A Female Adolescent Bystander's Diary and the Jewish Hungarian Holocaust

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Abstract: In his article "A Female Adolescent Bystander's Diary and the Jewish Hungarian Holocaust" Gergely Kunt analyzes the unpublished diary manuscript of Margit Molnár, a Hungarian Roman Catholic adolescent girl born in 1927 who kept a diary between 1941 and 1949. Kunt's analysis shows how Molnár viewed Jews, the persecution of Jews, and the anti-Jewish terror in Budapest. As the diary documents, Molnár's views of the Jews temporarily changed during the Arrow Cross's reign of terror in October 1944 when she received news of the Arrow Cross murdering Jews en masse in Budapest. However, once the war was over, Molnár's deep-seated anti-Semitic prejudices resurfaced and she felt that despite the previously "justified" measures against Jews, the "oppressive wealthy" Jewish Hungarian elite had once again returned.
A Female Adolescent Bystander's Diary and the Jewish Hungarian Holocaust

Scholarship on the Holocaust traditionally distinguishes three generations of Jews affected by the Holocaust: the first generation who personally experienced persecution, the second generation born after 1945, and the third generation born in the 1970s and 1980s. Susan Rubin Suleiman suggests the use of an additional distinction "Generation 1.5" to denote children who were eleven years old or younger during World War II (283). Scholars who adopt Suleiman’s category use it exclusively to denote victims, survivors, and descendants of the Holocaust. I argue, however, that these categories should be extended to the non-Jewish generations of countries directly involved in the Holocaust, since World War II and the Holocaust can be regarded as collective traumas that devastated entire societies. Although my personal collection includes several incoherent volumes written by twenty adults, my published calls for privately owned diaries was answered by Judit Molnár, who offered me her diary manuscripts. My private collection now encompasses over one hundred volumes written by non-Jewish persons of the era, the war and the Holocaust were traumatic for everyone who personally experienced them and left traces in the family histories of everyone, whether Jewish or non-Jewish. I therefore argue that extending the categories of Holocaust literature to the non-Jewish population would allow us to analyze society in its entirety instead of only witnesses, victims, and perpetrators. However, we would also need to readjust these categories to reflect the specificities of a given country's involvement in World War II and the Holocaust. In the case of Hungary, the first generation would include those who experienced World War II as adults, which means those who were born before 1922 and became adults by the time Hungary entered the war. Suleiman's Generation 1.5 would include those who were born between 1935 and 1945. However, the adolescent diary writer examined in this study was part of a generation born between 1923 and 1934 experiencing the war as adolescents and thus falling between the first generation and Suleiman's Generation 1.5.

When it comes to the experiences of children and adolescents belonging to the first generation or Suleiman's Generation 1.5, Holocaust scholarship focuses predominantly on Jewish victims and survivors with few works devoted to non-Jewish children and adolescents. One reason would be that archival research and publications related to the Holocaust focus on the victims and only mention non-Jewish persons if they were either perpetrators or part of the resistance that helped Jews during the Holocaust, which thus excludes bystanders who did not belong to either category. As such, we know of few published diaries written by non-Jewish adolescents during World War II. One rare example is the recently published adolescent diary of Brigitte Eicke (born in Berlin in 1928) (see Gröschner, Felsman, Meyer). Other scholarly accounts of Jewish survivors include Déborah Dwork's Children with a Star, Judith Kestenberg and Ira Brenner's The Last Witness, Alexandra Garbarini's Numbered Days, and Nicholas Stargardt's Witness of War. Stargardt's book in particular presents the experiences of Polish and German adolescents of the era, Jews and Christians alike.

Similarly to international Holocaust research, Hungarian Holocaust research also focuses on the accounts of Jewish victims and Hungarian public collections barely feature any accounts by non-Jewish witnesses. This is the reason why I decided to collect privately owned Hungarian diary manuscripts. To this end, I placed advertisements in newspapers and calls for privately owned diaries in local and national newspapers as well as daily, weekly and monthly papers, including leftwing, rightwing, and independent journals. I also included calls in religious media, among them Calvinist, Evangelical, and Jewish journals. My private collection now encompasses over one hundred volumes written by twenty-eight persons, the majority of whom were Christian. I either received the original manuscript or was allowed to make a digital or paper-based copy. Wherever possible, I extended my collection to other types of historical documents, such as family photographs or other personal documents. In 2010, one of my calls for privately owned diaries was answered by Judit Molnár, who offered me her older sister Margit Molnár's diary. Margit Molnár was born in 1927 and lived with her family in Budapest where her father worked as an engineering supervisor at the Budapest Electric Company. Molnár kept a diary between 1941 and 1949, which offers insight into how a Roman Catholic adolescent girl viewed the persecution of Jews in Budapest, the persecuted Jews themselves, as well as their perpetrators. All excerpts in this study are from Molnár's manuscript, which does not contain page numbers.

