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Nadkarni, Maya. 2020. *Remains of Socialism: Memory and the Futures of the Past in Postsocialist Hungary*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. 252 pp.

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Maya Nadkarni's book masterfully describes the multilayered effects of four decades of communism on everyday life and politics in early 2000s in Hungary. Unlike many scholarly publications, which are often dry, with focused engagement with academic literature, her volume has the tone of an inviting and broadly accessible journal. Nadkarni skillfully weaves her personal observations into interviews with individuals from various generations, and vignettes of art films and popular advertisements of the period. The collection forms a cohesive whole highlighting a fond personal familiarity with the location, its history, culture, and people. Informed by Nadkarni's arrival in 1993 as an English teacher in a village in northeastern Hungary—long before her current role as professor of anthropology at Swarthmore College—and her many trips about the country afterward, her observations build a sturdy basis of linking the insider and the outsider perspectives of anthropological analysis.

Nadkarni observes that individual interpretations of collective pasts are highly contingent on national, political framings of it. Her Hungarian friends enjoy Traubi-soda (a soft drink that has been ubiquitous in Hungary since the 1970s), treasure other consumer artifacts of the late communist period, and sentimentalize skills that were formerly highly beneficial. These reminiscences form part of a common, apparently apolitical nostalgia common in the tumultuous 1990s, when nearly all dimensions of life had undergone profound, and often confusing transformations. While socialist and communist parties failed to manipulate nostalgia for "the good old days" into politically productive support, the Hungarian right wing successfully conflated communism and Nazism into indistinguishable totalitarianisms, ousting left-wing ideology and parties out of the circle of political alternatives. As demonstrated within the passages detailing Nadkarni's successive visits to Budapest's House of Terror museum, political reframing of the most immediate past dangerously reverberates through current Hungarian social and foreign policy.

Although Nadkarni presents evolving and conflicting individual, group, philosophical, and anthropological perspectives on the past and manipulations of the past, she does not judge what she collected. Rather, she leaves it to the reader to interpret the information. Nadkarni appropriately describes her approach to the interviews the book includes as "insisting on the

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agency of various social and political actors" (p. 7), which allows the readers to feel as though they are joining a discussion among friends at a café or a kitchen table. Nadkarni is the careful, caring, and noninterventionist interlocutor of ideologies, without highlighting generational and gender differences. One such memorable exchange is between a mother in her fifties, living in a small town—a mother who is critical of communism, but also appreciative of the many opportunities she and her family had during the communist era—and her teenage son, whose critical view of the same period diametrically opposes his mother's. They both regard each other's views with astonishment and a considerable sense of bewildered alienation. A net shopping bag (of the sort once popular across Eastern Europe) is a simple, pragmatic necessity from the mother's perspective, while the son—who never personally experienced the communist period—views the same shopping bag as a sign of oppression and control of the party apparatus over everyday lives.

The book traces many lost personal possibilities and national opportunities, sometimes with a melancholy sadness, sometimes with a more critical edge, but always in withdrawn and nonjudgmental manner. The first chapter describes how and why the Statue Park (later Memento Park), an open-air museum on the outskirts of Budapest, appeared to house some of the most notable and politically now unwanted mementos of the communist past.

With the central theme that history is created, the second chapter reflects on how the communist symbol cut out of the country's flag has become synonymous with the 1956 revolution. Is Fidesz's politics of history anachronistic (pp. 61 and 69) or is it an example of promiscuity (p. 71)—or possibly: both?

The third chapter analyzes how everyday items—such as the aforementioned Traubi-soda, with its highly recognizable green bottle—have become warm, nostalgic reminders of a recent (childhood) past. The two competing narratives of nostalgia: one that wants to redeem the past, as "it is ours" (words referencing a popular, 1969 Hungarian tragicomic film, *The Witness*), and the other, which aims to vilify it. The metacommentary from top to bottom of Hungarian society has been a definitively negative judgement of the communist past, leaving behind the self-deprecating humor and creative, loving embrace of ambiguity in everyday lives.

The fourth chapter interrogates the political message increasingly relevant in the House of Terror. The officially endorsed interpretation of equating four decades of communism with the oppression of Nazi rule between October 1944 and April 1945 has loudly incorporated a politically expedient mentality of victimhood. The position of a victim is to elicit support for self and unequivocal condemnation of a perpetrator. This black-and-white opposition intends to create an apparent clear moral high ground and excludes complexity, such as gradations and choices under historical constraints. Holding on to the image of an unjustly abandoned, cheated, and wounded warrior, Hungary has created and exacerbated an all-too-familiar hero-victim image for itself and systematically disregarded alternative and opposing perspectives. The fissures of such denial of complexity and historical responsibility cannot disappear without consequences.

The moral algebra of continuous Hungarian national persecution (p. 128) has created new secrets and consequences, and the fifth chapter delves into the pressures of such omissions, baring the consequences of the silenced multiplicity and suppressed debates on what is this country's inheritance is how to deal with its traumas. In the final, sixth chapter, Nadkarni reflects on the past's refusal to remain a memory.

Nadkarni's nonjudgmental anthropological gaze has many benefits, including the implied endorsement of multiple, often conflicting narratives and what the author calls "present-day cultural productivity" (p. 12). However, especially given the unexpected and dramatic authoritarian turn that Hungarian politics has taken since 2010, *Remains of Socialism* could have hinted as to how that central concept of agency has produced pathology, vis-à-vis "becomes pathologized" (p. 12). Similarly, an inviting central concept: racism also falls outside of the observations present in this otherwise engaging and insightful book. Although Nadkarni notes her status as a "mixed-race visitor" (p. 18), this fundamental social, political, and cultural category does not appear again in the book's remaining 170 pages.

While each chapter forms a conceptual whole, the interviews, cultural vignettes, and scholarly themes in the book's six chapters engage in subtle and interlocking dialogue with one another, quietly but tendentiously reaching a steady crescendo that condemns, without using harsh words, what is contemporary blind anticommunism and an uncritical embrace of an imaginary, heroic past coupled with a sanctimonious sense of victimhood. Putting the chapters together, the reader perceives a sense of loss: a loss of historical opportunity. The occasional melancholy, and often outraged sense of loss mirrors the remains—the memories, interpretations, and lessons—of the communist period in Hungary that could have offered creative and positive (even if minimally so) meanings to later generations, but this is not what came to be. Although the contemporary social sciences internationally have thus far settled on embracing an ambiguous assessment of communism, such a position was castigated to remain at the margins in Hungary, with a near hegemonic demonization of the immediate past taking place via various effective modes of memory politics.