

FATIGUE

CENTENARY OF “TRIANON” - MEMORY POLITICS IN ORBÁN’S HUNGARY

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CENTENARY OF “TRIANON” - MEMORY POLITICS IN ORBÁN’S HUNGARY

- Role of history in politics and policy making through the lens of commemorative practices in Hungary
- Case: commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the Treaty of Trianon in 2020

Main research questions:

- How does the government employ the discourses about the past to increase its legitimacy and popularity?
 - How do the discourses about the past reinforce the general narratives of the government?
 - What are the narratives? Who are the mnemonic actors and how are the historical policies constructed?
 - What are the counter-narratives (counter-memories) and reactions towards the official discourse of the opposition parties, civil society, academia and the Hungarian minorities in the neighbouring countries?
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THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS

- Collective memory is socially constructed (Halbwachs 1925/1992), it's not a „mystical group mind” (Olick, Robins 1998)
- Interaction of three factors: 1. intellectual and cultural traditions; 2. memory makers. 3. memory consumers (Kansteiner 2002)
- Past is produced in the present, thus is susceptible to instrumentalization and manipulation. However, mnemonic actors are not totally free in constructing historical narratives, they have to take into account the visions of the past cultivated by their audience (Bernhard, Kubik 2014)
- Collective memory both constrains and enable policies, as it shapes frameworks for foreign policy and domestic politics (Müller 2002)
- Two components of commemorative practices: 1. semiotic practices (content of memory politics) and 2. institutional practices (formulation of the content) (Bernhard, Kubik 2014)

METHODOLOGY

Multi-method qualitative approach:

- Discourse analysis – analysis of the speeches, statements, interviews etc.
 - Participant observation – observation of the commemorative ceremonies and events linked to the memory of Trianon (eg. National Unity Day on 4th of June, Trianon Rock Opera)
 - Interviews – interviewing (if possible) the memory agents and entrepreneurs in order to understand the intentions behind the specific form of memory politics
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SUBJECT OF COMMEMORATION

- Treaty of Trianon signed on 4th of June 1920
- End of multinational Kingdom of Hungary
- Loss of about 2/3 of pre-WWI territory and population
- 3 mln ethnic Hungarians remained outside the borders
- Considered as the biggest tragedy of the 20th century, often framed as national trauma

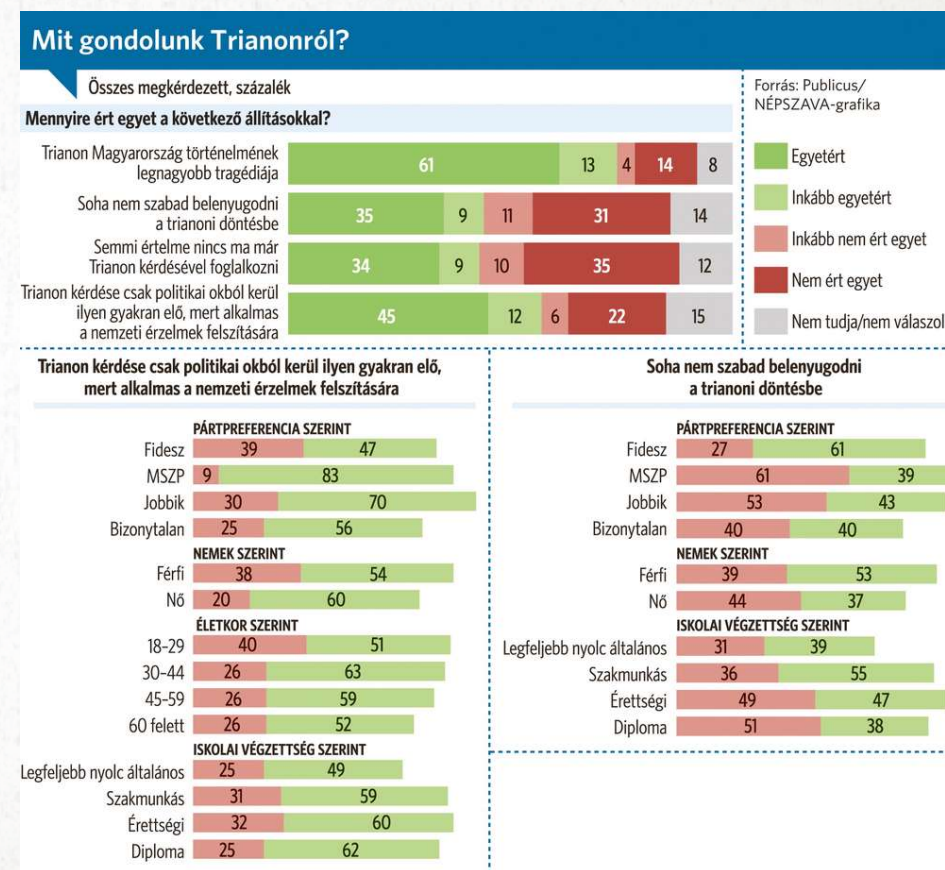


Source: Wikipedia

MEMORY OF TRIANON

Survey by Publicus (2018):

