

Király, Kinga Julia. *Recipes for a New Beginning: Transylvanian Jewish Stories of Life, Hunger, and Hope*. Translated by Rachel Hideg. Frankfurt am Main, Germany: CEEOL Press, 2020. 324 pp.*

Julia Király's *Recipes for a New Beginning* is a true labour of love in the genre of oral history. Király weaves an intricate tapestry from ten Holocaust survivors' recollections of childhood, the Holocaust, and the Communist era with forty-one traditional recipes of their northern Romanian homelands in Transylvania. The author sheds new light on the intersection between history, memory, ethnography, and food studies. Király's work bears the fruits of deep listening, meaning that a no-holds-barred approach was used in following up on mental associations, whether these concerned domesticity or the Holocaust. *Recipes for a New Beginning* is translated from the original Hungarian by Rachel Hideg and prefaced by Louise O. Vasvári, the foremost expert in Hungarian culinary nostalgia and Central European Holocaust life writing. Vasvári writes that this genre-crossing text could be productively categorized as a "culinary memorial book" (7). Király chronicles and commemorates the Jewish lives and ethnographic details of Transylvanian locales as per the *Yizkor* book format (2), however with a focus on recipes as the locus of memory.¹

Befitting contemporary works of oral history and ethnography, Király forewords her magnum opus on a distinctly self-reflexive note by noting her appreciation for intergenerational recipes under the poverty and alimentary dullness of the Ceaușescu regime (12). As a local of Marosvásárhely (Târgu Mureș), and given her multilingual Hungarian background, Király was well-positioned to attempt to reconstruct the foodways and betrayed Hungarian loyalties of her interviewees, and the tragic martyrdom of the Székely Sabbatarians in East-Central Transylvania.² In the foreword, Király also addresses the ethical stakes of her survivor-oriented methodology that uses

* This book review is dedicated to Transylvania-descended interviewees of mine who integrated their discussion of food into a "whole life perspective": Tom D., Esti M., and Margaret N.

¹ *Yizkor* books constitute memorial texts to particular destroyed communities, containing Holocaust testimonies, memoiristic writings, and other forms of cultural expression such as didactic tales and poems.

² The Székely Sabbatarians were Jewish Sabbath-observing Unitarians, many of whom formally converted to Judaism and married ancestral Jews. Gábor Gyórfy, Zoltán Tibori Szabó, and Júlia-Réka Vallasek, "Back to the Origins: The Tragic History of the Szekler Sabbatarians," *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* 32, no. 3 (2017): 566-585.

food talk to elicit larger narratives of the past, agonizing over whether her interviewees actually wanted to recall certain horrific ordeals. She likewise emphasizes the epistemic fluidity of memory, the importance of the interplay of her interviewees' mental associations with her dignified curiosity, and the preservation of the idiomatic richness of their speech (14-15). The subsequent chapters are organized much like a *Yizkor* book, centred on the Holocaust and ending with an account of the death and burial of her most pious interviewee, Helena (Lea) Kain, the guardian of tradition in Szatmár (Satu Mare) (7-8, 313-317). The succession of chapters is illustrated by a menorah icon, culminating with seven candles for the late Kain.

The first chapter, "Childhood," is separated into the subsections "Peacetime" and "A Shattered Childhood." The former begins with Király's personal and methodological reflections on the encounter between different forms of childhood and the role of guided remembrance in recovering details from a particular memory (19). In presenting the voices of Zsuzsa Diamantstein, Leopold (Rudi) Kárpelesz, Etelka Tusa, and Goldi Salamon, she reveals the centrality of certain Purim and Chanukah recipes in the celebration of these holidays (22-27, 46-47) and the lack of opportunity they had for mimetic learning (i.e. by observation and imitation) in the kitchen due to their youth (23, 31). Király's interview with Érdengeleg native Helena Kain reveals much about the nature of household management and religious observance in the region, especially with regard to food preservation, embroidery, and the Three Weeks of mourning (63-67).

The interview analyses of the next section present attitudes towards Hungarian irredentism (i.e. the Axis-arbitrated Second Vienna Award in September 1940, which transferred most of northern and eastern Transylvania from Romania to Hungary) and transitions to "A Shattered Childhood," which revolves largely around the Holocaust in Bukovina and Transnistria through an excavation of memories related to the 1941 Bucharest and Iași pogroms (88-89).³

Chapter Two, "Forced into Adulthood: The Ghetto," begins with László Baký's 7 April 1944 decree inaugurating the blitzkrieg against Hungarian Jewry. Along with the sudden humiliations wrought by ghettoization in Szatmár (Satu Mare),

³ See also Nicholas M. Nagy-Talavera, *The Green Shirts and the Others: A History of Fascism in Hungary and Rumania* (Las Vegas, NV: Histria Books / The Center for Romanian Studies, 2021), 227, 428 (Second Vienna Award) 453-456 (Bucharest pogrom), 463 (Iași pogrom).

Máramarossziget (Sighet), Nagyvárad (Oradea), and Dés (Dej), Király provides a granular perspective on these ghettos through her research partners who endured them and were faced with a narrow vice of choices. Helena Kain and Goldi Salamon also offer evidence that Romanians were ‘better bystanders’ than the Hungarians in Máramaros during the Holocaust (139, 142, cf. 61). Similarly, Leopold Kárpelesz describes the treachery of Hungarian officers and ordinary Magyars and laments their sudden change in attitude amidst the Second Vienna Award and the Nazi invasion of March 1944 (151-152).