One of the greatest advantages of using diaries as historical sources over other forms of life writing is that diaries record the contemporary experiences and views of the author while memoirs are retrospective texts that reminisce about the past as informed by the current views of the author. Andy Alaszewski defines diaries as dated and fragmented entries created by individuals who record their experiences of a given event in close temporal proximity of the event in question, as opposed to memoirs, which form a coherent retrospective narrative (2). In this respect, Molnár's diary is of special importance, since she began writing her diary as a young adolescent whose views seem to have been heavily influenced by her family and the environment in which she was socialized.

Based on her diary entries, it is evident that Molnár followed the introduction of Hungarian anti-Jewish laws with great interest either by reading the regulations displayed on street or hearing about them from her parents. She used her diary to note down the various prohibitions affecting Jews and her thoughts on these discriminatory measures. Although my personal collection includes several Christian Hungarian adolescent diaries, Molnár’s diary is the only diary to my knowledge that offers a detailed account of the persecution of Jews in Hungary during World War II. Molnár began writing her diary in February 1941, a few months before Hungary entered World War II, keeping her diary during and even after the war. It is important to note that according to Judit Molnár, Margit Molnár's diary is incomplete because Margit retrospectively chose to censor her manuscript. Before her death in 2001, Margit reread her diary and completely erased certain parts by cutting out a few lines, tearing out
certain pages, or even destroying entire volumes. Despite Margit’s self-censorship, a total of fourteen volumes survived, but since Judit only read the diary after her sister’s death, she could not tell what logical and criteria Margit used to censor her diary.

Molnár’s family was Roman Catholic, deeply religious, and strictly observed all Roman Catholic holidays and doctrines. For instance, in 1942 Molnár wrote an entry in which she related her father’s discontent over the profane symbol of the Easter Bunny, which caused Molnár to draw parallels between Easter and other religious holidays such as Christmas and the day of Santa Claus. In her comparison, Molnár references two Hungarian traditions: in one tradition Krampus, a devilish figure, delivers birch rods to children on the eve of Christmas Eve by the infant Jesus: “Daddy doesn’t like it when we say [at Easter] that the bunny is coming … and it’s enough if Baby Jesus and Santa Claus are coming [at Christmas], but for the bunny to come too, who does the bunny think he is, thinking himself so great when it’s the most cowardly of animals … I don’t know either why the bunny came into fashion when it’s got nothing to do with Easter. And lambs have been displaced altogether. Just like how on the day of Saint Nicholas, they put the Krampus into the foreground” (unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine) (“Api nem szereti, ha [húsévtkor] azt mondjuk, hogy jön a nyuszi … és elég is, ha jön a Jézuska [karácsonykor] meg a Mikulás, de hogy nyuszi jön, hát kicsoda az a nyuszi, micsoda nagyság az. Hiszen a leggyávább állat … Azt én sem tudom miért a nyuszi jött divatba, mikor annak semmi köze a húsvéthez. A báránnykat meg egészenn kiszorították. Úgy, mint mikulásokor a kramuszpos helyeztet előtereb”). As a result of Molnár’s strict Religious upbringing, her worldview was influenced by religion and also led her to adopt her family’s political value system. The Molnár family endorsed Governor Miklós Horthy and his followers and Molnár herself regarded Horthy with special respect for two main reasons. One was Horthy’s age, which led Molnár (as well as other Christian adolescent diary-writers) to regard him as a wise, elderly father figure of the Hungarian nation. The other reason was Horthy’s involvement in religious holidays, in particular the most important 20 August, the day Saint Stephen offered Hungary to the Virgin Mary. Molnár’s diary suggests that by the time she began writing her diary at age fourteen, she had internalized her family’s anti-Semitism and regarded Jews as a “separate race” from Hungarians. Owing to the fact that Molnár was socialized in a deeply religious Christian family that harbored anti-Semitic views, Molnár regarded herself as a Christian first and foremost and treated her national identity as self-evident tying Hungarianness to the Christian faith and consequently regarding Jews as the “Other.” For instance, her reference “igaz magyar” (“true Hungarian”) denotes actively religious Christians, a group Molnár strongly identified with and came to confine with the national category of Hungarians and thus her diary shows on several accounts that she made a sharp distinction between Christian Hungarians and Jews whom she considered a separate race and identified based on stereotypical physiognomic markers such as the shape of the nose. Molnár also regarded impolite or unconventional behavior as Jewish.

