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ARTICLE

# Memory-Politics and Neonationalism: Trianon as Mythomoteur

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**Abstract**

Analyzing the newly emerged Trianon cult, this article argues that the current wave of memory politics became the engine of new forms of nationalism in Hungary constituted by extremist and moderate right-wing civic and political actors. Following social anthropologists Gingrich and Banks, the term neonationalism will be applied and linked with the concept "mythomoteur" of John Armstrong and Anthony D. Smith, emphasizing the role of preexisting ethno-symbolic resources or mythomoteurs in the resurgence of nationalism. Special attention will be given to elites who play a major role in constructing new discourses of the nation and seek to control collective memories, taking their diverse intentions, agendas, and strategies specifically into consideration. This "view from above" will be complemented with a "view from below" by investigating the meanings that audiences give to and the uses they make of these memories. Thus, the analysis has three dimensions: it starts with the analysis of symbols, topics, and arguments applied by public Trianon discourses; it continues with the analysis of everyday perceptions, memory, and identity concerns; and finally ends with an anthropological interpretation of memory politics regarding a new form of nationalism arising in the context of propelling and mainstreaming populist right-wing politics. The main argument of this article is that although the Hungarian Trianon cult, identified as national mythomoteur, invokes a historical trauma, it rather speaks to current feelings of loss and disenfranchisement, offering symbolic compensation through the transference of historical glory, pride, and self-esteem within a mythological framework. This article is part of a larger effort to understand the cultural logic and social support of new forms of nationalism in Hungary propelled by the populist far right.

**Keywords:** history; memory; commemoration; memory politics; nationalism; neonationalism; discourse; Hungary; Eastern Europe; Central Europe

## Memory Politics and Neonationalism

Issues related to the past and its commemoration reemerged as pressing concerns at the moment when the young Hungarian democracy began to exhibit serious signs of crisis. The signs of this renewed preoccupation with the past are manifold. They range from the overburdening of legal and political discourses with historical references, through the erection of hundreds of new statues all over the country, to the commemoration of historical events that were irrelevant or in some cases even unacknowledged. Nevertheless, this was not the first time that historical symbols acquired an importance in Hungary's post-communist history. Historical revisionism and commemorative practices had contributed to the symbolic breakdown of the communist system (Gal 1991; Hann 1990; Hofer 1992; Verdery 1999; Zempléni 2002) and created new ways of legitimization in a situation where former mechanisms of legitimacy have suddenly ceased to operate (Gyáni 1993, 902–903). The "search for a usable past" supported mainly the revival of national myths, symbols, and narratives—of "the memory-nation connection" (Olick and Robbins 1998). However, as a case

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study analyzing the 150 anniversaries of the revolutions in 1848 revealed, the concept of democracy and common European values were also symbolically legitimized—though with varying effects—through historical references to historical moments of pre-communist times (Brubaker and Feischmidt 2002).

A specific relation to the past that anthropologists have exposed in recent years is the nostalgia of state socialism. Moreover, they claimed that as much the Holocaust becomes a paradigm for research in memory studies, works on nostalgia are paradigmatically East European (Ange and Berliner 2015; Todorova and Gille 2010). Furthermore a causal relationship between the nostalgia of socialism and rampant feelings of insecurity and disenfranchisement have been identified. In her path-breaking work on post-communist nostalgia, Daphne Berdahl conceptualized *Ostalgie* as a form of resistance (Berdahl 2010).

This article focuses on a newer wave of memory politics—one that commemorates national trauma and defeat partially following the logic of ethnic mythologies of the immediate post-socialist period and partially fitting to the "fabric of nostalgia" anchored in collective feelings of loss in the last decade. Colovic (2002) and Zubrzycki (2006, 2011) have identified the power of symbolic actions and mythologies in the resurgence of Serbian and Polish nationalism as well as in legitimizing radical political changes in these countries far before us. A similar fundamental political transformation has been legitimized more recently in Turkey by reinterpreting the founding moments of the Turkish nation and reshaping the public understanding of its history (Çinar and Has 2017). Similarly Chris Hann (2015) has proven (using the example of Ópusztaszer) how politicians manipulate the national past in Hungary to authenticate the political representation of a national grandeur.