The next two chapters, on Auschwitz-Birkenau and its network of slave labour camps, present a montage of their horrors and deceptive messages. True to the culinary memorial genre, there are notable instances of food talk in these zones. (178, 181, 196-197, 208-212). As an inmate of the “Gypsy camp,” Leopold Kárpelesz explains first-hand the unique deprivations that the Roma suffered (190-191), while Lajos Erdélyi assumes that Roma tended to be *kapos* (forced collaborators with the Nazis) (216-217). This contrast between solidarity and othering brings to mind the epistemic gaps between Jewish and Roma survivors that Ari Joskowitz examines in his 2016 article “Separate Suffering, Shared Archives.”⁴ Such an approach points a way forward through deep listening and guided remembrance.

Chapters Five and Six are entitled “Liberation” and “A New Beginning and Dictatorship.” Chapter Five stresses the chaos of the time and the existential void that remained. Chapter Six positions survivors’ postwar efforts to rebuild their lives, resultant psychological corollaries, and collision with their former Hungarian neighbours (253). The latter themes are presented alongside how pre-Holocaust foodways were maintained and changed (243-250). The historical thread underlying this period is the Romanian Communist regimes of Gheorghiu-Dej (1952-1965) and Ceaușescu (1965-1989) and their accompanying atmosphere of paranoia and intimidation, which shines through the interview data, especially in the accounts of Lajos and Anni Erdélyi.

Recipes for a New Beginning, with its ‘whole life’ approach to Transylvanian Holocaust survivors, is comparable to András Koerner’s work, particularly *How They Lived: The Everyday Lives of Hungarian Jews, 1867-1940*. In terms of using oral history in

⁴ Ari Joskowitz, “Separate Suffering, Shared Archives: Jewish and Romani Histories of Nazi Persecution,” *History & Memory*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Spring/Summer 2016), 110-140, especially 115-121.

conjunction with other sources to reconstruct Hungarian-Jewish foodways, Király's book forms a thematic pair with Koerner's *Jewish Cuisine in Hungary: A Cultural History with 83 Authentic Recipes*, which uses the Centropa life story interview of Zsuzsa Diamantstein.⁵ I agree with Vasvári that *Recipes for a New Beginning* is foremost a meticulously executed affective and interdisciplinary mosaic of emotional chronicles for intergenerational transmission (2-3). Király is particularly transparent in her methodology, allowing the reader to read dialogues *between* the interviewees. Her inclusion of literary vignettes, for example by Elie Wiesel, helps make this book legible to a wider audience. This book provides historical insight into understudied topics on the Holocaust in 'Greater Hungary,' such as the martyred Sabbatarian of Székely Land (160-161) and Hungarian-perpetrated mass violence south of the Transylvanian partition line in the 'Second Hungarian-Romanian War' (94-95).⁶ Király's focus on women's culinary memories in relation to changing national identities and the vicissitudes of history complements oral historical scholarship by Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki, who holistically address the memory work of Holocaust survivors, and Norma Baumel Joseph, who has outlined the primary source valence of cookbooks and the ritual significance of the transmission of culinary knowledge.⁷ Overall, *Recipes for a New Beginning* is unique in its sustained presentation of culinary

⁵ Centropa is an East-Central European organization that has been particularly thorough in their interviews of Holocaust survivors, and in documenting their life stories overall. See <https://www.centropa.org/en>.

⁶ Regarding Sabbatarian martyrdom see Gyórfy, Tibori Szabó, and Vallasek, "Back to the Origins: The Tragic History of the Szekler Sabbatarian," 577-81. For commentary on Hungarian-perpetrated violence see Zoltán Tibori Szabó, "The Holocaust in Transylvania," in *The Holocaust in Hungary: Seventy Years Later*, eds. Randolph L. Brahm and András Kovács (Budapest: CEU Press, 2016), 174; Holly Case, *Between States: The Transylvanian Question and the European Idea during World War II* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), Chapter 2, especially 90-93, 101-102, 214-217; Nagy-Talavera, *The Green Shirts and the Others*, 307-308; László Kürti, *The Remote Borderland: Transylvania in the Hungarian Imagination* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2001), 33-35.

⁷ See for example Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki, "'We Started Over Again, We Were Young': Postwar Social Worlds of Child Holocaust Survivors in Montreal," *Urban History Review* 39, no. 1 (Fall 2010): 20-30; Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki, "Questions Are More Important than Answers: Creating Collaborative Workshop Spaces with Holocaust Survivor-Educators in Montreal," in *Beyond Testimony and Trauma: Oral History in the Aftermath of Mass Violence*, ed. Steven High (Victoria: UBC Press, 2015), 212-234; Norma Baumel Joseph, "Cookbooks are Our Texts: Reading an Immigrant Community Through Their Cookbooks," *Religious Studies and Theology* 35, no. 2 (Fall 2016): 195-206; Norma Baumel Joseph, "'T'beet: Situating Iraqi Jewish Identity through Food," in *Everyday Sacred: Religion in Contemporary Quebec*, ed. Hillary Kaell, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), 99-126.

memories as intertwined with interviewee's interrupted lives, addressing regional variants of recipes through conversations between interviewees. (78)

Sean Remz

Concordia University