, hit the cinemas five years ago it caused an unprecedented turn in Hungarian film production. This low-budget diploma film reached more than 65,000 viewers domestically and made a profit, which is highly unusual

¹³⁹ Margit Feischmidt et al., *Nemzet a mindennapokban: Az újnacionalizmus populáris kultúrája* [Nation in Vernacular. The Popular Culture of Neo-nationalism] (Budapest: L'Harmattan Kiadó, 2014), 473.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 2.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 38

¹⁴² Margit Feischmidt and Gergő Pulay, "Élmény és ideológia a nacionalista popkultúrában," [Experience and ideology in nationalist popular culture] in *Nation in Vernacular. The Popular Culture of Neo-nationalism*, 249-90.

¹⁴³ This will be the main topic of analysis in Chapter 4.

¹⁴⁴ "Amikor hasba rúg a múlt - Reisz Gábor: Rossz versek," [When your past kicks you in your stomach] *Filmtett - Erdélyi Filmes Portál* (blog), accessed May 2, 2019, <https://www.filmtett.ro/cikk/amikor-hasba-rug-a-mult-rossz-versek-kritika/>.

for authorial cinema in Hungary.¹⁴⁵ The project received financial support from the MNF for a short film production, outgrowing itself to become a full-length feature with the support of friends and colleagues. *Bad Poems* then received 230 million forints from the MNF and additional French funding; however, the number of viewers and its income cannot be judged as final at the moment.¹⁴⁶ In a span of five years, the name of Reisz has become well-known in film circles both nationally and in the Eastern European region. *For Some Inexplicable Reason* won the prize for best feature at the Miskolc Jameson Cinefest and was nominated for the Hungarian Film Prize for best film in 2016, as well as at the critically acclaimed Karlovy Vary International Film Festival.¹⁴⁷ *Bad Poems* has won the best Hungarian Film Prize and Reisz the best director award of 2019.¹⁴⁸

This all illustrates the unprecedented turn Reisz' films brought to Hungarian film production. On the one hand, *For Some Inexplicable Reason* revived authorial cinema that was capable of speaking to its local audience; on the other hand, it was a commercial success. Notably, no matter the sources' political affiliation, its reception is mostly positive and often focuses on the aspects of the films that resemble real life. The articles often emphasize that Reisz shows how it is to be a young adult in Budapest and Hungary today.¹⁴⁹ The generational aspect is obvious from the stories constructed around the main Generation Y protagonists Áron in *For Some Inexplicable Reason* and Tamás in *Bad Poems*. They both overcome

¹⁴⁵ "Furcsa És Megmagyarázhatatlan, de Sikeres Egy Magyar Film," [Weird and inexplicable, but a Hungarian film is successful] *Index* accessed October 30, 2018, https://index.hu/kultur/cinematrix/2014/11/14/magyar_filmek_koltsegvetese_es_bevetele_infografika/. The first film received 7million from MNF, overall it was made from 8 millions which got multiplied by 10 as final income.

¹⁴⁶ "Nyolcmillióból Csodát Tett, Most Harmineszor Annyiból Álmodhat," [He made wonders from 8 million now he can dream of from thirty times more] accessed May 3, 2019, <https://www.origo.hu/filmklub/20170111-a-van-rendezoje-most-mar-sok-penzbol-almodhat-rossz-versek-reisz-gabor-van-valami-furcsa-es.html>.

¹⁴⁷ Gyula Szűcs, "Újabb díjat kapott a Van valami furcsa," [For Some Inexplicable Reason won another award] accessed May 3, 2019, http://index.hu/kultur/cinematrix/2015/07/06/van_valami_furcsa_es_megmagyarázhatatlan_dij_dijeso_film/.

¹⁴⁸ "Ők nyerték a mozi forgalmazású filmek Magyar Filmdíjait," [They won the prizes for feature films] Accessed May 12, 2019, <http://www.magyarfilmakademia.hu/hu/cikk/%C5%91k-nyert%C3%A9k-a-mozi-forgalmaz%C3%A1s%C3%BA-filmek-magyar-filmd%C3%ADjait>.

¹⁴⁹ Anita Libor, "Hová lett, aki azokat a rossz verseket írta?," accessed December 28, 2018, https://index.hu/kultur/cinematrix/2018/12/28/hova_lesz_az_a_kamasz_aki_azokat_a_rossz_verseket_irta/.

breakups, face the difficulties of adulthood and try to find their own mediocre place in contemporary Hungary. The Q&As and interviews with the director are curious about the autobiographical elements in his films. Reisz' generic response is that he wanted to make a movie about how it is to live in contemporary Hungary, to speak about "ourselves" reflexively and critically, as previously this type of public mood was not shown in Hungarian film.¹⁵⁰ Therefore, the discussions on the films frequently turn into a platform for criticising contemporary public life or young adults' inability to grow up in the popular press. This thesis considers these films as works independent from directorial intentions as providing a context on their own. They present the issues discussed in this chapter from a specific Budapest middle-class intellectual perspective.

Both films are predominantly considered as quintessentially Hungarian films, the reception in film journals and new online platforms showcases how these two films spark a debate about everyday experiences of nationhood. The Hungarianness of the movies is defined by the characters, their behavior and everyday situations,¹⁵¹ and so the local gets to be understood as national. Generally, in a post-socialist region subcultural identities are renegotiated according to several dichotomies: local vs. global, underground vs. mainstream, or authentic vs. commercial.¹⁵² Therefore understanding why this generation consumes Reisz' films, how they relate to something local that also follows global trends, opens up the possibility to study how film can be a means to approach the category of nationhood and its significance today. His films, able to speak about the contemporary Hungarian generation in a

¹⁵⁰ "Kitaláltam magamnak egy nyelvet" - Beszélgetés Reisz Gáborral a Rossz versek kapcsán," [I made up a language for myself] *Filmtett - Erdélyi Filmes Portál* (blog), accessed May 2, 2019, <https://www.filmtett.ro/cikk/kitalaltam-magamnak-egy-nyelvet-reisz-gabor-rossz-versek-interju/>; "Reisz Gábor: Ha Nem Szabad Önkritikát Gyakorolni, Akkor Mi a Célja a Filmkészítésnek? [If you're not allowed to be self-critical what's the point of making films – interview with Gábor Reisz], 24.Hu," accessed May 29, 2019, <https://24.hu/kultura/2018/12/27/reisz-gabor-interju-rossz-versek/>.

¹⁵¹ "Tökéletes Magyar Mese Készült a Kisbetűs Életről," [A perfect Hungarian tale was born about mundane life] accessed December 16, 2018, https://azonnali.hu/cikk/20181206_erolkodes-nelkuli-mese-a-kisbetus-eletrol.

¹⁵² Matthias Schwartz, *Eastern European Youth Cultures in a Global Context* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016) accessed May 3, 2019, <https://www.palgrave.com/gp/book/9781137385123>.

creative way, become important documents for studying the conflicting and changing category of nationhood for the urban youth.

In sum, for the Generation Y in Budapest, self-definition becomes a challenging issue. The experiences of urban life, the uncertainties deriving from the post-socialist context, and the current reinforcement of Hungarianness in public life all play an important role. There are not many platforms offered for this specific part of society in the capital to establish a dialogue with nationhood: Reisz' films provide the stage for it. Therefore studying Hungarian youth within a specific social, cultural, and demographic character can further our knowledge about identities in a global, international, cosmopolitan context. The following chapter will analyze these issues within the filmic texts in order to see what the films themselves communicate. More importantly, this chapter's framework will be particularly relevant for the analysis of the focus groups to see this context's direct impact on the Budapest young individuals' construction of nationhood.

4. THE ANALYSIS OF REISZ' FILMS

In this chapter Reisz' two films will be analyzed in the framework of Eastern European cinema, mainly relying on previously outlined relevant concepts for Hungarian film. This will be connected to scholarship on the category of the national in cinema in order to establish conceptual links with banal and everyday nationalism. The analysis will assess the characteristic traits of Reisz' filmmaking and focus on the aspect of reflexivity that is conveyed through a quirky mode. Lastly, the chapter concludes with how all these elements are represented in a comical frame constructing a particular narrative of Hungarianness in cinema today.

4.1. The Quirky Perspective

Since Reisz is a relative newcomer on the Hungarian cinema scene, it is hard to place him into a specific film cycle or movement. Notably, his previous work, consisting of a body of short films, covered similar topics: appreciation for Budapest, facing one's past, and the effects of an alienating environment.¹⁵³ Whereas the majority of contemporary Hungarian films communicate through metaphors and bodily experiences to depict an imaginary, often alien, Hungarian reality,¹⁵⁴ Reisz managed to convey the recognizable and ordinary image of today's reality surrounding the viewers. To make a movie about generational problems, however, is not a new tendency in Hungarian cinema. Film such as *Free Entry* (2014)¹⁵⁵ or *Utóélet* [Afterlife] (2014)¹⁵⁶ are contemporary examples, but the tendency has existed since the 1940s.¹⁵⁷ Reisz follows the common type of "így jöttem"¹⁵⁸ films in Hungarian cinema

¹⁵³ Reisz' short film titles: *A tagadás oka, őszintén* (2006), [The reason of denial, honestly] *Valakinek a valamije* [Someone's something] (2009), *Külsőalak* (2011) [Appearance], *Nekem Budapest* (2013) [For me Budapest].

¹⁵⁴ Balázs Varga, "A fel nem ismerhető ország: Kortárs magyar filmek Magyarországa." [An Unrecognizable Country: Hungary in contemporary Hungarian films] *Emlékkerti kőoroszlán: Írások György Péter 60. Születésnapjára*, ed. Katalin Orbán and Anna Gács (Budapest: ELTE Bölcsészettudományi Kar, 2014) 293-301.

¹⁵⁵ *Free Entry*, directed by Yvonne Kerékgyártó, (2014; Budapest: Vertigo Média Kft., 2014), 70 min.

¹⁵⁶ *Utóélet* [Afterlife], directed by Virág Zomborác, (2014; Budapest: Vertigo Média Kft., 2014), 93 min.

¹⁵⁷ "Beleszületett a szabadságba és nem tud mit kezdeni vele," [He was born into freedom and doesn't know what to do with it] *Filmtett - Erdélyi Filmes Portál* (blog), accessed May 2, 2019, <https://www.filmtett.ro/cikk/3974/a-2010-es-evек-nemzedekreprezentacioja-a-magyar-filmben>.

and he establishes continuities with the Hungarian filmmaking tradition, even including direct homages in his films. More importantly, his films are predominantly driven with reflexivity and consider what is happening in the public domain. Therefore, Reisz' films are most often compared to *No Girl Ever Thrilled Me So* (1994),¹⁵⁹ *Cukorkékség* [Candy Blue] (1999)¹⁶⁰ and *Moscow Square* (2001),¹⁶¹ which also engage with a Budapest context and young adult's relation to it in an reflexive manner. Especially *Moscow Square*, which depicts youngsters at the gates of adulthood in 1989, similarly builds on a familiar socio-politico-historical context easily relatable for the audience in an ironic way.¹⁶²

Additionally, Reisz' cinema also relies on global trends and specific cinematic representations where the concept of reflexivity is key.¹⁶³ From Stam's taxonomy of reflexive strategies, Reisz falls into the category of ludic playful self-reflexivity.¹⁶⁴ He uses reality as a backdrop to point out its absurdities in an entertaining comical manner, throughout calling attention to its own artifice.¹⁶⁵ Departing from this type of reflexivity, I position Reisz' filmmaking as relying on the category of quirky, defined by James MacDowell, as not a genre but rather a mode of filmmaking. Quirky films allude to various genres—mainly comedy and melodrama—and are generally characterized by tensions: on the one hand, being ironic and remote; on the other hand, creating sympathy for the characters. They are strongly connected to childhood, whether by starring infantile characters, through artificially constructed mise-en-scène that is dominated by characters' childhood objects, or by presenting a coming-of-age

¹⁵⁸ Gábor Gelencsér, *Magyar Film 1.0* [Hungarian Film] (Budapest: Holnap Kiadó, 2017), 238-9. A direct translation is "I arrived like this" films. A tradition in Hungarian cinema where the fresh directors introduce themselves with autobiographical references and address current societal problems in their narrative plots.

¹⁵⁹ *No Girl Ever Thrilled Me So*, directed by Péter Reich (Budapest; 1994) 80 min.

¹⁶⁰ *Cukorkékség* [Candy Blue] directed by Gergely Pohárnok and Attila Hazai, (Budapest; 1999,) 73min.

¹⁶¹ *Moscow Square*, directed by Ferenc Török, (Budapest: Pannonia Entertainment Ltd., 2001) 88 min.

¹⁶² Kalmár, "Srácok a Moszkva térről. Férfiasságkonstrukciók, történelem és ironia Török Ferenc Moszkva tér című filmjében," [Lads from Moscow Square. Masculinities, History and Irony in Ferenc Török's Moscow's Square] *Metropolis* 20.4 (2016): 58-73.