When Molnár began keeping her diary, the Molnár family lived in modest circumstances that stood in sharp contrast with the perceived wealth of their Hungarian Jewish neighbors, the Valkó family. The two families lived in an apartment building that was, in typical architectural fashion of the time, built around a rectangular courtyard surrounded by apartments on all sides. The ground floor hosted various shops. The cheap and small two-room apartments on the next floor faced the courtyard, while the larger and more expensive three-to four-room apartments had a view to the street. The Molnár family’s apartment faced the courtyard and thus received no natural sunlight. In contrast, the Valkó family lived in a three-room apartment facing the street and unlike the Molnár family where four people shared two rooms, in the Valkó family each person had their own room. According to a 1941 census, most apartments and their residents of the family’s generation IV. 1419. j.), the head of the household was Lili, owner of a drug store that operated as a family business with Valkó’s wife serving as a chemist producing toiletries and their daughter Lili working as an apprentice. Since Molnár internalized her family’s anti-Semitic prejudices, but had little exposure to Jewish society, she projected her experiences of the Valkó family onto Jews in general, regarding Jews as a homogeneous group of the rich, rude, and oppressive elite. For instance, Molnár imagined the Valkó family exceedingly rich on account of the fact that they lived in a three-room apartment with one room per person while her own family was crowded in a two-room apartment and thus she considered the arrangement of the apartments "unjust" (it is interesting that she considered her family’s financial situation "unjust" when in fact they also owned a cottage [see below], a fact that places her family’s family’s position hardly “poor”). Consider the following excerpt from July 1941, where Molnár discusses how the Jews had an oppressive presence in Budapest:

Now, a few more words on Jews. Needless to say, there’s hoards of them in Pest, may the wind blow them all away into the Sahara. When there is a Jewish holiday, there’s hardly a shop or two open on the Boulevard. There are so many hook-nosed Grüns and Svarc and Grünhuts you could clog the Danube with them. The German soldiers were right when they said this wasn’t Budapest, it’s Judpest. It’s terribly irritating how they can buy anything and everything. They, the big ones are all you see in cafés and on the beach. They said that when the war was over, Hitler would come and put the Jews in order. I have nothing more to say except for the Valkós living next door. Well, well … here you are, I have informed you of the situation at present, because our prospects are not very rosy, but we have no cause for despair, because we’re not starving to death or too worn down and we get on.

No a zsidókról még egy pár szót. Mondanom sem kell, hogy ez dögivel van Pesten, hogy a szél fújja el őket a Szaharáról. Ha zsidóinnep van a Körútban alig van egy-két bolt nyitva. Anyani a kampós orrú Grün és Svarc és Grünhut, hogy el lehetne rekeszteni velük a Dunát. Meg is mondók a német katonák, hogy ez nem Budapest hanem Judpest. Az szörnyű bosszantó, hogy nekik mindenre telik mindenre. Kávéházban, strandon, csak ők, a nagy ők vannak. Azt mondják, ha vége a háborúnak, Hitler itt is rendet teremt a zsidók között. Nem kell mást
megemlítenem, csak azt, hogy mellettünk a Valkóék. Nana ... Hát kérném szépen felvilágosítást nyújtottam a pl-
lanatnyi helyzetből, mely nem éppen rözsás, elkeseredésre nincs okunk, mert éhen sem halunk, le sem rongyo-
lódunk és élünk.