This article argues that the current wave of memory politics became the engine of new forms of nationalism in Hungary constituted by extremist and moderate right wing civic and political actors. Following social anthropologists Gingrich and Banks (2006, 6), the term neonationalism will be applied, which emphasizes the reemergence of nationalism in relation to far-right populist politics and to symbolic strategies manipulating notions of national culture and history. Nevertheless, to understand the connection of memory politics to reemergence of nationalism, an old concept of nationalism studies will be applied: "mythomoteur" or myth-symbol complex. The term was introduced by John Armstrong (1982) to indicate the vital role of myths and symbols and was further developed by Anthony Smith (1988) to mark the centrality and continuity of constitutive myths. In a later book, Smith (1999, 253) emphasizes the role of preexisting ethno-symbolic resources or mythomoteurs in the resurgence of nationalism. Following the late Anthony Smith and further constructivist scholars, I pay special attention to elites who play a major role in constructing new discourses of the nation and seek to represent collective memories, taking their diverse intentions, agendas, and strategies specifically into consideration (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008; Smith 2011). This "view from above" will be complemented with a "view from below" by investigating the meanings that audiences give to and the uses they make of these memories.

Chris Hann recently analyzed the recovery of the national mythomoteur in the context of a particular Hungarian village. My theoretical ambition is similar, though with a somewhat different methodology. Instead of focusing on one locality, I will concentrate on a single issue of memory politics: the reemergence of the discourse on "national trauma" in relation to the Trianon Treaty and the historical nostalgia related to the pre-Trianon "golden age" of the nation that is symbolized as "Greater Hungary." Although I consider the investigations pursued by critical historiographers relevant to this analysis, my approach differs also from theirs. A social anthropological perspective will be applied by focusing on objects of memory politics (commemorative events, historical myths, and symbols) as well as its agents. Everyday discourses will be also examined by considering structural abilities of the post-communist, neocapitalist context. Moreover, the problem of how memory politics propels new forms of nationalism as well as its impact on national identity will be also addressed.

Finally, there is an effort to analyze the Hungarian case in a comparative framework by showing how a semiperipheral capitalism characterized by a shortage of other resources seeks to create symbolic capital through the manipulation of the past and the production of its mythic visions.

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The second section of this article provides a short overview of the discursive field wherein divergent representations of Trianon are produced. This overview will be followed by four subsequent sections that deal with different actors who are involved in recovery of the Trianon mythomoteur. I begin by briefly addressing the memory politics of the state and academic discourses, before devoting attention to discourses of public history and far-right politics. My main argument is that various far-right organizations decisively shaped the Trianon discourse and used it as a tool to subvert the basic political consensus and taboos of the post-communist period. While the intentions of these groups have thus far prevailed, there also other actors who seek to offer a less radical interpretation and move the symbol toward the political mainstream by focusing attention on the present-day dispersion of Hungarians and calling for an ethnic perception of the nation. The last part of the article analyzes various semipublic discourses of everyday actors. Based on these data, a neo-Durkheimian explanation of historical nostalgia is adopted, which says that although the Trianon commemorations invoke a historical trauma, they rather speak to current feelings of loss and disenfranchisement, offering symbolic compensation through the transference of historical glory, pride, and self-esteem within a mythological framework.

## Memory Politics in Hungary: Strategies and Agencies of the Trianon Discourse

Hungary lost large territories (along with two-thirds of its population) after the First World War. The Trianon Treaty (signed in 1920) left a long-lasting impact on historical consciousness as well as national identity. This is evident from the oft-cited phrase "*Magyar az, akinek fáj Trianon*" ("A Hungarian is someone who grieves Trianon"), which also highlights the emotional charge carried by the historical trauma.