¹⁶³ Reisz' first feature resembles a mumblecore piece, a "no-wave" in American independent cinema. These films are self-referential, made in a spontaneous DIY manner with a low budget, and non-professional actors. They typically concern themselves with the everyday life and anxieties of a young generation.

¹⁶⁴ Stam, *Reflexivity in Film and Literature*, xvi.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 129.

story.¹⁶⁶ These elements function to recover a “lost purity,”¹⁶⁷ a way for the alienated characters to make sense of the world around them. More importantly, it is the tone that “exists on a knife-edge of judgment and empathy, detachment and engagement, irony and sincerity,”¹⁶⁸ which is the most important to consider in the framework of this thesis.

In both movies, the protagonists dominate the films throughout and become the main source of identification for the audience, for which their ironic distance—and, simultaneously, undeniable attachment—will be reviewed. In both films it is clearly established that they are Hungarian: Áron even declares he is going to be a “torn-smelly-bum-proud-Hungarian-peasant” when he goes abroad. This gives an additional layer to the films, where nationhood becomes an important perspective.¹⁶⁹ Although ironically established, it still dominates the characters’ lives through space, everyday practices, and through material as well as popular culture. Reisz throughout employs an ironic mode with a subtle mockery which puts even the presentation of nationhood into these frames. It is, therefore, crucial to consider these cinematic means, since as MacDowell argues, once these patterns are identified, they communicate directly with the audience on an emotional level.¹⁷⁰ The following sections will analyze the main protagonists’ relation towards space, memory, and cultural references as means of constructing Hungarianness in contemporary Hungarian film in a quirky mode.

4.2. City as a Discursive Space

The aspect of spatiality in both films acquires two main functions that reveal the national implications closely connected to the films’ setting, Budapest. In *For Some Inexplicable Reason* the city’s portrayal also provides a form of attachment, as it represents an alienating space that can be translated onto a national level. Paradoxically, the films use the landscape of

¹⁶⁶ MacDowell, “Notes on Quirky,” 8-10.

¹⁶⁷ *ibid*, 9.

¹⁶⁸ *ibid*, 13.

¹⁶⁹ Brubaker et al., *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town*.

¹⁷⁰ MacDowell, “Notes on Quirky,” 14.

the city to recreate a national imagination, yet in reality, Budapest is barely representative of what Hungary is today.¹⁷¹ As such, in order to understand the possibilities of experiencing nationhood connected to space, the mapping out of Budapest both as a realistic and as a surreal place in the film has to be assessed. In *Bad Poems* the city becomes a location for practicing memory, which establishes continuity between different time slots and places referring to a shared sense of collectivity. On the contrary, the representation of foreign cities differs significantly: Lisbon is limited to realistic means of depiction, and Paris in *Bad Poems* is the location for the protagonist's worst experiences and memories. The involvement of scenes from abroad not only strengthen what the Hungarian capital stands for in the films, but also opens up the topic of mobility capable of revealing dichotomous constructions such as local vs. global, familiar vs. foreign, and home vs. abroad.

In *For Some Inexplicable Reason* Budapest becomes almost a separate character that determines the overall atmosphere and narrative construction throughout the plot. The portrayal of this city is as realistic as it is imaginary, both personal and relatable yet estranged from its inhabitants. On the one hand, Budapest is shown as an existing capital familiar to a domestic audience in an almost documentaristic manner. The film uses real location shooting, hand-held cameras and natural light, and constantly refers to real pubs,¹⁷² restaurants, districts, parks, and institutions, with a special emphasis on public transport, that encourage attachment for the viewer. Similarly, in *Bad Poems* many of the characteristic Budapest locations like the Margaret Bridge, cinemas, and markets are included in association with Tamás' recollections about his ex-girlfriend. These form an instant connection with a domestic audience bringing up a set of "familiar sensations," placing them into the viewers' own familiar realm of everyday.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ There is growing division between Budapest and the rest of Hungary, for further details see Chapter 3.

¹⁷² The name of these pubs came up specifically in the focus group discussions, see in Chapter 6.

¹⁷³ Edensor, "Sensing National Spaces," 70.

On the other hand, through the character's outsider position to his surroundings, Budapest comes across as oppressing and not relatable. As György Kalmár and Zsolt Győri claim, the city as a social construction moves beyond cinematic space and establishes power structures. In the opening scene, Áron dies at lively spots in the metropolis, yet his "death-tourism"¹⁷⁴ goes unnoticed. Relying on quirky "meticulous compositions" and symmetrical planimetric shots as the main protagonist collapses on the street level further reinforces his isolation.¹⁷⁵ The establishing sequence, therefore, already complicates the possibilities of belonging in a modern world capital. Moreover, the mise-en-scène adds to recognition of the character's displacement throughout the film. In contrast to the moving mundane life around him, Áron often sits alone or just wanders around, suggesting his loneliness and detachment. According to Bátori, Áron's portrayal as a lonely alienated figure already foreshadows his migration as a means of escape.¹⁷⁶ His aimless drifting establishes him as a person devoid of identity,¹⁷⁷ his relation to the space illustrates his alienation from a collective.

In a short yet incredibly dense montage-scene, Áron, waiting for his mother's response on the phone, walks through protests, marathons, a national holiday march and celebration, the *Sziget* music festival, and thermal baths, which are all specific for Hungary in this context. These banal reminders of the nation,¹⁷⁸ such as the flag or symbolic places, pass unnoticed for the protagonist, but they become visible in the film and offer a source of recognition and identification for the audience. Furthermore, as Edensor establishes, this alludes to how performing the nation is closely associated with space: in the film Áron passes through various national commemorations that take place on the streets.¹⁷⁹ However, Áron moves through crowds disinterestedly, in the opposite direction, and stands out from the setting

¹⁷⁴ Bátori, "Modern Tales of Anti-Capitalism," 57.

¹⁷⁵ MacDowell, "Notes on Quirky," 6.

¹⁷⁶ Bátori, "Modern Tales of Anti-Capitalism," 60.

¹⁷⁷ Benke, "Suffocating Country," 32.

¹⁷⁸ Billig, *Banal Nationalism*.

¹⁷⁹ Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life*,

visually, which suggests that he is outside of the constructed national collectivity that is formulated in the public sphere. Bátori has contextualized these scenes as mirroring the current anti-establishment public mood in Hungary;¹⁸⁰ however, it is more important to realize how this scene reinforces conscious allusions to the category of nationhood, positioning the protagonist not as against it, but simply unaffected by it.

Budapest, a real existing capital, is also the personal space of the main protagonists and their own subjective constructions as means of creating order in a world where they do not belong and trying to make sense of their environment.¹⁸¹ In *Bad Poems*, space becomes a personal mind map of Tamás trying to connect the dots between his past and present. He literally plunges into his memories (demonstrated in the scene where he gets out of bed as an adult and comes out of the pool as a teenager) or gets on a tram from his living room. While in this film the unreal image of Budapest is achieved through seamless editing crossing time and space, in *For Some Inexplicable Reason* it involves unrealistic plot elements. After a brief argument with his parents, Áron follows an unlikely long cable, which is carrying his parents' heated debate, through the dark rainy Budapest and finally unplugs it in his own bathroom. The cable connects him and his family through the city, a clear visualization of his attachment to his parents as well as to his hometown. Before Áron leaves for Lisbon, he even imagines the city being led by his friends in order to create the perfect surprise farewell party for him. Through these practices the characters gain agency: they reinterpret their surroundings on their own terms, no longer dictated by Hollywood power structures¹⁸² but through creativity and quirkiness, thereby they intentionally purify it.¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ Bátori, "Modern Tales of Anti-Capitalism," 59.

¹⁸¹ MacDowell, "Notes on Quirky," 7.

¹⁸² Kalmár, "Inhabiting the Post-Communist," 90.

¹⁸³ MacDowell, "Notes on Quirky," 7.

4.2.1. Going Abroad as an Escape?

The motif of mobility is prevalent in Hungarian cinema: for the previous generation of Hungarian filmmakers, leaving and returning characters function as a metaphor of self-colonization in order to stress the inescapability of their “existential experience of marginalization and alienation.”¹⁸⁴ However, in Reisz’ films the mobility aspect acquires a different function. The West is no longer an idealized, better option, a fact explicitly addressed in the narrative when the group of friends reflect on why so many of their peers decide to leave the country. Moving to the West does represent more of an existential choice:¹⁸⁵ not an escape to improve their lives, just an escape. Right at the beginning Áron’s biggest fear becomes clear: his life is pointless, he serves no purpose for society, and his death would not change anything, even if it happened in the middle of the city. Reisz’ Budapest is just like any other European capital, which indicates that globalization has made its impact also on the screen, where self-colonization turns to making boundaries between real and desired space.¹⁸⁶ Formulating the city according to desires, however, does imply agency and offers an insightful viewpoint into a young filmmaker’s representation of his own generation in a modern urban reality.

Although in the Budapest scenes both films build on familiarity and a local context topped with surreal elements and flowing editing, the parts set abroad stand out and achieve a different effect. The contrast is especially apparent in *For Some Inexplicable Reason*: the personal, playful and subjective portrayal of Áron’s inner reality disappears as soon as the film crosses the border to Portugal, where the depiction is realistic, plain, and monotonous. Although Áron’s repetition of his practices and way of life in Lisbon illustrates how he cannot separate himself from what he left behind, he comes back changed and takes a new step in his

¹⁸⁴ Gelencsér, “Back and Forth,” 70.

¹⁸⁵ *ibid.*, 74.

¹⁸⁶ Miklós Sággy, “Irány a nyugat! – filmes utazások keletről nyugatra a magyar rendszerváltás után” [Let’s go to the West – film travels from the East to the West after the Hungarian regime change] in *Tér, hatalom és identitás viszonyai a magyar filmben*, 233-43; Gelencsér, “Back and Forth,” 73.

life (literally, as he puts his feet on the ground). The characters in previous films would come back disorientated and continue their quest for identity,¹⁸⁷ while in Benke's terms, after Lisbon Áron finally becomes "someone."¹⁸⁸ This difference between the two cities' construction suggests that the main protagonist is emotionally attached to one of them, whereas the other is just one place out of many that an outsider or traveller experiences.

In *Bad Poems* the motivation behind Tamás leaving for Paris is different since it is due to his ex-girlfriend. Nonetheless, it is still important to mention what the foreign city stands for. Budapest is a stage for his memories, both positive and negative, that together formulate his identity, while Paris is devoid of any memories except for the breakup. According to Strausz' conceptualization, mobility is also one of the themes that reflects on the concept of cultural memory and contemporary Hungarian identity for the 2000s generation of filmmakers. Significantly, at the end of the film Tamás' attempt to resurrect his memories is literally blown up at the Paris Orly Airport. Budapest is a place that he is attached to through his memories, while Paris is just like the airport: impersonal, uncaring, and alienating. Although the audience does not get to find out whether Tamás will return or stay abroad, it is clear that he is incapable of disassociating himself from his memories rooted in his familiar space.

To sum up, I argue that the representation of Budapest—as subjective, as a real existing capital, and as different from other cities—refers to the current context of Hungary while also alluding to the presence of nationhood in the films. Reisz acknowledges the space and the motif of mobility as discursive channels. Especially in *For Some Inexplicable Reason*, Budapest acquires a twofold image, as pulling and pushing at the same time, which opens up a debate on whether identification or belonging is even possible today. The city is a space where the youth struggles to connect to the collective because of various personal and societal

¹⁸⁷ Strausz, "Back to the Past," 24.

¹⁸⁸ Benke, "Suffocating Country," 32.

reasons, but it is also a self-conscious construction that implies agency. Budapest in the film, thus, becomes a tool of self-expression for the struggling Generation Y, who can recognize their own positionality to the collective as it takes place in familiar space. In the following section, the maintenance of this collectivity will be reviewed through the aspect of memory in the films.

4.3. Body as “Memory Container”

Connecting back to Strausz and his conceptualization of mnemonic themes for post-1989 collective identity in Hungarian cinema, the aspect of corporeality is relevant to consider for *Bad Poems*. Although the context has changed, the plot of the film similarly demonstrates Hungary’s democratic transformation and its imprints on society. Strausz builds on Connerton’s work and understands the process of remembering formulated through bodily experiences as a means of expressing belonging to a collectivity.¹⁸⁹ Edensor has assessed these repetitive actions and gestures also as ways to reproduce the national through everyday performances.¹⁹⁰ Accordingly, practices both in the private and public sphere enacted by Tamás get to be interpreted as associated with nationhood. Once again the aspect of memory and its connection to the body is able to showcase the dual nature of how the protagonist relates to and experiences these aspects, but also stands outside of them.