From the excerpt above, we can see that Molnár imagined Jews (who in formed about 15.8% of the
Budapest population at the time [see Braham]) as an oppressive majority and Christians as the op-
pressed minority, which caused her to support the restrictive measures against Jews. Molnár’s hopes
that Hitler would suppress the Jewish population of Hungary seems to imply that she either did not
perceive the changes brought on by previous anti-Semitic measures in Budapest, or considered these
measures insufficient and ineffective. To Christian adolescents like Molnár, the persecution of Jews
remained largely intangible in spite of the anti-Jewish Laws until the German occupation and the sub-
sequent Holocaust of the Jewish population. The fact that Molnár used the term “Jew” to designate
persons she perceived as Jewish rather than persons who were self-identified Jewish Hungarians sug-
gests that she considered Jews a separate race. In the early entries of her diary, it is unclear on what
basis she identified the Valkó-s as Jewish, but since her diary hints at the fact that two Jewish families
were known to live at the apartment building at that time, Molnár might have classified the Valkó-s as
Jewish based on her idea of the stereotypical rich Jews. Of course, by 1944 she knew for sure because
the Valkó-s were put into a ghetto: on 19 March 1944, German troops occupied Hungary and as of 5
April Hungarian authorities were pressured by the Germans to prescribe that all Jews wear the yellow
star and to start the ghettoization of Jews moving Jewish families out of their homes and into apart-
mant buildings marked with the Star of David. From 1944, Jewish citizens were gradually forced
into these habitations, while outside of Budapest the Hungarian administration began to establish Jew-
ish ghettos in various settlements to serve as deportation camps. Between May and June 1944, Hun-
garian authorities deported the entire Hungarian Jewish population living outside of Budapest to
Auschwitz.

Because of the German occupation, Budapest was targeted for air raids and became unsafe, forcing
the Molnár-s to evacuate Margit, her younger sister Judit, and their mother to their holiday home in
Rákoscscba, a small town twenty kilometers outside of Budapest and only the father remained in the
capital in order to work. Until October 1944, the children were rarely allowed to visit their father and
relatives in Budapest, but even these few occasions deeply affected Margit. In April 1944, Margit and
Judit traveled to Rákoscscba by train. Taking public transportation in Budapest to reach the train sta-
tion was the first time Molnár could see masses of people wearing the yellow star while out on the
streets. Here is an excerpt from her text: “Somehow Pest has completely changed as if it were some-
thing different from what it was a few months ago. A great many people on the streets, those weird
yellow stars, all those German soldiers, a lot of tanks, booming canons” (“Valahogy Pest egészen
megváltozott, mintha nem az lett volna, ami pár hónappal ezelőtt. Az utcákon a rengeteg ember, azok
a furcsa sárga csillagok, a rengeteg német katona, a sok tank, dübörgő ágyúk”).

Molnár’s subsequent diary entries show that she and her family often engaged in anti-Semitic be-
havior during their stay at Rákoscscba and that they viewed Jews as an acceptable subject of ridicule.
In April 1944 Margit, her sister Judit, and their young niece put on a show for the adult members of
the Molnár family in Rákoscscba which she and her sister had been preparing to put on before they
moved out of Budapest. As the eldest, Molnár wrote the entire script of the show and preserved a
handwritten program of it between the pages of her diary consisting on school recitals, songs, reen-
actments of scenes, and even a play called “A sánta zsídó” (“The Lame Jew”). The contents of the play
are unknown, but we can assume that the title character played a comical role based on the fact that
the character was played by a four years old member of the family. Judit, who was three or four years
old at the time. According to her text, her niece’s costume consisted of a large worn coat and a yellow star
Molnár made from paper and colored with yellow pencil. Molnár preserved this prop along with the handwritten program in her
diary.

To Molnár Budapest’s once familiar cityscape became increasingly alien owing to the openly dis-
criminatory measures imposed on citizens classified as Jewish. Molnár previously tended to classify
persons as Jewish based on stereotypical markers like norm-violating behavior or physiognomic sche-
mata. However, in April 1944, Molnár’s assumptions about identifying markers were rendered useless
when Hungarian law forced Jewish citizens to wear a yellow star in public, resulting in growing masses
of people that Molnár would have previously been unable to classify as Jewish based on her own set of
limited criteria. Due to the seemingly all-pervasive presence of the yellow star, Molnár felt that there
were a lot more Jews than she previously imagined. In May 1944, she wrote that “Ah, Pest was so
strange. It was so completely different from a few years ago. It’s almost disgusting how many yellow
stars there are here. One can hardly count the yellow stars. As many as there are stars in the
sky. And then there are a lot of closed shops, the Jewish ones” (“Jaj olyan furcsa volt Pest. Olyan
egészen más, mint pár évvel ezelőtt. Az a rengeteg sárga csillag szinte undorító. Az ember mást alig
lát, mint sárga csillagot. Annyi van mint az égen. Aztán rengeteg üzlet zárva, a zsídóké”).