- Acc. to 74% of respondents say that Trianon was the biggest tragedy in Hungary's history
- Acc. to 44% we should never come to terms with decisions taken in Trianon (42% say to the contrary)
- Acc. to 43% there is no sense to deal anymore today with the issue of Trianon (45% to the contrary)
- Acc. to 57% the issue of Trianon is raised so often only for political reasons because it fires up national sentiments (28% to the contrary)



Source: Publicus/Népszava

1920-2020 – HISTORY OF MEMORY AND COMMEMORATION OF TRIANON

- Interwar period – territorial revisionism (irredenta)
 - 1938-1941 – regaining of territories in alliance with Nazi Germany
 - 1947 – Treaty of Paris: restoration of pre-1938 borders
 - Communist regime – Trianon as taboo
 - Post-1989 – renouncing territorial revisionism, support for Hungarian minorities abroad and good relations with the neighbouring countries, irredentism marginal.
 - 2000s. – growing popularity of the topic of Trianon, connected with the revival of the far-right.
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ORBÁN ERA (SINCE 2010)

- Introduction in 2010 of a **Day of National Unity** on 4th of June – rhetoric of national unity beyond the borders
 - Declaration of National Cooperation of 2010– creation of a new **National Cooperation System** „open for every Hungarian (...) living in and out of Hungary”.
 - **Citizenship & voting rights** for Hungarians outside the borders (2011-2012)
 - **New constitution** (2012) – references in the preamble (National Avowal) to Saint Stephen, Carpathian Basin, Holy Crown („embodying the unity of the nation”).
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COMMEMORATION OF 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF TRIANON

- Fidesz refused to make 2020 the „Year of Trianon” as proposed several times in parliament by far right **Jobbik** party.
- Fidesz Speaker of the Parliament **László Kövér** suggests to announce the „Year of National Unity” (March 2019): to commemorate the „Trianon tragedy” and pay tribute to generations of Hungarians faithful to their identity in the past 100 years, but also look into the future and cherish cooperation with other Central European nations.
- **Mária Schmidt** (director of the House of Terror Museum, advisor to PM Viktor Orbán, main ideologist of the government’s memory politics): Trianon as foreign dictate (alluding to current struggle against foreign foreign), blames lack of strong leadership (contrary to current one), offers „positive” aspect – „Hungarians prevailed in spite of Trianon”

WHAT IMPACTS THE GOVERNMENT'S MEMORY POLICIES AND DISCOURSES ON TRIANON

- the goal of **monopolizing the symbolic sphere** in the country
 - **competition with Jobbik** party for the far-right electorate and those representing revisionist sentiments in society
 - **foreign policy considerations** – impact on the relations with neighbouring countries.
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DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES OF FIDESZ ON TRIANON

No rhetoric of territorial revisionism, but emphasis on unity of Hungarian nation beyond borders.

Examples of strategies:

- Calculated Ambiguity (Wodek, Forchtner 2014), eg. „Future is written in Hungarian” (Orbán in 2017 to Hungarian minority in Cluj-Napoca; Facebook post on 4th of June 2018 – anniversary of the Treaty of Trianon)
 - Euphemisms for Greater Hungary, eg. Carpathian Basin, Saint Stephen / Holy crown lands
 - Synonym for catastrophe, eg. “The ongoing migration crisis is like Trianon for Europe” (Fidesz Deputy House Speaker Sándor Lezsák, 2.03.2019)
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COUNTER-NARRATIVES, COUNTER-MEMORIES

- Opposition parties
 - Academia
 - Media (independent from the government)
 - Art and culture
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FRAMING BY HUNGARIAN MINORITIES ABROAD

- Hungarian political/intellectual elites abroad
- Negotiating narratives of the past with Budapest and majority populations in their countries of residence

Example: slogan by UDMR/RMDSZ (major Hungarian minority party in Romania) for the centenary of „Great Union” (unification of Transylvania, Bessarabia and Bukovina with the Kingdom of Romania) in 2018:

„1000 év Erdélyben, 100 év Romániában”