An iconic scene in *Bad Poems* centers on the famous final public speech of the first post-socialist prime minister, József Antall. In this scene, Tamás’ body becomes a “memory container” that reflects on the socio-historical context around him.¹⁹¹ While on a walk with his father on Mátyás Square, where the speech was held in 1993, we suddenly enter Tamás’ memory of the event from his childhood. However, the speech is not seen from his perspective first but introduced through archival footage, into which his father is seamlessly

¹⁸⁹ Connerton, *How Societies Remember?*

¹⁹⁰ Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life*, 84.

¹⁹¹ Strausz, “Back to the Past,” 26.

edited, cheering in the crowd. The incorporation of archival material reinforces the protagonist's participation in a "commemorative ceremony"¹⁹² as part of a nation. The young Tamás faints and his motionless body is carried through the crowd and its Hungarian flags, indicating how even unconsciously he is part of the crowd that holds him up. Moreover, referring to Assmann's concept of cultural memory and its fixation, this scene indicates how different layers of memory are intertwined.¹⁹³ Although Tamás has fainted, Antall's iconic declaration that "there is no future without the past"¹⁹⁴ is engraved into the film's narrative as well as to the cultural memory within a Hungarian context, as the speech is archived and rewatchable.

Moreover, as a further allusion to the democratic transformation, the film depicts the sudden appearance of posters all over the city. Here the body as an expressive tool functions as a sign of ideological resistance:¹⁹⁵ Tamás, in his own personal rebellion, headbutts campaign posters of political parties and product advertisements that are context-heavy. As concrete material objects the posters become a way to practice memory, not only for Tamás but also for the viewers who are aware of the multilayered meanings they hold. One of the posters features Fidesz's famous slogan from the 1990s encouraging voters to choose orange instead of a banana, thereby embracing progress,¹⁹⁶ but the audience also gets to see posters of once-exotic Western products that gradually entered the country, such as Coca-Cola or washing powder. A poster for the former Hungarian national airline, MALÉV, also appears. The company was once the pride of the Hungarian economy, but it was forced to cease its operations after sixty-six years: in this way, the film incorporates a hint about the financial crisis hitting Hungary in the 2010s. These posters allude to the atmosphere of the time by

¹⁹² Connerton, *How Societies Remember?* 7.

¹⁹³ Assmann, "Communicative and Cultural Memory,"

¹⁹⁴ Own translation of the speech "A Nemzet búcsúünnepén" [On the farewell of the Nation], Retrieved from: <http://antalljozsef.igytortent.hu/beszedekek/politikai-beszedekek-interjuk/174-a-nemzet-bucsuunnepen>

¹⁹⁵ Strausz, "Back to the Past," 27.

¹⁹⁶ The orange also alludes to Péter Bacsó's movie *The Witness* (1969) where orange stood for ironic double nature of sweet propaganda and sour reality as a critique of 1950s in Hungary.

bringing in real-life connotations; they are the reflections of a metonymic relation between a “remembering mind and a reminding object” alluding to cultural memory.¹⁹⁷

Besides the public space, the reproduction of one’s memory happens in the domestic sphere through family members. Tamás’ attachment to his family is supported by how they are present in each time period of the film; they are even played by the same actors in order to reinforce continuity, which gets formulated in their repetitive gestures. The setup at the family table is always the same, while the father remains an eager Ferencváros¹⁹⁸ fan throughout, watching matches at home and always waving to Tamás from the balcony. The family’s practices transcend time and form themselves into “bodily automatisms” that strengthen the social bond of these characters and develop recognizable social codes.¹⁹⁹ Similarly, though primarily set in the present, *For Some Inexplicable Reason* depicts familial lunches in the same manner, where a mandatory argument seemingly has to take place every time. More importantly, the importance of having Hungarian products for lunch hints at practices and habits that reinforce nationhood in the everyday, practices often unnoticed which function as taken-for-granted repetitions reinforced by the protagonist’s mother. However, in both films the main protagonists remain outsiders in these events: Tamás escapes to his own memories and imagination, while Áron remains unaffected and passive. The disinterested protagonists are not conscious practitioners of these automatisms, but they still endure them physically which maintains the bond between themselves and the collective—in this case, the national collective. Through their distance these practices even formulate into “an awkward comedy of embarrassment,”²⁰⁰ which leads me to consider the main source of comedy in the films, namely references to popular culture important for a national framework.

¹⁹⁷ Assmann, “Communicative and Cultural Memory,” 17.

¹⁹⁸ Ferencvárosi Torna Club, known as Ferencváros, is a professional football club based of the district Ferencváros in Budapest.

¹⁹⁹ Connerton, *How Societies Remember?* 5.

²⁰⁰ MacDowell, “Notes on Quirky,” 13.

4.4. The “National” as a Gag

Reviewing the use of space and memory in the two films has underlined so far the implicit connections to nationhood as well as the maintenance of a detached yet comic tone. The plethora of references and homages to specifically Hungarian works of pop culture are another strategy of connecting to the audience, yet these common points are presented as laughable plot elements. Edensor’s emphasis on music or films capable of holding intertextual codes only meaningful for a certain type of audience is reflected in how the film “resurrects” certain popular elements from previous decades that imply a shared knowledge.²⁰¹ In *Bad Poems* the film shows a picture of one of the most famous national poets, János Arany, a generic image known to everyone who has studied from Hungarian literature books. However, Tamás confesses his misrecognition of Arany with Stalin in the film, leading to an absurd episode where Stalin narrates a famous ballad by Arany. The film also includes footage of Zoltán Latinovits, popularly known as the “actor king”²⁰² of socialist Hungary, reciting an Attila József poem on TV. For the majority of households Latinovits was popular entertainment: however, for young Tamás he is only a man making out of context facial expressions, which makes him ridiculous.

An evident homage, appearing in both films, is to Hungary’s most successful TV soap opera *Szomszédok* [Neighbors].²⁰³ This series was once the nation’s most popular entertainment show, running from 1987–1999 and building up a “popular national televisual consciousness.”²⁰⁴ A common ending for the episodes was the lower-middle-class characters making a comment about politics, a social situation, or human relationships; this is re-enacted in *For Some Inexplicable Reason* when the characters talk to the camera artificially and share

²⁰¹ Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life*, 140.

²⁰² Latinovits famously claimed that “To recite a poem well is a nation-building task.” Source: <https://wmn.hu/kult/49362-maganyos-vagy-osszeferhetetlen---87-eve-szuletett-latinovits-zoltan>

²⁰³ *Szomszédok* [Neighbors] directed by Ádám Horváth, (1987-99; Budapest: MAHIR és a Magyar Televízió Művelődési Főszerkesztőség)

²⁰⁴ Edensor, “Sensing National Spaces,” 75.

little snippets from their everyday life. In a short Christmas episode, *Bad Poems* once again recreates the aesthetics and narrative of this popular show. The episode is even introduced with a panoramic image of housing units and a telenovela-style caption, followed by a recreation of the dialogues typical for the series. Referring to *Szomszédok*, therefore, also alludes to a collective activity for the young generation socialized on watching this show, as it was “an integral part of the everyday life of the whole nation,”²⁰⁵ reformulated into comic relief in the films.

Lastly, another way of evoking a feeling of familiarity within the audience is through musical cues. Before Áron’s departure to Lisbon, his friends perform a musical cover of Pál Szécsi’s hit song “Boldogság” [Happiness].²⁰⁶ Ironically, the film tests and questions what happiness could mean as part of Áron’s own identity-quest; it then switches to a song that was written by an enormously popular singer in Hungary associated with depression and several suicide attempts. Omega’s “Gyöngyhajú lány” [The girl with pearly hair]²⁰⁷ still remains one of the country’s most popular songs, released at the end of the 1960s, that is performed in Tamás’ imagination as he pretends to be a rock star in his living room. Tamás’ performance of “Gyöngyhajú lány” is evidently over the top, as was that by the group of friends performing Szécsi’s song in the first movie. Naturally, watching a TV series with one’s family, pretending to be a rock star to a famous song, or having an actor reciting poetry is not nation-specific. Yet the use of cultural references that are recognizable in a particular context become codes reclaimed on a national level through recognition and humor.²⁰⁸

Considering Elsaesser’s notion of the post-national, where parody is used self-consciously to define identity,²⁰⁹ in Reisz’ cases it is not so much parody as irony and a redefinition of the familiar into comical. These national nuances are represented in a

²⁰⁵ Bátori, “Modern Tales of Anti-Capitalism,” 60.

²⁰⁶ Pál Szécsi, “Boldogság” [Happiness] *Csak egy tánc volt ...*

²⁰⁷ Omega, “Gyöngyhajú lány” [The girl with pearly hair] 1969, *10 000 lépés*, 1969.

²⁰⁸ Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life*, 140.

²⁰⁹ Elsaesser, *European Cinema Face to Face With Hollywood*, 72.

humorous and often absurd or exaggerated way, impacting the overall tone of the films. Besides the already mentioned banalities signalling nationhood like the protests, ceremonies, or public speeches, both films make references to buildings, sporting events, or even to flags which reproduce national identity in the mundane.²¹⁰ All these small details that are part of Áron and Tamás are consciously constructed, positioning the character into a spatial, temporal, and cultural framework that addresses the audience directly. They are presented as integral parts of the protagonists' everyday realities, although the characters' detached ironic perspective and simultaneous sincere engagement puts everything into quotation marks. Through such methods, Hungarianness is constructed both ironically and ambivalently. The exaggerated everyday nationhood elements become laughable, but through the relationship between the protagonists, their close social circle, and their attachment to the city, it is clear that belonging does matter. This reflexive, quirky, approach towards one's past, one's position in the present, and toward all the components that shape one's identity prevails, which implies that it depends on one's own attitude or interpretation.

Overall, Reisz' films are able to express in a creative manner the country and its youth's convoluted and often contradictory relationship in Budapest. The discourse of these films, therefore, offers an insight into how meaning is produced in the current context and what relation to national belonging is suggested on the cinematic level. As a topic for further study, perceiving one's national belonging as both a laughing and crying matter proves to be an extremely relevant and interesting issue to study. However, in order to test whether these national allusions suggested in the film are recognizable, the discourse around the film must be further scrutinized. Such scrutiny must remain accordance with Higson, who argues for an inward-looking film analysis which proves to be more relevant when considering the films in their surrounding context and considering audience reception.²¹¹ Once acknowledged, it is

²¹⁰ Billig's and Edensor's conceptualization of these everyday elements are can be seen in Chapter 2.

²¹¹ Andrew Higson, "The Concept of National Cinema," 40.

useful to see whether the filmic representation of everyday Hungarianness is utilized in the identification and reconstruction of perceived belonging in public discourse. This could offer an innovative view on “the ways in which ordinary social actors construct themselves as nationalised subjects,”²¹² to which the following sections aim to contribute.

²¹² Susan Condor and Jackie Abell, “Vernacular constructions ‘national identity’ in post- devolution Scotland and England,” *Devolution and Identity*, ed. J. Wilson and k. Stapleton (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2006) 158.

5. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter provides a detailed description of the research design. Whereas the previous section relied on close textual analysis of the films, the next step is to see how young Hungarians reflect on their own nationhood through the two films. This empirical part builds on qualitative research methods grounded in everyday nationhood and audience reception studies. Firstly, the chapter starts by outlining the case selection and moves on to clarify the reasoning behind choosing a qualitative approach and focus groups. A review of the procedure and the discussion guideline follows. Lastly, the chapter concludes with establishing the analytical method and an overall reflection about the individual discussion groups and their dynamics.

5.1. Case Selection

In order to see whether Reisz' two films are connected to everyday nationhood experiences, a case was selected that is exemplary and instructive in this context.²¹³ As has been explained in detail, studying Generation Y provides important insight into sociological issues; accordingly, choosing young adults from this generation allowed the case to be studied in a detailed and direct manner.²¹⁴ Furthermore, since the films are set in Budapest and the urban context is pivotal, the case selection followed the same pattern. The aim was to focus on participants who are Budapest locals, either by birth or long-term residency, and who identify as Hungarians. It was crucial to consider both rooted and non-rooted Budapestians in order to provide a complex picture about urban identity.²¹⁵ This case selection allows me to inquire

²¹³ Uwe Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, 4. ed., repr (Los Angeles, Calif.: SAGE, 2011), 134.

²¹⁴ Ibid, 134.