When Molnár heard about the establishment of Jewish ghettos, the news inspired a diary entry
where she sympathized with Christians whose homes fell into areas designated for ghettoization. Ac-
cording to Molnár’s diary, the Molnár family was informed that their apartment building in Budapest
and their holiday home in Rákoscscba might both be affected by ghettoization, which alarmed the
Molnárs and only served to increase their anti-Semitic sentiments. Molnár’s entry from that period of
uncertainty shows that she perceived ghettoization solely as a process in which Christians lost their
homes to the Jews, who Molnár thought were being scattered across the various settlements to pro-
vide them with increased protection against air raids: “We can gather our things and move over. To
give away our lovely little house to the Jews and we might not even get another in its place. Everyone
was despondent and decided they would rather burn the house down than give it away. Thank the
good Lord that the ghetto will be at the new site instead of here, and according to recent news, Jews will be moving into the third street from here. I suspect they're being scattered about because of the Anglo. I'm sorry for those who have to leave their houses that they acquired with hard work and effort and had grown to love so much" ("Foghatjuk a sátorfánkat és állhatunk odébb. Oda kell ajándékozni, a szép kis házunkat a zsidóknak és talán nem is kapunk helyette másikat. Mindenki el volt keseredve s elhatározott, hogy inkább felgyújtjük a házat, semmint odaadják. Hálá jó Istennek azonban mégsem itt lesz, hanem az új telepen, s újabb hírek szerint innen a 3.-ik utcában is zsidók fognak lakni. Biztos az angolok miatt szórjuk őket így szejjel. Sajnálm azokat, akiknek itt kell hagyni a házukat, amit munkával, családi szerződésekkel szerzettek, s ami úgy úgynéz, hogy változatlan a szívükhöz kötőt")

Once Molnár witnessed how Hungarian authorities forced Jews into ghettos, her diary entries reveal some compassion for the Jews for the first time. Her entry at the end of May 1944 shows how she began to reevaluate her previous views and attempted to abandon her prejudices in the face of the increasingly oppressive discriminatory measures against Jews. Her ambiguity is evident when she writes: "Today we saw from the corner how the Jews were moving out. The people went in groups up front and the cars behind them. It was such a sad sight somehow, not that I feel sorry for the Jews, but still this war it's so strange" ("Ma a sarokról láttuk a zsidókat, amint megnyúltak, a házukat, amint költözik. Elől mentek csoportosan az emberek, utánuk pedig a kocsik. Olyan szomorú látvány valahogy, nem mintha sajnáljánám a zsidókat, csak mégis ez a háború olyan különös"). As we can see, Molnár first called what she witnessed a sad sight, but then went on to state that she did not feel sorry for the Jews. Her indifference was likely motivated by her previous conceptions of Jews as well as by her belief that the discriminatory measures were just punishing the dispossessed, someone whose house was bombed lives there and the seven of them have to make do in some one room apartment in Király street. Everyone gets their comeuppance sometime.

The fact that the Valkó family had to move into the Jewish ghetto led her to regard the fate of the Valkó family with contempt and even malice: in 1943 the Molnárs suggested to their Jewish neighbors that the two families switch apartments, but the Valkós rejected the offer. It appears from Molnár’s entry that the Molnár-s only made such suggestions by her belief that the dispossessed measures were just punishing the dispossessed, someone whose house was bombed lives there and the seven of them have to make do in some one room apartment in the capital for a short visit and her diary entry reads as follows:

Pest and our apartment are so detestable. Ah, when the war ends – ? – we will go and live in a beautiful apartment because this current one is hideous. We barely fit and the lights are always on. And we have been living here for seven years. We talked to Mrs Valkó. When we asked her to give us her apartment, switch with us because they are three people living in a huge three-room apartment, (Jew) replied indignantly that they really do need a room per person (We four live in two small rooms). Now? You know what happened? They have three name plates on the door. Three families are living in their apartment. Good, very good. Everyone gets their comeuppance.