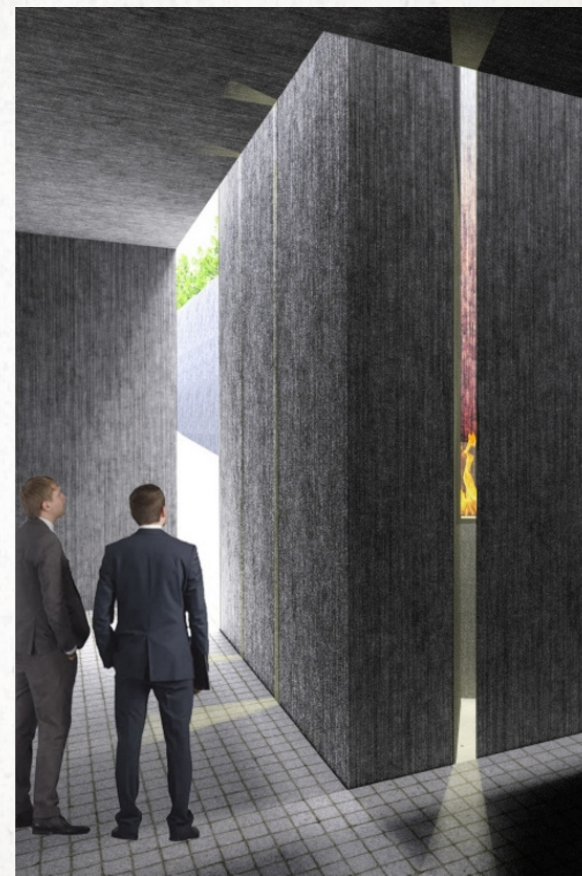
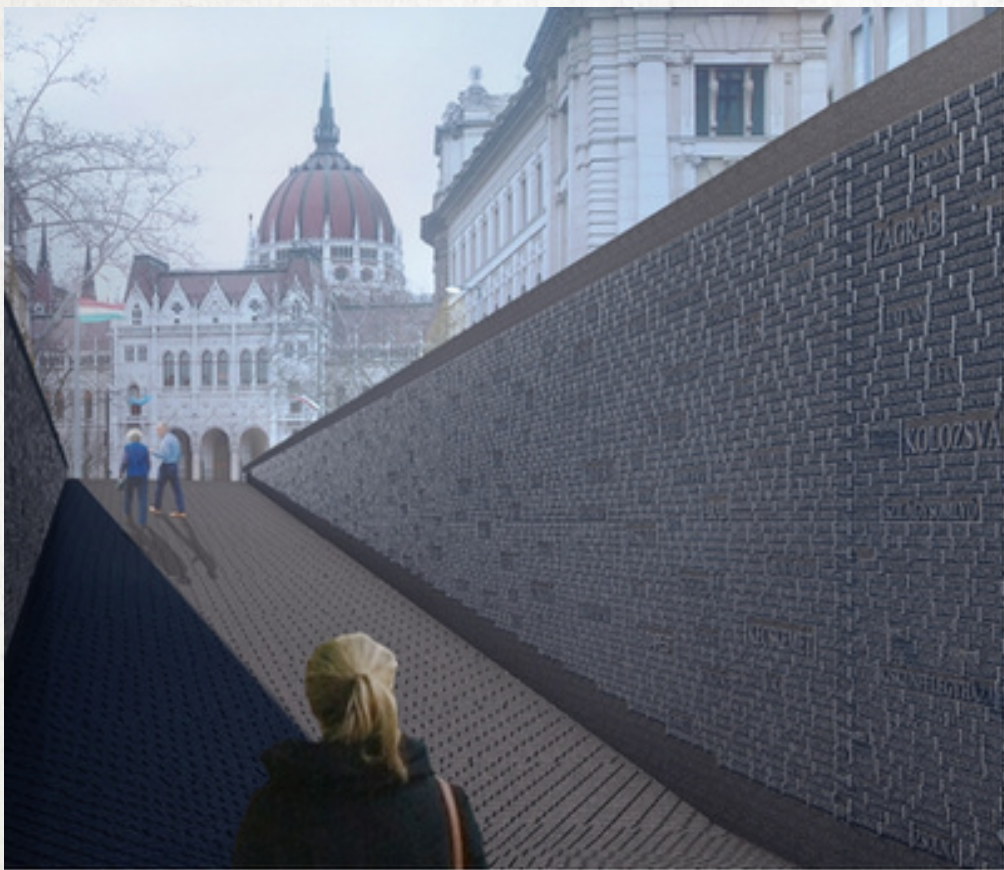
„1000 de ani în Transilvania, 100 ani în România”

NARRATIVES ON TRIANON

Mnemonic actors situating themselves between two extremities:

- **polarazing narrative:** accentuating historical grievances, sustaining the “Trianon trauma”, reinforcing negative attitudes towards neighbouring nations (as “unjust” beneficiaries of the Treaty) and bringing out revisionist sentiments (reviving the interwar irredentism);
- **conciliatory narrative:** accentuating the need of “healing old wounds”, ending the national mourning, self-reflecting (critical assessment of the causes), directed into the future (eg. need to cooperate with neighbouring countries for the common good)

MONUMENT OF NATIONAL UNITY



Source: Index.hu

TRIANON ROCK OPERA

- Mass open air show on Heroes' Sq. in Budapest
- Politics of memory in popular culture
- Semi-official character – private entreprise, but official patronage of the Deputy PM

Main narratives:

- victimhood of the Hungarian nation
- struggle against the foreign powers and domestic traitors
- return to the “golden age” under current government



Source: author's pictures