²¹⁵ Bögre and Keszei, "To Live in Budapest." In this study they consider both young people from Budapest and those who commute to the capital for their studies, their perspective and experiencing Budapest differed.

specifically how the assumed target audience reflects on the films, to study a phenomenon from the viewpoint of those experiencing it.²¹⁶

5.2. Data Collection and Research Method

This thesis builds on the framework of everyday nationhood and incorporates audience reception to see whether films could be helpful tools in indirectly invoking everyday nationhood frames in the participants, as a suggestion for a new method. The purpose was not to find a common explanation for the films but to understand what sort of associations the films left the viewers with, and how they connect to nationhood. Both of these fields focus on the microcosm and regard individuals as active producers of meanings and concepts.²¹⁷ Empirical research on audience reactions emerged as a way to end speculations about the effects of visual media and instead directly study how individuals make sense of them.²¹⁸ From the perspective of everyday nationhood qualitative modes of investigation provide a deeper, richer and more balanced exploration of discursive representations of nationhood brought up by the interviewees themselves, rather than enforced by the interviewer.²¹⁹ That is why scholars stress a “wait-and-listen” approach to discover how people contend with the category of nationhood, assign meaning to it, and then act accordingly in some circumstances.²²⁰ Accordingly, everyday nationhood prefers ethnographic and micro-sociological methods where social context is key for observing whether nation becomes a conscious discursive category or merely remains implicit in the background.²²¹ Similarly, the audience’s “meaning-making” process is societally context-dependent as well as influenced

²¹⁶ Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, 141.

²¹⁷ Fox and Miller-Idriss, “Everyday Nationhood,”; John Fiske, *Television Culture*, (London, England: Methuen. 1987).

²¹⁸ Schröder, Kim C. 1987. “Convergence of Antagonistic Traditions? The Case of Audience Research.” *European Journal of Communication* 2 (1): 7–31.17

²¹⁹ Fox and Miller-Idriss, “Everyday Nationhood,” 555

²²⁰ Ibid, 555.

²²¹ Jonathan Hearn and Marco Antonsich, “Theoretical and Methodological Considerations for the Study of Banal and Everyday Nationalism,” *Nations and Nationalism* 24, no. 3 (July 2018): 594–605, <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12419>.

by situational factors such as place and time.²²² It is crucial to consider “the contextual specificity of the evidence” collected in order to adopt flexibility and a critical approach so as to avoid essentialising the study.²²³

Whereas the majority of empirical research aims to detect the rising renationalization of today, as Uwe Flick states, “the study of subjective meanings and everyday experience and practice is as essential as the complementation of narratives and discourses.”²²⁴ Therefore, it is also important to explore nationhood in a context where it might no longer be as significant and review whether, through an everyday practice such as movie-watching, it becomes evoked. There is an obvious gap in the methodological assessment of everyday nationhood connected to the consumption of films to which this thesis would like to contribute. Other studies in the field have similarly relied on qualitative research methods preferred to quantitative ones;²²⁵ however, there has not yet been a study which would approach young adults’ attitudes and perspectives on nationhood via cinema. Moreover, though the scholars of everyday nationhood stress the importance of examining the participants’ own conceptualization of nationhood, in their research they ask the participants directly about their national identity. I suggest including films as relevant tools for social science research in order to understand people’s identification with nationhood without invoking it as a category of research.

To achieve this purpose focus group data collection was chosen, as it is one of the most efficient methods to collect individuals’ views and comments in qualitative research.²²⁶ Group settings are common in audience reception studies as well, since they recreate the collective experience of watching films and reflecting on them together, similar to a common media

²²² David Morley, *The “Nationwide” Audience* (London: British Film Institute, 1980).

²²³ Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, 278.

²²⁴ Uwe Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research* (SAGE, 2006), 43.

²²⁵ Hearn and Antonsich, “Theoretical and Methodological Considerations for the Study of Banal and Everyday Nationalism,”

²²⁶ Rosaline Barbour, *Doing Focus Groups: The Sage qualitative research kit* (London, United Kingdom: Sage Publications, 2007).

communication environment.²²⁷ Focus groups, which resemble everyday conversations more accurately than interviews, allowed me to see social representations and knowledge as well as meaning formation and its negotiation.²²⁸ Discussing the films in a group setting also revealed which topics, issues, and values are prioritized and how the production of social meanings takes place.²²⁹ For this reason, the method connects back to everyday nationhood's preferred "wait-and-listen" approach to minimize the interviewer's participation and thus see whether the nationhood aspect in the films comes up naturally in the discussion.²³⁰ The following sections will give a detailed explanation of the circumstances of the research and participant selection, and show this method in practice.

5.2.1. Sample

According to the case selection, the targeted participants were Budapest locals, familiar with Reisz' two films, between the ages of nineteen and thirty-eight (roughly the age of Generation Y). Participants were recruited via social media with a Facebook event named "Special screening of *For Some Inexplicable Reason*." The description explained that Reisz's first feature would be screened followed by a short informal discussion as part of an MA research that aims to examine young adults' reflections on Gábor Reisz' two films. It was specified that the event was free, snacks and drinks would be provided, and only those who filled out a registration form would be considered eligible. The event was distributed to various groups on Facebook, which produced an unanticipated high response. For this reason, neither the location nor the exact dates of the screenings were specified to ensure an overview of how many people would actually show up for the discussion.

²²⁷ Morley, *The "Nationwide" Audience*.

²²⁸ Peter Lunt, "Rethinking the focus group in media and communications research," *Journal of Communication*, 46(2), (1996): 79-97. doi: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.1996.tb01475.x

²²⁹ Graeme Turner and Turner Graeme, *Film as Social Practice* (Psychology Press, 1999).

²³⁰ Sue Wilkinson, "Focus groups in feminist research: Power, interaction, and the co- construction of meaning." *Women's Studies International Forum*, 2(1), 111-125. doi: 10.1016/S0277-5395(97)00080-0

The registration form allowed the participants to sign up for four different dates and it asked for demographic details such as sex, age, education, occupation, birthplace and current city. The latter two were to assure that the participants who signed up were originally from Hungary, since the study excludes Hungarian diaspora; it also served to estimate the number of Budapest natives as opposed to those who moved to the capital recently. These demographics were necessary to collect since they could not only influence the participants' perception of the cinematic texts but also shape the group discussion dynamics.²³¹ Furthermore, the registration form asked whether potential participants had seen Reisz' two films: knowledge of the second was a condition for attendance. For copyright reasons, it was not possible to screen *Bad Poems* outside of a cinema. Although the distributors agreed to a private screening, their conditions did not ensure the necessary space or time for conducting discussions after the screening.²³² Most importantly, through the form the participants were asked to give consent to take part in the discussion and to be audio taped for educational purposes (Appendix 1).

A total of seventy-two participants signed up for the screening and discussion, out of whom forty-seven were considered eligible. Most of the participants were rejected on the basis that they had not seen the second movie; they were encouraged, however, to see it at the cinema prior to the focus group session. Other reasons for denying attendance were due to age or the country of origin being outside of Hungary. Those who met all the criteria were contacted with a detailed email about the location, date and procedure of the event. The only prior information given about the research was that it was an MA thesis by the Visual Studies Platform at CEU in collaboration with the ELTE Film Studies faculty, which aims to look at how young Hungarians reflect on Reisz' two films. The Nationalism Studies aspect of it was

²³¹ Lilla Vicsek, "A scheme for analyzing the results of focus groups. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 6(4), (2007): 20-34. Retrieved from <http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca.ezproxy.aut.ac.nz/index.php/IJQM/article/view/982/670>

²³² This distorts the sample and the findings to some extent, see section 5.4.

purposefully concealed in order to avoid invoking nationhood associations for the participants and to ensure the spontaneity of their answers.

5.2.2. Focus Groups in Practice

The data was gathered through four focus groups in total. All took place during a span of one week from March 29 to April 4, 2019, starting at 6pm with a screening and following it with a discussion. For each group, a maximum of fifteen people were allowed in to ensure at least half of them would attend, in order to meet the criteria of a focus group.²³³ I was faced with the challenge of not knowing how many participants would be willing to attend despite registering, or on the contrary, I could have ended up overrecruiting. In the end, the methodological requirement for the participant number was met in all groups, and in total thirty participants took part in this research. The gender and age of the groups were mixed, the youngest participant's age was nineteen and the oldest was thirty-eight. The gender divide was 50% and the Budapest vs. countryside divide was almost even, with 52% participants being from outside of Budapest originally. The majority of 70% were working, with 63% of the participants holding a university degree. A detailed overview of the demographic details is collected in a table (Table 1)²³⁴ as a comprehensive overview of the participants in this research.

All four screenings and discussions were conducted in Budapest in a classroom at the Central European University. The place was selected for practical reasons: the university's technology allowed me to set up a private screening as well as providing a safe and undisturbed environment for the discussions. These arrangements were intended to assure a cinematic experience for the participants. The idea of pairing the discussion with a screening had various functions. Firstly, it ensured a bigger interest in the event and attracted more

²³³ Paul J. Lavrakas, *Encyclopedia of Survey Research Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2008) doi: 10.4135/9781412963947.

²³⁴ See on page 63.

participants. Secondly, it was necessary to refresh impressions and thoughts about *For Some Inexplicable Reason*, as five years have passed since its release. Although *Bad Poems* has been at the center of attention in recent months, screening the first film proved to be a unique occasion to see the movie on a big screen again, as it is no longer screened in cinemas. Thirdly, within the framework of audience reception studies, in order to understand viewers' responses it is necessary to conduct the discussion in the same immediate environment where they encountered the film.²³⁵ Since the viewing environment affects the viewers' attention, the participants were asked to turn off their mobile phones and direct their attention fully to the film in order to recreate a cinematic atmosphere in the classroom.

Upon the participants' arrival, at the scheduled place and time, the film was prepared for screening. When the film finished there was a short break, after which the discussion began with a brief outline of the purpose of the thesis and collection of permission for audio recording. All the participants were guaranteed anonymity and privacy as the data would be only used for this research. The discussions were conducted in Hungarian in order to make the participants feel comfortable rather than create a formal interrogative environment. Since the setting can bear a great influence on the interviews and their results, throughout the process I tried to ensure an informal, friendly atmosphere, though the discussions were recorded.²³⁶ It is important to note that the length of group discussions also impact the data;²³⁷ hence in G3, due to the participants' tiredness, the final task was eliminated.²³⁸ The recordings were fully transcribed in English, directly translated by me and then anonymized. They lasted on average from ninety to 110 minutes per group.

²³⁵ Martin Barker, "I Have Seen the Future and It Is Not Here Yet ...; or, On Being Ambitious for Audience Research," *The Communication Review* 9, no. 2 (July 1, 2006): 123–41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10714420600663310>.

²³⁶ Ruth Wodak "Methods for Critical Discourse Analysis - Google Books," accessed May 29, 2019, https://books.google.hu/books/about/Methods_for_Critical_Discourse_Analysis.html?id=tNRWsrPiNQoC&redir_esc=y. 10.

²³⁷ Vicsek, A scheme for analyzing the results of focus groups," 25.

²³⁸ This will be explained in the following section in detail.

5.2.3. Topic Guide

The topics covered by the group discussions were constructed according to the theoretical framework and then operationalized into questions (Appendix 3). When deciding on the topic guide the questions were constructed only as a general guideline focused on the films, in order not to reinforce the nationhood aspect. The questions were tested in a pilot semi-structured interview in which the aspect of nationhood was brought up by the interviewee. After this pilot, the provisional topics were modified slightly to ensure relevance but the same overall outcome was expected for the focus groups. The structure consisted of warm-up, core and cooling-down questions.²³⁹ The questions were open-ended rather than concrete and due to the semi-structured nature of the research their order was not always followed strictly, and some were ultimately not asked at all. However, as new topics emerged new questions were raised accordingly. The participants were always asked to elaborate on their statements, and if there was silence I asked the whole group whether they agreed or disagreed with what had been said.

The participants were instructed about focus group dynamics to establish the rules prior to the start of the conversation. Besides the “discussion stimulus,”²⁴⁰ in this case the screening, the trailer of *Bad Poems* was also shown to remind the participants that the second movie should be equally included in the discussion. The conversation started off with each participant giving a short introduction of themselves, where they were also asked about their cinema-going habits as a warm-up. This first question was brought up in order to reinforce the common ground between the members, since most of the participants did not know each other prior to the screening.²⁴¹ The core topics that I necessarily wanted to cover were: what do these films mean to the participants; what is the role of place, time, and tone in the films; and

²³⁹ Sue Arthur and James Nazroo, “Designing Fieldwork Strategies and Materials,” in *Qualitative Research Practice : A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*, ed. Ritchie, J., Lewis, J. (Sage Publications, London, 2003) 109–137.

²⁴⁰ Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, 200.

²⁴¹ Ibid, 200.

how do the films make them feel. It was vital to recognize what role films played in the participants' lives and what they thought about Hungarian cinema in general. The function of Budapest was emphasized throughout in order to assess the relationship between the urban and the national level, which brought up the aspect of recognition and identification with Reisz' films to a great extent. Through commenting on the films the current socio-economic or political situation in the country also came up, which allowed me to bridge the questions from the film to the participants' own real-life experiences.