O nterval between that time and the spring of 1944, the Molnár family disliked the dispossessed, someone whose house was bombed lives there and the seven of them have to make do in some one room apartment in Király street. Everyone gets their comeuppance sometime. They have three name plates on the door. Three families are living in their apartment. Good, very good. Everyone gets their comeuppance.

On 15 October 1944, Horthy made an attempt to withdraw Hungary from the war, but his ill-prepared attempt was unsuccessful and the Arrow Cross Party assumed power with the help of the occupying German forces. In simplistic terms, the Arrow Cross was the Hungarian equivalent of the Nazi Party, which allowed them to gain the support of the Germans and force Horthy into resigning his post as governor. It is important to note that based on Molnár’s diary, the Molnár family disliked the Arrow Cross despite the fact that they also supported the restrictive measures against Jews. After Horthy’s attempt to withdraw Hungary from the war, some Jews immediately left their forced habitation and attempted to reclaim their former homes, while others took off the yellow star to try and escape persecution. However, shortly after the Arrow Cross assumed power in the capital, the Arrow Cross and the German forces began the Holocaust against the Jews of Budapest killing many on the streets or ordering the residents of starred houses and even protected houses (under the protection of police) onto the buses and taking them en masse. He, however, in February 1945, the Arrow Cross’s reign of terror came to an end as their final attempt to break the siege of Budapest was crushed by Soviet forces at the cost of severe casualties and material damage.

Once the Arrow Cross assumed power in Budapest, the anti-Jewish terror became a reality to the non-Jewish adolescents living in the capital, the majority of whom including Molnár were informed of
the Arrow Cross's brutality by their parents. Her parents told her that the Christian and Jewish residents of their apartment building were shot on the Danube by German and Arrow Cross forces. In the following excerpt, Molnár writes of the cruelty of the Arrow Cross, but only showed compassion for the Christians, whom she called unfortunate for becoming victims of circumstance. Her entry is also telling of the fact that she now began to view the differences of the two groups in terms of religious affiliation rather than race. While in previous entries, she used the distinction of Hungarians versus Jews, the following entry instead uses the distinction of Christians versus Jews:

in their fear of Germans, they deliberately removed their yellow stars, running so wild as to move out of the Jewish houses and into their own old ones, driving out the Christians who now lived there. But the Arrow Cross reined them in soon enough. During these past few days, Jews were dropping like flies in the fall. Sometimes there were cruel murders. In several cases, the German soldiers ordered the residents of an entire Jewish house, the unfortunate Christian tenants included, to the bank of the Danube, where they lined them up in front of the water in a row and gunned them down. They fell into the water and the waves carried them away.

In November 1944 Molnár wrote a diary entry in which she expressed her compassion for the Jewish victims of the Arrow Cross. By the end of October, the Molnár family and their acquaintances often discussed the cruelty of the Arrow Cross and the German forces in Budapest, which caused Molnár despite her deep-seated prejudices against Jews to condemn the brutality of the Arrow Cross. In their Rákocsabá cottage Molnár received news of the anti-Jewish terror from her close acquaintances of the family, whose words Molnár accepted implicitly as truthful and wrote down in her diary as facts although at the same time she appears disturbed and affected by her relatives and acquaintances' accounts: "The Jews are being gunned down in the streets for no reason, an acquaintance saw how a seventeen-eighteen-year-old Arrow Cross man stabbed a pregnant Jewish woman in the stomach. Even though she begged him on her knees with her hands put together not to hurt her. The woman's two-year-old daughter was standing right next to her. It makes our hearts bleed, these terrible things we hear about the actions of the Arrow Cross. And whoever says even one good word in favor of the Jews gets gunned down too" ("A zsírokat az utcán ok nélkül lelövöldözik, egy ismerős láttja, amint egy 17-18 éves nyilas suhanc egy állapotos zsidó nőnek beleszúrt a hasába. Pedig az térden állva özsi tetőt kezzel könyörgött, hogy ne bántha. Az asszony mellett ott állt kétetendős kislánya is. Az embernek a szíve vérzik, olyan elrendettné eseteket hallunk a nyilasok tetteiről. S aki a zsírok mellett egy jó szót is mond, azt is lepuffantják.")