Hungarian scholars identified two antagonistic strategies that political elites have later adopted in relation to Trianon. They claim that elites have alternated between an effort to emphasize the topic "on the agenda" (interwar period) and an attempt to "silence" the issue (communist period). However, according to Vásárhelyi (2007), the regime change brought about a novel situation in that the two strategies were simultaneously present in the Hungarian public sphere after 1989. Historian Gergely Romsics (2006, 50) came to a similar conclusion. Analyzing parliamentary speeches between 1990 and 2002, he concluded that there is a clear distinction between the right-wing rhetoric (which emphasizes historical grievances from an ethnic and/or historical point of view) and the left-liberal discourse (which focuses on the topic's negative impact on society).

I have come to think of Trianon discourses in a slightly more complex way. One discursive strategy is the detachment from the emotional aspects of the historical event, which is related either to a past-oriented approach (its proponents emphasize the historical causes of the territorial division) or to a more present-oriented approach, which denies nostalgia by a pragmatic acceptance of territorial division. The other discursive strategy consists of elevating the Trianon discourse into the emotive and symbolic domain with a view to evading a clash with pragmatic pressures. This strategy can also be related with a past- or a present-oriented approach. The former strives to recover the national unity through a reenactment of a mythical past. The latter seeks to displace the loss and grief caused by Trianon by portraying ethnic Hungarians who became citizens of neighboring countries as suffering victims and to overcome the separation by enacting rituals of reunification.

These approaches tend to be followed by different types of actors (although it is not possible to neatly match approaches with actors). I begin my analysis with the Hungarian state, which has vacillated between embracing and denying the Trianon trauma before settling for an in-between position after 1989. However, the state has recently shifted strategy, when the new right-wing government led by the Fidesz party officially embraced the Trianon trauma after 2010. Academics were critical of such attempts due to the emotional detachment that characterizes scholarly practice. The majority of historians, however, also admit that they have adopted a special position in relation to Trianon. This has to do with the fact that the influence exercised by other actors renders an

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objectivist stance very difficult to sustain. One such category of actors that I analyze is the agents of public history who exert significant influence through the maintenance of memorial houses, the publication of historical magazines, and the building of a nostalgia industry. These actors are, however, not alone on the turf of myth-building. The civic and political organizations situated on the far-right end of the ideological spectrum were the first to initiate public events on the Trianon topic, and these actors continued to dominate commemorative activities in recent times when the nationalist government has appropriated it successfully. In what follows, I analyze the symbolic work performed by each of these actors and also show how their strategies and achievements have influenced each other.

## Mainstreaming Trianon: The Hungarian State Celebrating the Extraterritorial Nation

Without doubt, the most significant recent change in the public memory of Trianon is a remarkable shift in the discourse of the Hungarian state. This is part of a more general shift in the direction of identity politics. This shift is most clearly visible in the new Fundamental Law, whose preamble identifies national values and traditions as the foundations of the political community. Here, I would like to emphasize the new law, whereby "the National Assembly declare[d] the 4th of June, the day of the enforced Peace Treaty of Trianon of 1920, a Day of National Cohesion" (Act No. 45 of 2010).

The preamble of the Law on the Testimony for National Cohesion calls the "Peace Treaty signed on the 4th of June, 1920 … one of the greatest tragedies of Hungarian history" and emphasizes the "political, economic, legal, and psychological problems [that] remain unresolved to this day." The second section of the law takes a stance both against revisionist politics (pursued by the far-right) and universalism (pursued by the left-liberal elite). The third section asserts the existence of a "single Hungarian nation" and states that the unity of Hungarian individuals and communities should be based on "cross-border cohesion." The fourth section attempts to connect regret for lost territorial integrity with historical self-criticism and declares a "national commitment" toward the minority communities living outside the current territory of the state: "The Hungarian National Assembly feels obliged to call upon present members of the Hungarian nation and those of future generations to strive for national cohesion…."