Most importantly, however, the main question was what makes the films Hungarian, and consequently, what "Hungarianness" means for them. Following the "wait-and-listen" approach I did not bring the aspect of nationhood into the discussion: it came up naturally. When it did, I had an excerpt ready from a film review blatantly stressing the Hungarian aspect of Reisz' first feature, openly leading the debate toward national frameworks:

"Oops, without any force a Hungarian film was born about an ordinary Hungarian youngster. There's a guy, going through a break up [...] meanwhile the viewers can see a Typical Hungarian family and Typical Hungarian situations."²⁴²

Since in all groups the "Hungarian" quality of the movies emerged already at the start of the discussion, an inclusion of this excerpt was not puzzling for the participants; it supported the dynamics. Incorporating it also helped with introducing the final task to the participants: to imagine directing a film along the criteria that the above-mentioned article specifies. The reasoning behind their choices allowed me to see their associations with typical Hungarian characters and situations, as well as their views on nationhood.

As the moderator's task is not to disturb I aimed to create an open space where everyone can express their opinion and listen to one another.²⁴³ On many occasions the discussion about the films went into details such as the acting skills of the characters or

²⁴² Own translation and selected part from the article: "Tökéletes Magyar Mese Készült a Kisbetűs Életről," [A perfect Hungarian tale was born about mundane life] accessed December 16, 2018, https://azonnali.hu/cikk/20181206_erolkodes-nelkuli-mese-a-kisbetus-eletrol.

²⁴³ Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, 201.

getting over a breakup. For this reason, I often utilized *topical steering* to deepen and expand on specific topics relevant for the research.²⁴⁴ Occasionally I also relied on *steering the dynamics*,²⁴⁵ where I intentionally brought in a change of perspective to challenge the participants' frameworks. I invoked an external frame of how a foreigner would react to these films, which was meant to reveal whether there was something uniquely Hungarian about the films according to the participants. Moreover, I applied Fox's breaching strategy to challenge "the taken-for-granted foundations of everyday nationhood":²⁴⁶ the participants were always asked to explain explicitly the references to nationhood in order to avoid implicit answers. Each focus group ended with deciding on what this thesis would actually be about in order to reflect on what we had discussed together. Generally, follow-up feedback positions the participants into a more active role;²⁴⁷ for me, however, it was crucial to ensure the participants found out and agreed with the actual purpose of the research.

5.3. Analytic Method

The chosen analytic method of this thesis is thematic analysis. Although this model is often used interchangeably with qualitative content analysis, the difference is that in thematic analysis the data is not quantifiable and it does not focus on individual words.²⁴⁸ Rather, it reflects on reality as well as moves beyond the surface level,²⁴⁹ which helps to detect the type of language, terminology and concepts used by the participants in their own context. The method's purpose is to split the data into units of analysis and discover prevalent patterns

²⁴⁴ Ibid, 199.

²⁴⁵ Ibid, 199.

²⁴⁶ Jon E. Fox, "The Edges of the Nation: A Research Agenda for Uncovering the Taken-for-Granted Foundations of Everyday Nationhood: Edges of the Nation," *Nations and Nationalism* 23, no. 1 (January 2017): 26–47, <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12269>.

²⁴⁷ Lunt, "Rethinking the focus group in media and communications research," 82.

²⁴⁸ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3 (January 1, 2006): 77–101.

²⁴⁹ Ibid, 77–101.

through inductive or deductive means.²⁵⁰ In the analysis I rely mostly on the inductive approach; however, deductive means proved to be helpful in organizing the data since they do not emerge in a vacuum. When deciding on the data I rely on both the semantic and interpretative levels, though the latter is more relevant when discovering the conceptualizations and ideologies of the participants.²⁵¹ The thematic analysis is often criticised for its flexibility, but in this research, it is crucial to remain receptive and categorize the data both from the bottom-up and from above.²⁵²

5.4. Validity and Reliability of the Data

Through the focus group dynamics, I was able to see the different and various responses these films are able to evoke in individuals and perceive how young adults from Budapest relate to nationhood and why to the films' narrative on Hungarianness specifically. Notably, Reisz' first film was more dominant in the discussion due to the circumstances. Therefore, the detailed analysis of *Bad Poems*, principally focusing on the role of memory as a producer of national belonging,²⁵³ did not get to be unfolded in the discussions. More importantly, it should be acknowledged that all the participants were fans of the movie, which is a considerable limitation of the study. It could be supposed that the way in which Reisz presents nationhood in the film resonates with them strongly, which problematizes the validity of the research questions for this group.

These participants have a privileged perspective on these issues as they are educated, they are either students or employed, and they have the opportunity to consume both global and local cinema culture in their free time. Nevertheless, they were self-reflexive and critical

²⁵⁰ Mojtaba Vaismoradi, Hannele Turunen, and Terese Bondas, "Content Analysis and Thematic Analysis: Implications for Conducting a Qualitative Descriptive Study: Qualitative Descriptive Study," *Nursing & Health Sciences* 15, no. 3 (September 2013): 398–405, <https://doi.org/10.1111/nhs.12048>.

²⁵¹ Richard E. Boyatzis, *Transforming Qualitative Information: Thematic Analysis and Code Development*, Transforming Qualitative Information: Thematic Analysis and Code Development (Thousand Oaks, CA, US: Sage Publications, Inc, 1998).

²⁵² Braun and Clarke, "Using thematic analysis in psychology,"

²⁵³ For further details on what role does memory play in the films see Chapter 4.

towards the movies even as fans of Reisz' work. However, the study did not have the capacity to consider in more detail the privileged perspective of this particular group in terms of class status. Accordingly, the patterns that emerged do not reflect or reproduce nationhood as a whole; they only represent the views of a specific subgroup of people with very similar backgrounds in the country, who have a cosmopolitan bourgeois outlook on such matters. What is evoked through the films, however, is far more complex than what can be captured in focus groups. These films present nationhood in a certain way that greatly affected the answers of the participants. The interrelatedness of how the participants and the films approach the category of nationhood is made clear through the analysis, but it is important to note they essentially both reflect on the surrounding environment. I acknowledge the greater focus on film analysis than any detailed multi-layered examination of what nationhood means to young adults today in Hungary and their frames of inclusion and exclusion.

To give a short reflection from the researcher's perspective, each group had very different dynamics. In G1 the Budapest vs. Hungary divide came up dominantly and it was also the most critical group towards Hungarian nationhood. In G2 the participants were almost all the same age and some even knew each other, which turned the conversation into a friendly talk about real-life experiences. As G3 mainly consisted of couples it affected the participants' behavior; they answered for each other and were far more reticent in sharing their opinions. In every group, there was typically one individual who questioned other participants' preconceptions, a common phenomenon in group discussions,²⁵⁴ but in G3 this tendency was pronounced, which challenged the overall dynamics of the discussion. Lastly, although G4 had siblings as participants it did not affect the flow of the conversation, and the participants predominantly focused on their everyday experiences connected to Budapest.

²⁵⁴ Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, 202.

Overall the discussions went very well; the participants were enthusiastic in discussing the films and, through them, their own experiences, even staying later than scheduled. The topics did not make them uncomfortable, although it was noticeable that their discussion about Hungarianness was somewhat ad hoc and it was often difficult for them to verbalize and express things that they often take for granted. The informal setting and my resemblance to the group in terms of age, status, and ethnicity also influenced the dynamics, ensuring the smooth flow of conversation.²⁵⁵ No one got upset or left early, nor did anyone express negative feedback: on the contrary, the participants remained eager to read the outcome of the discussion once the analysis was completed. The outcome of the research can be read in the following chapter.

²⁵⁵ Ibid, 203.

Table 1:

Participant	Gender	Age	Education	Status	From Budapest/outside of Budapest	Group	Code
1	Male	34	higher education	working	Budapest	G1	G1M1
2	Male	38	higher education	working	outside of Budapest	G1	G1M2
3	Male	34	high school	working	Budapest	G1	G1M3
4	Female	38	higher education	working	Budapest	G1	G1F1
5	Female	19	high school	student	outside of Budapest	G1	G1F2
6	Male	21	high school	student	outside of Budapest	G1	G1M4
7	Female	23	higher education	student	Budapest	G2	G2F1
8	Male	27	higher education	working	outside of Budapest	G2	G2M1
9	Male	25	higher education	student	outside of Budapest	G2	G2M2
10	Male	25	higher education	student	outside of Budapest	G2	G2M3
11	Female	32	higher education	working	outside of Budapest	G2	G2F2
12	Female	30	higher education	working	outside of Budapest	G2	G2F3
13	Female	29	higher education	working	outside of Budapest	G2	G2F4
14	Male	30	higher education	working	outside of Budapest	G3	G3M1
15	Male	26	higher education	working	Budapest	G3	G3M2
16	Female	28	higher education	working	Budapest	G3	G3F1
17	Female	21	high school	student	outside of Budapest	G3	G3F2
18	Female	21	high school	student	Budapest	G3	G3F3
19	Male	31	higher education	working	Budapest	G3	G3M3
20	Female	27	higher education	working	outside of Budapest	G3	G3F4
21	Female	33	high school	working	Budapest	G3	G3F5
22	Male	29	high school	working	Budapest	G3	G3M4
23	Female	28	higher education	working	Budapest	G3	G3F6
24	Male	19	high school	student	outside of Budapest	G4	G4M1
25	Female	28	higher education	student	outside of Budapest	G4	G4F1
26	Female	23	higher education	working	outside of Budapest	G4	G4F2
27	Male	26	high school	working	outside of Budapest	G4	G4M2
28	Female	27	higher education	working	outside of Budapest	G4	G4F3
29	Male	27	higher education	working	Budapest	G4	G4M3
30	Male	34	higher education	working	outside of Budapest	G4	G4M4

6. ANALYSIS OF THE FOCUS GROUPS

The previous chapter outlines the prior steps and the procedure of collecting this data, which now provides the ground for analysing the focus groups. This section starts by briefly outlining the analytical viewpoint through which the discussions were led. The aim of this chapter is to present how through the two films narratives of Hungarianness that emerged for the focus group participants and why are the films perceived within a national framework. These are linked back to the theoretical and contextual foundation in order to reveal what significance do films offer in understanding this subgroup's construction of nationhood. The chapter concludes with a summary of the results and an overall evaluation of the analysis' success.

6.1. Thematic Analysis

As has been established previously, the analytical viewpoint of this thesis relies on thematic analysis. The aim of the analysis is to understand the narratives of Hungarianness through reviewing *For Some Inexplicable Reason* and *Bad Poems*. Hungarianness means to denote here a specific perspective on the social reality, a concept changing according to individual's usage.²⁵⁶ Throughout the focus groups there was an overlap of what was recognized as Hungarian in the films and what Hungarian meant for the participants beyond Reisz' cinematic interpretation. Therefore, rather than dividing the analysis into separate sections about the films, the nationhood discourse in the films, and the participants' own associations with nationhood, the chapter shows they are all intertwined. The analysis unveils that nationhood comes up naturally for individuals when analyzing the films. Their narratives are formulated via the context of the everyday, through space, practices, cultural and material products as well as socio-economic and political concerns.

²⁵⁶ This definition is based on Brubaker's conceptualization, for further details see Chapter 2.

These topics are the subject of my analysis, connected back to Edensor's framework of spatializing, materializing, performing and representing nationhood in the everyday. Moreover, it considers the scholars of everyday nationhood theories to see participants as active agents in constructing Hungarianness in the discussions. A fluctuation between local and national associations was a prevalent tendency, which runs parallel to the unconscious and conscious presence of nationhood in the participants' lives. I present direct quotations from the participants to illustrate their meaning-making processes. As the participants' references to certain places, concepts, and products are specific to the Hungarian context, I provide explanatory comments where necessary. Before showing my findings about Hungarianness, however, the basis of this research—that is, the relevance of cinema for the participants—needs to be assessed.

6.2. The Need for Reisz in Hungarian Cinema?

In order to understand perceptions of how and why Reisz' films portray Hungarianness, the participants' relation towards Hungarian films is the necessary first point of reference. In a global context where participants have equal access to international films as to local productions, the majority clearly stated that nationality is not a category according to which they select films. Accordingly, discussing films can evoke categorization conforming to national logic, but this does not define the parameters nor the content of their choices.²⁵⁷ Aside from two participants in G2, for whom Hungarian films enjoy priority, the rest espoused a general preference for foreign films. Here Higson's emphasis on heterogeneous reception of films proves to be relevant as the participants did not identify Hungarian cinema with prescribed features, but rather express their views on existing films that they group together as Hungarian films.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁷ Fox and Miller-Idriss, "Everyday Nationhood," 544.

²⁵⁸ Higson, "The Limiting Imagination of National Cinema," 65.

Moving on to discuss Reisz specifically, the participants consciously positioned him into the Eastern region by comparing him to other regional directors²⁵⁹ as opposed to Western or Hollywood productions. They build upon an East vs. West divide in terms of cinema culture, which suggests that this dichotomy is still prevalent. Although the scholars of Eastern European cinema aim to challenge the common marginalization of this region's films, the participants utilized frames such as authenticity and exceptionality²⁶⁰ to demonstrate their appreciation for Reisz' films:

G3F3: The reason Reisz' films are very successful is because he doesn't want to show more than what is the Hungarian reality with its good and bad parts. [...] There's a recent attempt to boost Hungarian film production but the situations and actors remain foreign to me. Finally there's a Hungarian film that didn't want to make Hollywood out of Hungary.

