The book *Multi-Faceted Reflections: The Diaries of Jewish and Non-Jewish Adolescents in Wartime Hungary* by Hungarian historian Gergely Kunt takes a comparative approach to everyday life in Hungary during the troublesome years between 1938 and the 1950s through analyses of teenagers’ diaries. The methodological approach of the book draws on Charles Taylor’s concept of modern social imaginaries. Kunt uses egodocuments to present the different strategies with which young Jewish and non-Jewish adolescents identified themselves in Hungary during the Horthy period and the era of German occupation, which came to an end with the liberation of the country by the Soviet army. In the case of personal narratives by Holocaust survivors, for instance, there is certainly a vast literature of published memoirs and recorded testimonies available to those interested in the subject. However, Kunt’s research is not based on retrospective recollections recounted under circumstances in which interviewees often feel pressure to correspond to real or imagined expectations of the given period’s political circumstances or its morals. On the contrary, by following in the footsteps of authors Alexandra Zapruder (*Salvaged Pages: Young Writers’ Diaries of the Holocaust* [2002]) and Jacob Boas (*We Are Witnesses: Five Diaries of Teenagers Who Died in the Holocaust*, [2009]), Kunt uses entries from the diaries of twenty teenagers to offer a more authentic perspective on the perceptions at the time of the people in question of social norms, political values, religion, and prejudices, without any form of deliberate or unintentional self-censorship.

Of the twenty diary entries on which the book draws, eighteen were written by women. As Kunt notes, the practice of keeping journals was still considered more characteristic of women than men. Nevertheless, Kunt’s collection of personal narratives not only attempts to offer both young female voices and male voices, but also includes recollections from people of different religious and social backgrounds in Hungary. The focus, thus, is not restricted to experiences from Budapest, diary entries by people from other important Hungarian towns and the countryside are also included. *Multi-Faceted Reflections* is divided into two broad sections. The first part concentrates on the journal writers’ attempts to craft identities for themselves using cultural and religious upbringing, family, and
schooling. The second examines the ways in which adolescents dealt with major social issues and prejudices. It is important to note, however, that for an all-encompassing comparison, more materials by diarists from the same geographic regions, and a more gender-balanced representation as well as the incorporation of a wider range of perspectives for instance, from Orthodox Jews would produce a more detailed exploration of the topic.

The paramount contribution of Kunt’s publication is his method of using micro-scale analyses to test and challenge the validity of macro-scale explanations within the given time period. It is common knowledge that both Jewish and non-Jewish adolescents had different perceptions of the other communities, and the sources bear this out. All groups, however, identified strongly with the Hungarian state. Neolog Jewish teenagers, for instance, considered themselves first and foremost to be Hungarians, and they considered their Jewishness only a matter of religion. Young adults with Christian beliefs described Jews not strictly as a religious group but as a separate and, more importantly, foreign entity within Hungarian society. Evidently, the political circumstances in the 1940s not only openly accommodated but strongly encouraged such anti-Semitic concepts among Hungary’s gentile population. However, as Kunt suggests through his analysis, there is greater depth to these anti-Jewish prejudices. On the one hand, it is perhaps not surprising that young Christians, influenced by their parents’ standpoints and contemporary political developments and rhetoric, would also adopt and even record on paper racially discriminatory comments against Jews, invoking tropes of their unmerited wealth allegedly obtained from Hungarian Christians, their responsibility for Hungary’s post-Trianon territorial losses, or the distinctiveness of their appearance. Of course, comments like these were largely built on popular stereotypes, social myths, and, most prominently, the political propaganda of the period. On the other hand, as we learn from the diaries, being a young anti-Semitic either on paper or among one’s nuclear family did not prevent most of the Christian adolescents from maintaining their friendships or forming new relationships with their Jewish acquaintances and neighbors.

A further important element of the book is its focus on the journal writers’ assessments of the Regent of Hungary, Miklós Horthy, and the irredentist indoctrination they received at school. Since every young adult in this group, regardless of religious affiliation, considered themselves Hungarian before anything else, they could easily identify with Hungary’s irredentist territorial claims. Furthermore, they placed great confidence in Horthy not only to
reclaim the lost territory, but also to protect Hungarian Jews from growing discriminatory measures taking hold in other parts of Europe. Based on the descriptions in the diaries, this group of adolescents seems to have viewed the German occupation of Hungary as a direct attack on both the nation and on Horthy personally. Consequently, it is little surprise that when discussing the events of March 19, 1944 (the day on which the German army entered the country), even in the current context, Hungary continues to portray itself as a victim of Nazi Germany.

To conclude, Gergely Kunt’s book offers insights into the ways in which ordinary adolescents experienced and, moreover, adjusted to the gradual changes that began with the country’s own alarming political circumstances and evolved into a European tragedy. The diary excerpts prove that history constitutes a complex web of continuity, in which society continually undergoes changes in various directions. The historical truth lies between both macro and micro levels of analysis. Therefore, in order to have a comprehensive overview of a given period, it is necessary not only to observe the broader development of a given phenomenon, but also to focus on the ways in which individuals situate themselves in the world which surrounds them. Gergely Kunt’s volume offers a unique opportunity for the reader to approach the history of Hungary in the 1940s, not only on a macro level more commonly familiar and accessible to the public, but on a micro level as well. It presents the diverse and often opposing perspectives of young adults from various societal and religious backgrounds.

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