In the speech he gave at the first official commemoration of the Memorial Day for the Treaty of Trianon, former president László Sólyom emphasized the event's decisive influence on Hungarian national identity, Hungary's relationship with cross-border Hungarian minority communities, and various peoples living in neighboring countries. He pointed out that the significance of the commemoration resides in its effort to nurture a sense of unity:

> The Hungarian nation exists through the cultural nation in Hungary, the mother country, through the autochthonous Hungarian communities in the neighboring countries, and through the Hungarian diaspora throughout the world. Hungary on the other hand is also a multinational country that recognizes its national and ethnic minorities as being constituent parts of the state. Our position thus comes with numerous responsibilities. As we now declare our unity, it is paramount to identify the present-day genuine structure of our nation, the pending tasks of the mother country, and the various needs of the minority communities abroad. However, having the knowledge and the will-power is not sufficient. We also need to resolve the emotive dimension in the two-fold task of upholding our national unity and improving our relation with neighboring peoples. In this, too, we need to seek for a new path.

The text of the law and the presidential speech mirror a clear tendency to promote a Hungarian national identity defined by historical traditions and ethno-linguistic commonality as opposed to a citizenship-based national community. In this sense, the celebration of National Cohesion constitutes a foundational event, which—through its yearly commemoration—reinforces the legitimacy

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of the concept of ethnic citizenship. It is important to note that this concept was later codified into law through the reform of the citizenship law. These two legal texts, together with the choreography of the official commemoration of Trianon, have cast a shadow over the geopolitical status quo in the Carpathian Basin.

The ambiguity of the historical legacy and of the nation's ethnicization have continued to characterize the memory politics of the right-wing government in recent years. The self-reflexive tone—introduced by Sólyom—has, however, all but disappeared. The same has happened with a later endeavor: that of incorporating professional discourses into the state's memory politics. This is, for instance, evidenced by a permanent exhibition entitled "We, the Hungarians" ("*Mi, magyarok*") inaugurated in 2015 but closed two years later without any explanation. The exhibition was hosted by The House of Hungarianness (*Magyarság Háza*), a public institution devoted to supporting the development of "Hungarian-Hungarian relations" and the promotion of "national values." The exhibition strived to transcend the tragic view of the nation by emphasizing past achievements and linking them to the challenges of the present. Combining new perspectives with new technologies and an emphasis on everyday life, the exhibition achieved a high degree of interactivity.

As mentioned previously, the current conservative government has appropriated the historical legacy of Trianon. This is still true, though there is clear evidence that memory politics and historical nostalgia became less important in public discourses on the nation than the discourses on enemies made topical with references to the threat of migration since 2015. The nationalization of the public memory of Trianon has been achieved by a historical narrative focused on national pride anchored in the pre-Trianon period and by promoting the ethnic bond unifying Hungarians living in and outside the current borders of the country. In the latter case, ethnic unity is evoked through the celebration of various historical symbols that were invented by late-19th-century romantic nationalists. The mythic bird, the *Turul*, is one of the key symbols of this ethnic mythology. In a speech he gave at the Ópusztaszer memorial, prime minister Orbán alluded to the bird's role in the healing of the Trianon trauma: "[The *Turul*] reminds us that every Hungarian is responsible for every other Hungarian. The Hungarian nation is a world nation because the boundaries of the country do not coincide with those of the nation. … This statue tell us that there is only one country, which is capable of uniting all Hungarians on both sides of the Trianon border into a single community. (Hann 2015, 141).[1] The website Kurultaj, "the annual assembly of the Hun-Turkic nations," an event inspired by the interwar idea of Turanism celebrating the Eastern ancestry and kinship of the Hungarians, has published a commemorative article called "The Future which Overwrites Trianon Has Started." Seen from the perspective of the unity of the "Turanic" nations celebrated in Ópusztaszer and Bugac, the home country that unifies Hungarians is not Hungary as a political unit but the "Carpathian-basin" as a naturalized ethnic unit.[2]