G1M3: I watch only a few Hungarian films, there's not many that resonate so strongly with my generation... For all of us Hungarian films are not a priority, and the reason is because these recognizable elements are missing... even with super heroes you can identify more easily...

These two statements showcase the participants' critical and paradoxical stance toward Hungarian cinema. On the one hand, there is a need for establishing Hungarian films as separate from Hollywood mass productions; on the other hand, there are certain grievances toward Hungarian films due to (a lack of) quality and the missing sense of familiarity. This connects back to changes Hungarian cinema has recently undergone,²⁶¹ as well as to Varga's observation of how recent Hungarian films dissociate from the current context.²⁶² This means that Hungarian cinema as a discursive construct is rather associated with negative traits as it fails to stand as an example encompassing the complexities of Hungarian "reality."

These statements prepare the ground for understanding why Reisz' films stand out for this particular audience, also pointing toward potential reasons for stressing their "Hungarian"

²⁵⁹ The participants also mentioned that *For Some Inexplicable Reason*'s premiere was at the Karlovy Vary festival as another proof that it is appreciated mainly for an Eastern audience.

²⁶⁰ Imre, "Introduction," 25.

²⁶¹ For further detail see Chapter 3.

²⁶² For further detail see Chapter 4.

aspect. The participants enjoy these films because they build on familiar cultural references, refer to the current public life in Hungary, and depict a recognizable Budapest, all of which resonate with them strongly:

G3F1: It adds to the success that there's no similar film on the Hungarian market. [...] Here it's familiar, we know these things, the whole thing is us here in Budapest basically...

G2M2: It's very locally specific, as the director lives here and made it about here. I can't even imagine foreigners would get these parts in the films, it can be only for us.

G1M3: He attracts the viewers, especially this generation, with these minor things that are easy to identify with, they're very characteristic like we drink vodka at Caesar,²⁶³ the parents... with these he winks at the audience, like you know it and I know it. These minor things like Latinovits on TV, Hungarian tomato,²⁶⁴ political standpoints at home, even the set design with its bathroom tiles... These visual and narrative triggers are what people connect with.

The statements demonstrate a direct link between the films' plots and the participants' real life where identification is inevitable. They sum up how the local milieu with its situations, places or products provides the main anchor points for invoking national frameworks in discussing the films.²⁶⁵ The fact that there is a film made about "them" assigns importance to the usually not noticeable aspects from the mundane.

Besides the surroundings, pop culture references mainly from *Bad Poems* were also recognized by the participants, who consequently interpreted them as Hungarian in the film. As textual analysis shows, though these visual and musical cues are presented in a comical frame, they refer to how consuming popular culture constructs nationhood.²⁶⁶ The homage to the TV series *Szomszédok* [Neighbors], present in both films, had mixed responses among the participants, as this G3 debate demonstrates:

²⁶³ Caesar was a pub in the 6th district of Budapest close to the "party district" that closed down in 2014. It was a cheap place especially popular among the young locals.

²⁶⁴ The participant refers to scene in the movie where the parents have a fight during lunch because the tomatoes are not from the local market.

²⁶⁵ This supports Higson's processual approach towards national cinema.

²⁶⁶ For further detail on popular culture and comical frame in the films see Chapter 4.

G3M3: I didn't like these cuts in For Some, it's weird how the lady says I had to wash the flag...

G3F1: That's Neighbors one on one, it gives to this...

G3M3: For me it took me out of the film... I was like... what's going on?

G3F1: I think it gives more to the Hungarianness that Neighbors is included with all their good advice at the end... (laughs)

Although Szécsi's song was not mentioned in any of the groups, "Gyöngyhajú lány" was referred to as an archetypically Hungarian song. Moreover, Latinovits' recitation on TV and József Antall's speech came up in the debates the most often. Arguably, the participants do not listen to this music, or at least not on a regular basis, and they did not experience directly Antall's speech or watch Latinovits on TV. Still, they are fixed reference points of nationhood for them as part of cultural memory.²⁶⁷ Furthermore, the fact that these events are established as not comprehensible for a foreign audience demonstrates how remembering maintains belonging;²⁶⁸ they perceive these elements in the film as speaking directly to them.

G2F4: Foreign viewers don't get the Latinovits poems... though I'm sure there were black and white recitals on TV a few years ago somewhere else too...

As this remark indicates, the participants gradually realized that these elements are not nation-specific, yet their understanding and affect suggests otherwise. These homages highlight the richness and exceptionality that they assign to Hungarianness. Hence, these pop culture references already point towards exclusiveness in the reception of films on a national basis.

However, the participants were able to self-reflexively observe why such national classification happens and, more importantly, what its appeal is:

G3M1: What makes it Hungarian is that a lot of people feel it's Hungarian. Because they can identify with it and they feel it as their own. We can't define what makes it Hungarian, is it the sour cream or sausage put into their bag...

G2M3: I think the films express things that previously films haven't done, we don't really talk about these things and these topics come up like the Hungarian tomato... We all have these experiences, and it's good to meet this in the films.

²⁶⁷ Assmann, "Communicative and Cultural Memory," 18.

²⁶⁸ Assmann, "Communicative and Cultural Memory," 20.

The participants recognize the communicative aspect of the cinematic medium²⁶⁹ where Reisz offers a platform to express such abstract, and often sensitive, topic as one's experiences of nationhood on a local level. Discussing Hungarian cinema and Reisz' position in it revealed that the two films spark conversations about issues important to them, one of which is also the dilemma of (non)-belonging. Although the participants agreed that they do not necessarily identify with the main characters, they stressed, especially in the case of Áron, that his ironic stance was needed for Hungarian cinema. This is a crucial point to assess in order to see whether Reisz' cinematic presentation of nationhood²⁷⁰ also resonates with the participant's own apprehensions and associations. Hence, the following sections will analyze how nationhood emerged in the analysis of the films and what does it mean for studying this generation.

6.3. Budapest Only for Us

In all four groups, space described in a national framework emerged in two distinctive ways. Firstly, the familiar urban reality of Budapest was referred to as Hungarian unconsciously as the participants' everyday surroundings. Budapest as a setting for identity crisis has been assessed earlier in this thesis;²⁷¹ in this section, however, the city's function is reviewed through the participants' interaction with it beyond the films. This brought up everyday situations and concepts such as attachment and home connected to nationhood. Secondly, once nationhood became a conscious category in the debate, Budapest's Hungarianness came into question. Discussing the space of the films revealed the differences between local vs. national levels for the participants.

²⁶⁹Schlesinger, "The Sociological Scope of 'National Cinema,'" 17.

²⁷⁰ Chapter 4 outlines in detail the "quirky" mode in Reisz' films and its impact on nationhood representation.

²⁷¹ Chapter 3 outlines the various forces that are transforming post-socialist urban space.

Associations with Budapest in the films brought up nationness by referring to “quotidian fixtures.”²⁷² The participants’ strong identification derives from their everyday habits: going out with friends for a drink, commuting to work, and specific locations in the city that are highlighted in both films’ plots. The location thus establishes a shared commonality between the films and the viewers, reproduced by repetitive habits, which came to be understood as forming Hungarianness.

G4M4: All the feelings work because it evokes my everyday. Even though I don’t use public transport I know how it feels. [...] If it would be set in a different city then you would have to think about what’s Hungarian or not...

G3F3: In my head I divide the films into different chapters: with problems connected to this age group... and the other stuff that’s Hungarian, like public transport—I recognized myself how I miss the buses or how typically there’s a shouting person on every tram, I didn’t even realize it’s in the film and I’m not on the tram...

These comments on public transport exemplify how spaces of mobility can argue for a shared sense of nationhood experiences,²⁷³ specifically the 4–6 Combino trams, which are a routine part of experiencing the city. Consequently, their “unreflexive apprehension of quotidian realms”²⁷⁴ gets to be reinterpreted as national. Whereas Edensor and Sumartojo claim that this sharing of the urban space fosters tolerated multiplicity,²⁷⁵ for the participants the “familiar sensations” of the films enforced exclusivity, as these elements are only decodable by them. The first excerpt in particular calls attention to the unconscious side of these statements: the participant “knows it” and “feels it,” it formulates belonging into a collective.²⁷⁶

However, it is necessary to approach the issue of whether the everyday is part of the local, regional, or national level. According to Andrew Thompson, who moves away from the banal level to the local, nationhood is to be recognized in how individuals interact with their

²⁷² Edensor and Sumartojo, “Geographies of Everyday Nationhood,” 553–78,

²⁷³ Ibid, 565.

²⁷⁴ Ibid, 575.

²⁷⁵ The context for this study is, however, very different from Hungary, they are studying Melbourne, a multicultural city.

²⁷⁶ Edensor, “Sensing National Spaces,” 70.

local context.²⁷⁷ As such, spaces become entangled with the understandings of nationhood for which human agency is essential.²⁷⁸ The identification with the films often suggested an exclusive Budapest identity formation, which would be difficult to comprehend either for foreigners or Hungarian viewers outside of Budapest. Through different understandings of the films it became evident how the participants position themselves within these layers:

G1M3: This is a Budapest film, but it can be entertaining for non-Budapest people though they miss the layers. Then besides Hungary there's the Eastern European block. The question is what is closer, Cegléd²⁷⁹ or Paris? Is this film a Hungarian film or a city film? Well, I think Cegléd is further away, the urban elements are more prevalent...

G1M2: I disagree, there are these layers, yes. You have the typical Budapest things, but at the same time, it gives you a picture-image about young Hungarian university students that can be valid in other places around Hungary too, they would get these vibes...

Once the discussions moved beyond determining how the everyday reality is portrayed in the films, Budapest as a Hungarian element in the film was questioned pointedly. In the film analysis the portrayal of a double-sided Budapest implied that national belonging to a collective is challenged through cinematic means,²⁸⁰ and in the discussion this was translated to the real context for the participants. It was a more neutral choice to opt for categorizing the film as a city-film rather than a Hungarian one, since the latter involves negative connotations for the individuals, which will be further addressed in the following subsection.

When the participants were asked to direct their own typical Hungarian film,²⁸¹ places associated stereotypically with Hungary came up alongside borrowing from Reisz' portrayal.

²⁷⁷ Andrew Thompson, "Nations, National Identities and Human Agency: Putting People Back into Nations," *The Sociological Review* 49, no. 1 (February 1, 2001): 18–32, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954X.00242>.

²⁷⁸ Thompson and Graham Day, "Situating Welshness: 'Local' Experience and National Identity | Aberystwyth University," accessed May 30, 2019, <http://aspire.aber.ac.uk/items/705BCDA1-47AE-B04F-8712-0A095C4CDC0E.html>.

²⁷⁹ A town in central Hungary, approximately 70km away from Budapest.

²⁸⁰ City as discursive place in the films are analyzed in Chapter 4.

²⁸¹ The last task for the focus group was to imagine directing their own Hungarian film and what would they include, see Chapter 5 for further details.

The groups associated places such as the countryside, Lake Balaton²⁸² or other popular non-urban tourist spots with Hungarianness.

G4F1: I'd put in typical Hungarian places besides Budapest like Balaton or Dunakanyar, Szentendre or anything.

G4M4: If I'd make a film then the main protagonist wouldn't be from Budapest and wouldn't have a university degree. He would be working long enough.

Billig establishes how certain buildings or landscapes can become engraved markers of nationhood, which Edensor further developed into the spatialization of national identity.²⁸³ Places with symbolic importance for Hungary were mentioned here not because the participants inhabit them but because they believe these spaces are representative. When we step out of their reality and focus on the majority narrative of Hungarianness, their framework changes and they doubt whether Budapest is a part of it. This already implies that once the category of nationhood is consciously recognized, the participants aim to distance themselves from it, as is also seen in the subsequent section.

6.4. Hungarianness on the Street and at the Family Table

While discussing space, certain situations mentioned by the participants demonstrated which practices they associate with nationhood. Although Áron is unaffected by the performativity of nationhood present in the montage scene,²⁸⁴ for the participants these practices did not go unnoticed:

G3F3: In a scene when he is waiting for call he shows the Hungarian events like the Sziget festival, protests, folk dancers' march... these strengthen the nationality part of it.

G4M3: The phone call is also very typical, protest, protest, baths, Sziget festival, and hooligans... this is the Hungarian life.

While Billig, Edensor and Connerton consider everyday performances of nation as unconscious parts of people's lives, the participants clearly recognized and reflected on them.

²⁸² Lake Balaton is the largest of its kind in the Central European region, it is a popular tourist destination.

²⁸³ Both Billig's and Edensor's conceptualization of space is outlined in Chapter 2.