Reading Molnár's diary entries, it is evident that the news of the Arrow Cross terror played a decisive role in the temporary suspension of her anti-Semitic prejudices and traumatized her to such an extent that she even made mentions of the anti-Jewish terror during the Soviet occupation of Hungary. In January 1945, Budapest was liberated from the siege, which meant that the city could begin clearing away debris and corpses from the streets. In the middle of February, Molnár's mother saw a truck full of dead women and girls being taken to the morgue and since the corpses showed signs of torture, she believed them to be victims of the Arrow Cross. She then related the news to the suffering of these women and adolescent girls to her daughter, temporarily inspiring compassion in Molnár. Owing to her mother's emphasis on how many of the victims were young girls, it may have occurred to Molnár that she, her younger sister, and her mother could have met a similar fate if they had been Jewish. Molnár emphasized in her entries how the anti-Jewish terror was committed by Hungarians against Hungarians and the Arrow Cross effectively waged war on its own people, which means that as a consequence of her trauma Molnár temporarily accepted the Jews as Hungarians as part of a group from which she had previously excluded them. It is important to note that the following excerpt is the only place in Molnár's diary where Jews are included into her own group and where she even went so far as to judge the actions of the Arrow Cross more severely than that of the occupying Soviet forces:

They brought an entire truck full of naked corpses. Most of them were women, mutilated, with bruised bodies and faces distorted with horror. They unloaded them and took them to the morgue. It was a terrible sight, it was the Arrow Cross and course who murdered these people. The only crime was that they were Jews. The majority of them were women and young girls, naked and exposed to the world. They murdered the poor things amid terrible despicable torture, and a hundred others, too. Can we even say anything if the Russians are being cruel? They are enemies. But the Arrow Cross have done this to Hungarian people and for that they deserve a hundred deaths.

Despite Molnár's temporary compassion for the victims of the anti-Jewish terror, once the war ended and social order was more or less restored in Hungary, her anti-Semitic prejudices returned (and this was also the case in Budapest altogether: on the immediate post-war situation of Jewish Hungarians see, e.g., Pető). In April 1945, a mere two months after the previous compassionate entry, Molnár
reflected on the restrictive measures issued before and during the war, concluding that these measures were justified but largely unsuccessful in their attempts to curb what she perceived as the wealthy, oppressive Jewish elite. Nevertheless, her opinion of the Arrow Cross also prevailed, possibly on account of the fact that she could not reconcile the cruelty of the Arrow Cross with her own Christian values, which would explain why she left the terror out of her enumeration of the oppressive measures against Jews. It is also interesting to note that in her entry, Molnár uses an anti-Semitic Hungarian reference to describe the current situation in Hungary, one that is about a legend involving a Jew. According to the legend, a Jewish coachman from the village of Mád set out on his cart, but fell asleep on the coach during his journey. Without guidance, he found himself arriving to the same place he left and Molnár's entry reads: "The Jews are on the rise again, it was a waste wreaking havoc with the anti-Jewish laws and yellow stars and locking them into ghettos. We are back at square one like the 'Jew from Mád,' it's a good thing the Christians weren't dealt with in the same way" ("A zsidóknak újra felragyogott, kár volt a nagy felfordulást csinálni zsidótörvényekkel, meg sárga csillaggal, gettóba zárással. Ott vagyunk ismét mint a 'mádi zsidó,' még jó, hogy a keresztényekkel nem bánnak el hasonlóképpen").

In conclusion, my selected analysis of Margit Molnár's diary shows that she viewed the persecution of Jewish Hungarians without compassion and even a degree of malice until the anti-Jewish terror of the Arrow Cross. This terror instilled temporary compassion in her until the war ended and when her anti-Semitic prejudices returned. Before the Arrow Cross assumed power, Molnár viewed the Hungarian anti-Jewish laws as just the punishment of the wealthy Jewish elite or a series of measures aimed at changing the social order she perceived as unequal and biased in favor of Jews over Christian Hungarians. Molnár only began to sympathize with the Jews during the terror of the Arrow Cross, but her prejudices ultimately prevailed and resurfaced once the war was over, because she interpreted the restoration of society as a return to the previous unequal status quo where poor Christian Hungarians were being oppressed by a wealthy Jewish elite.

Works Cited


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