This section has addressed the radical shift of state politics toward issues of memory, emphasizing how Trianon was used to legitimize the ethnic reconceptualization of the nation. I highlighted two divergent ways of representing the nation: through the symbols of ethnic mythology (exemplified by the prime minister's reference to the Turul) and through the link to modernity (exemplified by the fugitive exhibition "We, the Hungarians" and the speech of the former state president) claiming the clear prioritization of the former in recent years. The next section addresses the intellectual sources of the historical discourse.

## Divergent Academic Approaches to the "Trianon Trauma"

Trianon has always been a focus of Hungarian historiography, and this very intense academic interest has generated manifold controversies and debates. Historian Ignác Romsics gives a short outline of dominant historiographic perspectives on Trianon during three important periods of the 20th century: the Horthy period, the coalition period (1945–1947), and the Kádár period. He shows

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that the revisionist politics of the Horthy regime were supported by two types of argumentation: a historical narrative promoting the cultural and political superiority of Hungarians and a discourse that combined ethnic and geographic notions in order to present "the Central Danube Basin" as a unitary region from geopolitical and economic points of view (Romsics 2010, 8–9). The coalition period was characterized by a dominating critical perspective, which addressed the negative consequences of the revisionist era. In the first decades of state socialism, the goal of "reckoning with our own revisionists and chauvinists" over-ruled all other interpretative attempts (Romsics 2010, 9). Perspectives emphasizing the need for a release from the trauma caused by wartime losses—together with the assumption of responsibility for cross-border Hungarian minorities—only returned into Hungarian politics and public discourse in the 1970s. Most of the historians working on this topic agree that the present-day engagement with Trianon is motivated by the actual trauma that was preserved in social memory and forms an integral part of national identity. Scholars have also highlighted that the symbol has become connected to the cause of Hungarian minority communities and have stressed that historians cannot disregard this relationship (Ablonczy 2010; Romsics 2010; Zeidler 2003).

Not all scholars agree with this interpretation. Refuting the "continuity thesis," sociologist and historian Éva Kovács has articulated a radically different interpretation for the survival of the trauma:

> One can easily see, that for long time now, the memory of Trianon has not been fueled by our first-hand experience nor been part of our communicative memory. There is almost no one left to remember Trianon personally. What we know today about Trianon comes from cultural memory. Trianon has become a *lieu de mémoire* (Pierre Nora) and a part of memory politics. As a consequence, the various uses of Trianon belong to an ideology which appropriates historical debates to be instrumentalized in the service of politics, giving a new shape to existing attitudes. Unfortunately, in our case these attitudes do not enhance a disposition towards patriotism, but intensify the feelings of xenophobia, revanche, and ressentiment which can be found more or less in all societies. (2010, 50)

Kovács's argument is that the popular public history discourse on Trianon, which she calls "Trianonizing," serves as an instrument for clouding or sidelining the unsettling memory of the Holocaust. Gábor Gyáni agrees with Éva Kovács regarding the close connection between the persistent significance of the Trianon cult and the unsettling memory of the Holocaust. He, however, proposes an alternative explanation for the popularity of Trianon: "There is no other historical referent in Hungarian history [aside Trianon], which could assume the function of the quintessential Hungarian lieu de mémoire" (Gyáni 2012a, 2012b; translation mine).