²⁸⁴ The close textual analysis of the this scene is in Chapter 4.

These public performances are to strengthen national solidarities, but the actual ways in which people perceive and interpret them can entail different meanings.²⁸⁵ Due to the film, national commemoration became associated with protests which overall distanced the participants from, as one of the participant in G1 labelled it, “magyarkodás”, i.e. enacting Hungarianness. Once again, when Hungarianness became a conscious category in terms of practice, the participants did not identify with it, although it takes place in Budapest.

Besides commuting, public transport featured certain behaviors that the participants also assessed as typically Hungarian. The famous sentence from the first feature “Why am I afraid if I have a pass?” resonated with their real-life encounters. The participants perceive BKV, more specifically its controllers, as figures of authority. Except for G1, fearing authority as a typical Hungarian attitude was established:

G2F4: An everyday feeling is to be scared even though you have a pass. Fearing authority or fearing the police is a typical Hungarian thing.

G2M1: I think fearing authority is common in Eastern Europe. Abroad you’re taught that the policeman is your friend, they’re there to help you, whereas here it’s not present.

The second participant recognizes the regional framework, which connects back to how distrust in authorities is an inheritance of the post-socialist legacy.²⁸⁶ Whereas for the previous generation it was crossing the border, for them it is ticket controllers who represent the socialist anxiety. The East/West dichotomy is evoked in terms of attitudes and experiences, where the former is associated with negative connotations. Assigning a particular mentality to this region and particularly Hungary will be further assessed through reviewing complaining towards the end of this chapter.

Moving away from the public sphere, the domestic setting indicated by the scenes with family were formulated in all the groups as showcasing Hungarianness. This follows

²⁸⁵ Fox and Miller-Idriss, “Everyday Nationhood” 546.

²⁸⁶ Although Chapter 3 does not speak about it specifically, it connects to distancing oneself from political socialization altogether.

Edensor's conceptualization of how nationhood is performed both in public settings but also in daily routines.²⁸⁷ Behavioral traits associated with nationhood ranged from certain table manners or customs to negative aspects such as not paying attention to one another and fighting during eating:

G3F1: It's hard to express what is Hungarian because it's there throughout the film...the way they sit down to have a meal, how he's sent to buy sour cream [...] all the fights at family lunches, how they tell off their child since they don't have the money for plane tickets. For me at least, every second sentence is about Hungarianness...

G1F1: The dialogues with the parents are so Hungarian...We all know how a Hungarian person doesn't eat during eating...²⁸⁸ Then the situations how we greet our relatives, how you have to compliment them on the food or you can never have enough of it and, essentially, we don't pay attention to each other...

In the film analysis these repetitive gestures were interpreted as part of social memory where the main characters remain outsiders.²⁸⁹ In the discussions, however, an important pattern was revealed. Associating Hungarianness with family situations, on the one hand, implies the interrelatedness of national belonging with family ties.²⁹⁰ On the other hand, nationness is assigned to the characters of the parents; that is, the older generation. Family as an inherent part of their construction of nationhood is also shown by how the majority of the participants included family scenes and generational divides in their own imaginary Hungarian film.

Hungarianness was recognized here no longer as part of the everyday, nor as unconscious, but a visible discursive construct with which the participants do not want to associate themselves.²⁹¹ Analysing the parents' behavior in the films as showcasing strong national consciousness unveiled that Hungarianness is negative, exaggerated, conservative, and for them it is laughable. This emerged specifically in discussions of the scenes when a

²⁸⁷ Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life*, 70.

²⁸⁸ The participant alludes to a saying: "A Hungarian person does not speak during eating."

²⁸⁹ In Chapter 4 the role of memory in filmic representation is further described.

²⁹⁰ In Chapter 3 it has been established how the Generation Y maintains strong family ties.

²⁹¹ Fox and Miller-Idriss, "Everyday Nationhood," 538.

family argument starts because of the tomato's supposedly non-Hungarian origin, or when Áron is asked to buy Hungarian sour cream:

G2M3: It's like with those who like everything with salads and avocados and only Hungarian products: for them it's important and for those who don't care they smile about it.

G4M2: The only place I would stay the film is mocking is with the Hungarian tomato scene. It mocks people who only buy Hungarian products because they're convinced that it's better than the one from Auchan. [...] Everyone has these relatives shopping at markets or from people they know, it's an ingrained custom.

G1M4: I can't think of another director who shows Hungarianness like these films, the references to parents and their conservative standpoint is something which always makes me smile...

These statements expose how through choosing and consuming,²⁹² the participants create an opposition between a globalised, neoliberal value system and a recent political discourse promoting the local economy. This points to the participants' awareness of these everyday ways of reproducing the nation, whether it is in discourse, consumption, choices, or performances. Moreover, the first statement in particular indicates disinterest, which leads to a conclusion that for these participants consumption is not an everyday practice through which their connection to nationhood is reinforced and they do not want to engage with such practices. Conversely, some parts of material culture, as the following section demonstrates, were not framed as negative even though they were recognized as Hungarian.

6.4.1. The Significance of Objects

As the previous section showed, the great emphasis put on product consumption in the films resonated negatively with the participants. However, the products' Hungarian status was not questioned: both tomato and sour cream were mentioned in each group in the same national framework as in the film.

²⁹² These are the two modes of how nationhood gets reproduced in the everyday according to the framework of Fox and Miller-Idriss, described in detail in Chapter 2.

G3F4: There are these elements that we feel are more Hungarian, like the sour cream, tomato, celebrating name day or the topics at the family table...

G4M3: It could be a brutal drinking game to count all the Hungarian elements. For example sour cream, Combino, BKV²⁹³ controller... yes, sour cream might exist abroad but the real sour cream for me is very Hungarian and a big part of my life.

The last statement, however, calls attention to how sour cream is not understood as Hungarian only because of the film, but also for being an inherent part of the participant's everyday life. Here it is not for "consuming the nation," to support the local economy, or to maintain national pride, but simply a materialization of the nation that happens unconsciously.²⁹⁴ Nevertheless it highlights that products can also be situations when the nation becomes relevant for individuals: thus, the films do not construct these frames in individuals, only voice them, which is a strong reason behind why these films are well received among this subgroup.

The visual quality of objects contributing to the set design of the films paved the way to recognize material culture as a signifier of nationness in the films. Whether it was done consciously or not in the films, some domestic elements reminded the participants of their childhood:

G4F1: That typical Hungarian wardrobe... I almost laughed out loud in the cinema... it's known by everybody, my grandparents used to have it. Although it's in the past, we still remember it thirty years after the change of system.

G2F2: And those jugs on the top of cupboards... or the furniture that everyone recognizes because that's what my grandparents had. These are those delicacies for us, for foreigners it is retro or a ruin pub style because it seems staged...

Hungarianness is assessed here through "reminding objects,"²⁹⁵ which ensure a shared continuity for them and are thus categorized along national lines. Although the role of memory was stressed in the film analysis from the aspect of corporeality as a supporter of

²⁹³ An abbreviation for Budapest Közlekedési Vállalat, translated as The Budapest Transport Privately Held Corporation.

²⁹⁴ Fox and Miller-Idriss, "Everyday Nationhood," 549; Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life*, 109.

²⁹⁵ Assmann, "Communicative and Cultural Memory." 17.

collective cultural memory, in the discussion it only came up in connection to materiality. Moreover, these objects set up an exclusive form of identification, just as with the Budapest context. These “delicacies” are not graspable for foreign viewers, according to the participants, as they tap into mental spaces associated with nationhood. Interestingly, however, these reflections are not Budapest-dependent anymore, nor they are assessed in a critical, ironic way. Hungarianness as part of material memory is acceptable and appreciated for the participants, since they articulate attachment to the past and their family.

Overall, the practices in both the public and private narratives of the film were ways to define Hungarianness for the participants. Enacting nationhood generally came out as unfavorable for them, as they solely associate it with strong national consciousness and not as part of the everyday factors that are “a form of life.”²⁹⁶ Material culture was the only instance when nationhood as a conscious category came to be defined positively by the participants. Even though it moved beyond their familiar Budapest context these objects became important to them because they imply belonging to a secure space of the familial and of the home.

6.5. To Stay or to Leave?

Lastly, as both of the films are primarily set in the present and make several allusions to public life in Hungary, it was discussed at length in the groups. The current socio-economic issues in the country were interpreted as representing Hungarianness from the participants’ perspective. Naturally, the participants focused on issues that concern them as a generation specifically. The patterns in this section are more connected to the contextual rather than the theoretical framework: however, I find it necessary to analyze as these aspects reveal equally as much about the participant’s perceptions on nationhood in the context of “here and now.”²⁹⁷ The evaluation of public life came up during a debate over the characters in the

²⁹⁶ Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 69.

²⁹⁷ Fox and Miller-Idriss, “The ‘here and Now’ of Everyday Nationhood,” 573.

films. There was a general consensus in all the groups that the Hungarian milieu is embodied in the parents:

G1F2: These characters who are typically Hungarian represent the environment, they create this milieu around us...

G4M3: In both films the family round table brings in the Hungarian public life. The mother is very Hungarian and the dad is more liberal and in *Bad Poems* it's the other way around, the dad is more of a pro-government voter.

The intersectionality of nationhood with contemporary politics is observable in these statements. The parents were previously described as conservative, preoccupied with sustaining and reinforcing national consciousness; however, in this debate they are directly classed as Fidesz voters. The government party's reinforcement of nationhood in the everyday²⁹⁸ is recognized by the participants, but they do not identify with it; it remains distant for them just like the parents' behavior in the films.²⁹⁹

Moreover, some of the challenges that the characters go through in the films, when placed into the reality of the participants, came to be judged as national characteristics. Both of Reisz' films demonstrate plot elements that are easily relatable for the Generation Y participants: the struggles both in professional and romantic life were discussed substantially in the groups. However, it was aimlessness that came to define Hungarianness for them:

G3M1: Beyond hope was the word that came to my mind as for what's Hungarian, this passive flurry that Áron does...

G1M3: Although I hate this expression, a Peter Pan figure³⁰⁰ could be perceived as Hungarian specific.

G2F2: A Hungarikum, or a typical Hungarian specificity is that Hungarian education doesn't help us to settle down or find our vocation, could a person searching for his identity be a Hungarikum as well?

With the exception of G3, all the discussions related the bad state of education as Hungarian and the cause behind Generation Y's struggles. Although the Generation Y is characterized

²⁹⁸ Fidesz' strategies are discussed in Chapter 3.

²⁹⁹ Chapter 3 discusses how contemporary youth recognizes exaggerated forms of nationalism which leads to antagonism or indifference.

³⁰⁰ Peter Pan syndrome is associated with men who show an inability to grow up.

worldwide as a lost generation, the participants observe it as a separate Hungarian phenomenon since they experience it in their own skin.

Similarly, outmigration as a dominant aspect from real life came to be interpreted as Hungarian. As has been stated, outmigration is a frequent tendency among young Hungarians, mainly for financial reasons.³⁰¹ Although in one of the groups the mobility of the characters in the films was considered first as a trope common in the cinematic medium, later, just like in the other groups, it was assessed as part of their everyday reality. This often resulted in approaching it as a Hungarian phenomenon:

G3F5: It's a Hungarian-like attitude in the film how abroad comes into the picture... many of my colleagues and friends went abroad, a very typical Hungarian question is to stay or leave. Even I think about it...

G3M3: What's very Hungarian is how they sit together and say how everything is shit and everyone goes abroad.

G1M4: I'm not sure it's a daily question in London whether I should leave the country or not, this is where it comes out that it's Hungarian, that it points toward the current happenings...

Along these lines a clear division was formulated regionally. In all of the groups the participants were aware of how this phenomenon is generally characteristic for the Eastern European bloc, yet due to the closeness of this issue they unconsciously assigned it to be Hungarian-specific. The films' depiction of the everyday reality allows the participants to position themselves as outsider viewers of their own lives and thus, encourage reflexivity.

6.5.1. The World Champions of Complaining

Moreover, to explain the fact that they all have an acquaintance who has left the country recently the participants brought up the issue of complaining. Complaining as a typical Hungarian trait in the films came up in all the groups, however, it needs to be assessed separately since it stands out from the other frameworks that the participants relied on. Whereas previously they formulated Hungarianness through their everyday context, here they

³⁰¹ The outmigration, its causes and consequences, are studied in detail in Chapter 3.

rely on autostereotypes of national character.³⁰² Complaining as the “favourite Hungarian past-time”³⁰³ is a widely recognized Hungarian attribute rooted in language, phrases, and culture, influenced by a general Hungaro-pessimism.³⁰⁴ In G2 complaining was not generalized but evaluated according to their own practice, which offers a necessary viewpoint into why the participant’s highlight this plot element and how do they apply their own subjective constructions on it:

G2M3: Complaining is very strong at home, it goes on and on and then we complain about the fact that we complain... I perceive this as a local speciality, I never experienced it elsewhere or with foreigners.