An outstanding achievement in the creation of *lieux de memoire* is the volume edited by the historian Miklós Zeidler and published in 2003 as the second tome of the Nation and Memory series. This volume contains the most comprehensive collection of historical sources about the First World War, including documents of the Peace Conference and Peace Treaty in Paris, as well as material on the revisionist politics that prepared the field for the Treaties of Vienna (1938 and 1940). The second part of this monumental work deals with the political and public memory of Trianon in the interwar period and after the Second World War; it covers the search for alternative political visions, and includes essays written by public intellectuals alongside documents from the popular culture of revisionism. The volume also contains a separate chapter on "scientific memory" (covering the main issues and approaches of academic work dealing with Trianon) and some newer studies investigating the cultural memory of Trianon (Trianon in historical consciousness, Trianon as national trauma, Trianon in literature, Trianon legends, Trianon in popular culture). As the 100th anniversary of the Peace Conference and Treaty in Paris approached, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences launched a research program, which, according its leader, the historian Balázs Ablonczy,[3] promotes new research on the social consequences of the Trianon Treaty affecting local

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societies and international relations in the region, as well as publications promoting transnational professional discourse.

There is a close relationship between the memory of Trianon and Hungarian nationalism. Most of the above referred authors agree that Trianon is a *lieu de memoire* endowed with the potential of becoming a central political symbol. "But when?" one could ask, taking inspiration from the classic question of nationalism studies, "When is the nation?". In relation to the latest revival, Zeidler reiterated the important link between the resurgence of "Trianonization" and nationalism as a political project:

> In the midst of the heated public discussions that took place in the period of the political transition Trianon was once again resurrected as a public and political issue. Those who introduced the theme into public debates were representatives of the cultural and political elite who characterized themselves as nationally minded or nationally committed. They identified as opponents of those who sought to keep the topic within the framework of academic investigation in order to avoid the subjective and symbolic reapplication of Trianon. (2003, 11)

## Public History: Old Mythology for a New Nationalism

While the academic community, represented by researchers working in the fields of political, intellectual, and social history (Ablonczy 2010; Kovács 2010, 2011; Michela and Zahorán 2010; Romsics 2010; Zeidler 2002, 2003), as well as the sociology of knowledge (Gyáni 2012a, 2012b), has maintained a certain distance from the practice of memory politics, other nonscientific and non-state-run institutions have sought to combine the disciplinary professionalism of history writing with the project of myth building. The most important examples of this approach are the Trianon Museum in Várpalota, the periodicals *Nagy Magyarország* [*Greater Hungary*] and *Trianoni Szemle* [*Trianon Review*], and popular musicians who place a strong emphasis on historical mythology in their work. Their common ambition is to insist on the recognition of the trauma that Trianon caused for Hungarian national identity and, more broadly, to devise a new type of memory politics that affirms their understanding of national identity and the "national interest." Their goal, in other words, is to link Hungarian national self-image to Trianon in such a way as to undermine interpretations that shadow the issue.

One of the main actors in the field of public history is the Trianon Research Institute, which publishes the *Trianoni Szemle*.[4] The institute was founded in 2007 by Gyula Fábián, senior journalist at the right-wing daily *Magyar Nemzet*; Ernő Raffay, professor of a church-run university; Gyula Zeke, former cultural radio host and current advisor to the prime minister; and Archimédesz Szidiropulosz, the director of the institute. The publication of the periodical was initially funded by the local government of Óbuda. Recent applications for state funding were, however, twice rejected by the National Cultural Fund and the relevant parliamentary committees. This prompted the editors to call on the readers of the daily *Magyar Hírlap* and the viewers of *Echo TV* to donate money to support the publication. However, no new issues have been published since 2013.