G2M1: I think a complaining culture could be said for Eastern Europe... but we’re world champions in this for sure and I think it’s not a problem that we’re not superficial...

G2F2: I think Hungarian complaining is much more layered though, it’s just like when an Englishman asks how are you but doesn’t need an answer back. [...] It can be alienating for a foreigner that for us it’s easier to verbalize our suffering... but it’s good to complain, it has this community building effect to it...

Generally complaining appeared in the debate as supporting the division between “us” and “them” in establishing an image about Hungarianness. When it came to be understood as related to them, however, they tried to redefine it positively, a prevalent tendency for ingroup enhancement.³⁰⁵ The purpose of the study is not to test stereotypes or to examine attitudes toward the outgroup in the participants, but it is important to note that this practice, though evidently related to nationhood, did not distance the participants—quite the contrary.

Reflections on the socio-economic and political situation as well as discussion on complaining are a clear demonstration of how everyday reality comes to be perceived through

³⁰² Alex Inkeles, *National Character: A psycho-social perspective* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1997).

³⁰³ László Kürti, “Cameras and Other Gadgets. Reflections on Fieldwork Experiences in Socialist and Post-Socialist Hungarian Communities,” *Social Anthropology* 7, no. 2 (June 1999): 169–87.

³⁰⁴ Paul Lendvai, *Hungary: Between Democracy and Authoritarianism* (Hurst Publishers, 2012). Hungarian depression and pessimism reaches far back in the history, the nation is described as such due to the high suicide rates and a prevalent dissatisfaction that is showcased in empirical research.

³⁰⁵ Henri Tajfel, “Social Identity and Intergroup Behaviour,” *Information (International Social Science Council)* 13, no. 2 (April 1, 1974): 65–93, <https://doi.org/10.1177/053901847401300204>.

a national perspective. Not following the dominant elite discourse but rather reformulating their everyday struggles as part of Hungarianness connects tightly to Brubaker's conceptualization of nationhood being a perspective on the world.³⁰⁶ Therefore, the negative aspects that they associate with nationhood are affected by the current socio-economic situation in Hungary, which show new constructions and understandings of Hungarianness for Generation Y are necessary.

6.6. Summary of the Findings: “We’re Laughing About Ourselves”

The above-mentioned sections present the findings of how the urban Generation Y perceive Hungarianness in Reisz' films and in their own lives and why is it necessary to have their own narratives. The reflexive approach of the participants was hinted at throughout, but it is crucial to revisit this aspect as the summary of the findings are presented here. The analysis of the films from a close textual approach suggested how nationhood is put into a comical frame. This resonated with the participants as even the tone of the films reinforced the dichotomy: it is only they who understand these jokes. According to them, those with strong national consciousness would get offended, while foreigners would simply not understand the humor. The films draw attention to elements in their everyday that are related to nationhood either through objects, space, or practices that might go otherwise unnoticed, but here they perceive it as “theirs,”³⁰⁷ demonstrating a need for constructing their own version Hungarianness. The participants, however, realized what makes these films Hungarian is essentially their own construction of them as such. Therefore, they turned out to be ironic even towards themselves, they recognized how in the films they are essentially laughing about themselves.

The audience reception revealed that the films capture the zeitgeist of a specific Budapest-based (young, higher-educated adults) generation which has ambivalent feelings of

³⁰⁶ Brubaker et al., *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town*.

³⁰⁷ Sorlin, *Italian National Cinema, 1986–1996*, 25.

identity. As expected, nationhood that is relatable to them comes to be formulated in the mundane, just like the films illustrate the urban reality, the participants similarly rely on this framework when constructing their own nationhood. Moreover, it demonstrates their views on how Hungarianness is the local reality to which they maintain strong belonging, underlining Thompson's concept of locality. Overall, it connects back to the theoretical framework and is able to show how discussing the films' nationhood as a discursive construct emerges from the bottom up.³⁰⁸ Just as the films closely allude to Edensor's framework of spatializing, materializing, performing and representing the nation, the participants reconstruct these elements by positioning them into their own rhythms of everyday life.³⁰⁹

However, the theoretical framework of bottom-up nationhood does not suggest an ironic stance nor a comical framing of nationhood. When Hungarianness came to be recognized as a conscious category for the participants, it was assessed with a great deal of irony and reflexivity. The films' tone is crucial since it allows them to maintain a critical position towards nationness, which for them is only understood as exaggerated and unnecessary. Nationhood, as formed in elite discourse, does not correspond with their own formulations. They are therefore critical but simultaneously use the lenses of Hungarianness³¹⁰ to express a type of specific, almost exclusive Hungarian identity, or perhaps predicament. They draw on existing ideas of Hungarianness deeply embedded in their upbringing or on common autostereotypes of national character. Here, it is not so much the everyday context any more but a deeper ingrained understanding of Hungarianness formulated across time and various means, from which not even the conscious cosmopolitan young generation can distance themselves. As found in previous studies,³¹¹ the urban Generation Y's definition of Hungarianness similarly shows self-reflexivity, irony, and relying on stereotypes. The focus

³⁰⁸ Fox and Miller-Idriss, "Everyday Nationhood," 538.

³⁰⁹ Ibid, 539.

³¹⁰ Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, 19.

³¹¹ Székely, "National Identity of 15-29 olds in Hungary," further explained in Chapter 3.

group dynamics were able to reveal that this was due to their separate reformulation of Hungarianness that is connected to the local context, not the wider national one which is linked with contemporary dominating elite discourse.

Moreover, the recent changes that the country is going through and its direct impact on the young generation indicates how Hungarianness gets to be defined accordingly. To associate consuming tomatoes from the local market rather than from a multinational corporation with Hungarianness, or to perceive the flight of their peers to the West as a Hungarian phenomenon and to judge unemployed young adults with diplomas as typically Hungarian, all suggest a recent reformulation of what Hungarianness means. The contemporary new capitalism in Hungary, where the socialist legacy still lingers on with a nationalist elite discourse, all impact how nationhood is assessed today. Still its importance was clear for Generation Y participants: a nationhood which does not resonate with the mainstream, widespread tendencies in the country, which does not reflect on the political discourse of today trying to reinforce national pride, but which they define in their own terms, as familiar, as part of their everyday which they recognize and which can even make them laugh. For this reason the specific narrative of Hungariannes in Reisz' films, that stresses reflexivity and agency, resonate strongly with the young adults who similarly construct their own Hungarianness along the same criteria.

7. CONCLUSION

The thesis unveils how the “quirky” mode in Reisz’ two films, *For Some Inexplicable Reason* and *Bad Poems*, which rely on irony and reflexivity in their depiction of nationhood, resonate strongly with young Budapest-based viewers. Approaching nationhood implicitly through audience reception of the films allowed me to witness why does Hungarianness emerge in the context of everyday and gets renegotiated within the setting of specific subgroups. The focus group discussions revealed how the local context is interpreted as national through the use of everyday spaces, habits, and objects. In order to separate themselves from dominant narratives, the aspect of locality—and thus a formulation of a separate Budapestian perspective—demonstrates an ambivalent relationship with nationhood once it moves beyond the context of the city. Hungarianness, as a conscious category, came to be understood as exaggerated, laughable and strictly associated with the older generation. Nevertheless, categorizing Reisz’ films as Hungarian showed why is there need for an alternative platform to which the participants can relate: to appreciate their attachment yet at the same time be self-conscious and critical. Overall the thesis shows why a locally very specific, ironic narrative on Hungarianness is prevalent among Generation Y Budapest-based adults as a means of asserting their agency, which would not have been possible to fully uncover without the films as visual prompts.

The thesis followed the main theoretical arguments on how nationhood gets reinterpreted from the bottom up in the everyday lives of individuals. As such, nationhood being formulated according to mundane reality rather than elite discourse was not unexpected. However, reliance on the banalities of everyday life, specifically tied to the urban context, was utilized throughout by the participants to dissociate themselves from the dominant narratives of Hungarianness reinforced by contemporary politics. The analysis of both the cinematic texts and focus groups reveals a self-reflexive, oftentimes cynical assessment of

nationhood by young adults. Nevertheless, the existence of Hungarianness, though recognized in its wider regional context as well as criticized and laughed at, remains undisputed. It still provides a dominant perspective allowing young individuals to orient themselves in the changing world and to even interpret films addressing the specificities of their age group, which overall point towards a need to belong to a collectivity. However, a collectivity defined according to their own terms.

The thesis' approach and research method is able to present a new take on how Reisz' contemporary films are able to present nationhood reflexively, encouraging both attachment and ironic distance to this concept. Moreover, audience reception among the specific Generation Y subgroup contributes to studies on Hungarian identity and its significance for young individuals in their everyday lives. However, this offers a very specific and limited view of Hungarianness as it is anchored in the "here and now". Reisz' films reflect on the current context in Hungary through the eyes of the younger generation, which may not develop continuities for future generations. Further research would be required to better understand the extent of this phenomenon's historical roots and its connections to other age groups. Moreover, involving viewers outside of Budapest in the focus groups would perhaps challenge this argument and demonstrate whether Reisz' narrative on Hungarianness resonates nation-wide or not. While the study is context-dependent, especially in the post-socialist countries, an appropriation of certain films as "theirs" might happen for reasons similar to those in Hungary, proving it to be an interesting, regional topic to be developed.

With this thesis I suggest that cinema opens a new window to understanding nationhood on a quotidian level. Although film studies scholarship argues for transnational approaches in cinema, national implications onscreen still offer an insightful analytical viewpoint when the audience's role is acknowledged in their construction as such. The two perspectives that the thesis employed widened the understanding and relevance of utilizing a visual medium to

understand young adults' formulation of national narratives. Involving visual prompts enables the study of meaning-making processes in their specific context where national signifiers are already elicited, facilitating the articulation of such a complex notion as one's nationhood. Moreover, the use of cinema as a means of understanding views on day-to-day nationness helped to break through the wall I would otherwise confront when approaching a group infamous for indifferent or even antagonistic attitudes towards nationhood. Thus, overall the thesis encourages new ways of bridging humanities and social sciences, and stressing an interdisciplinarity both in the methodological and analytical study of nationness.

That being said, I hope this thesis convincingly presents how important it is to examine films as social texts that have an impact on making sense of our everyday social reality. Films, just like language, are a means of communication; they are a powerful mass medium and are able to establish and circulate a variety of notions. When appropriated by a specific audience they can even serve to illustrate new ways of understanding nationhood while also building on past traditions. Overall, I hope the thesis points out the need for positioning cinema and nationhood into a reflexive dialogue with one another in order to make us realize how these specific narratives prevail in our lives.

Appendix 1

The form that was delivered to the participants to fill in before the event: “Special screening of *For Some Inexplicable Reason*.”

Email address (needed for confirmation)	
Age	
Gender	
City (birthplace, current city)	
Education	
Occupation	
Have you seen <i>For Some Inexplicable Reason</i> before?	
Have you seen <i>Bad Poems</i> before?	
Do you agree to take part in the screening and the discussion?	

Appendix 2

Research goals of the focus group:

- How does the Hungarian Generation Y perceive the two films?
- How and why do they construct the film as typically Hungarian?
- How do they reflect on their Hungarianness through the films?

General questions:

1. Introduction:

- The researcher and participants are introduced
- The rules and the flow of a focus group discussion is explained by the researcher to the participants
- Permission for the recording asked in person as well
- The focus of the research framed as how are Reisz' films perceived by young Budapest locals

2. Warm-up

- Icebreaker discussion: How often do you go to cinema in a month? Do you watch Hungarian or foreign films more?
- What was the best Hungarian film and foreign Hungarian film you saw last year and why?
- Why do you like Reisz' films? What sort of feeling to they evoke in you?

3. Core questions

- To whom do the films speak the most and why?
- What is the tone of the films?
- What familiarities did you discover in the situations, characters, events presented in the film?
- How is daily life presented in the film? Do you relate to the setting of the films, especially in the first feature? What do you think of the abroad sequences?
- Does the portrayal of the past evoke some feelings in you in the second feature?
- Is this a Budapest or Hungarian film?
- Is it important that the films are set in Budapest?
- Do the films resonate with the audience outside Budapest?
- How do foreigners perceive these films?

If it does not come up in the discussion by this point...

- Most of the articles that review the films ascribe a certain Hungarian quality to them. Why do you think this might be?
- What are the Hungarian qualities for you in the films? How are these elements different from other films?
- How did it make you feel when you recognized these elements and why?

- Do you think the films' success depends on these qualities?

4. Cooling down questions?

- What would you include if you were to direct a typically Hungarian film?
- Why did you choose these elements?

5. Conclusion

- Summarizing the topics that were covered in the discussions
- Asking the participants if there is anything else they would like to share or add related to this topic?
- What do you think this research is about
- Concluding remarks

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