Szidiropulosz wrote a three-volume monograph about Trianon. One of the volumes deals with "the perception of Trianon within Hungarian society," through a collection of interviews with intellectuals, politicians, and public figures (Szidiropulosz 2004). His aim is to examine the relationship between Trianon and national identity, and he reaches the conclusion that Hungarian national identity was so severely damaged by the Treaty that it never recovered from the trauma:

> Since Trianon, we have always had to explain ourselves; we always get confused when we [are] asked about our homeland, our national belonging. Our national identity has become

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> unsettled and deformed after Trianon. The decades of communism have almost completely eliminated feelings of national belonging in Hungary, while all over the world the most natural feeling shared by people is their sense of national belonging. (Szidiropulosz 2004, 398)

Szidiropulosz states that the lack of consensus regarding the question of Trianon is caused by both generational and political factors. According to him, the main problem lies in "neoliberal" and "global" ideology, which excludes the topic of Trianon from public and scholarly discussions, because their proponents "cannot relinquish the stereotype which holds that every argument about or emotional connection to Trianon represents an extreme position" (Szidiropulosz 2004, 399).

Far less embedded in professional scholarly networks, yet wanting to play an even more significant role in the shaping of memory politics, is the Trianon Museum, which was inaugurated on June 4, 2004, in the Zichy Palace in Várpalota. The building belongs to the Trianon Museum Foundation, whose advisory board was initially led by Zsolt Bayer (a founding member of Fidesz and the country's most renowned right-wing journalist). The permanent exhibitions of the Museum commemorate the heroism of Hungarian soldiers during the First and Second World Wars ("The Relics of Hungarian Heroism and Bravado"); the revisionist movements of the Horthy regime ("About the History of the Hungarian Revisionist Movements"); the national public monuments destroyed after 1918; the poets who sang "the pain of Trianon" and "the joy and enthusiasm" experienced during the short "return of the torn-away territories" after the First (1938) and Second (1940) Vienna Treaties. One of the permanent exhibitions in the Museum commemorates the revisionist movements of the interwar period (invoking many of the slogans of the time: "Hungary does not forget!"; "No revolt. But no compromise either."; "Transylvania is ours."; "Justice to Hungary!"; "What was once, shall be again."), and the political acts of revision (the "return" in 1938 and 1940 of the territories lost as a result of the Treaty), interpreting these as moments of national self-realization.

While the left-liberal government that was in power between 2002 and 2010 did not take notice of the initiative, the new Fidesz government developed an ambivalent relationship with the institution. On one hand, the Museum receives state funding (45 million Forints in 2011, 53 million in 2012). On the other hand, it was not designated as the official commemoration place of Trianon Memorial Day. Nevertheless, the Trianon Museum received overwhelmingly positive coverage in the right-wing media.

In this section, I have presented the popular forms of memory politics, ranging from the publication of semiprofessional historical periodicals to the creation of historical memory sites (labeled as "museums"), that played important roles in the rehabilitation of the symbolic tool kit, which enabled Trianon to become the mythomoteur of Hungarian neonationalism. I argue that the proponents of professional historiography have been sidelined by the enterprise of myth building in the service of an old–new identity politics. The main purpose of Trianon discourse was to transform the approach to national history, in other words, to construct a different kind of memory politics. Having investigated the field of public history, I now turn to the political field to analyze how memory politics can be bent to the service of the political will. This analysis focuses on two directions and institutional actors within the right-wing political field: the Sixty-Four Counties Youth Movement, which calls for a revisionist solution regarding the question of Trianon, and the Jobbik Youth Movement, which created new festivities focusing on the commemoration of Trianon on the local level with a view to promoting grass-roots mobilization.

## Trianon: A Taboo-Breaking Symbol Elaborated by the Far Right

The commemorations of Trianon were not initiated by the Hungarian state but various political and civil organizations, all of which belong to the far-right side of the ideological spectrum. The most remarkable commemorative events of the early 2000s were organized by a radical youth organization, the Sixty-Four Counties Youth Movement (SFCYM). In the past few years, however, the

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local branches of the far-right party, Jobbik, have also organized Trianon commemorations in many of the towns and villages where the SFCYM has had no activity. As a consequence, the latter organization found itself compelled to increasingly radicalize its discourse with a view to maintaining a competitive edge over Jobbik-led Trianon festivities, which have targeted families and youth.

The SFCYM takes its name from the sixty-four counties which constituted Hungary before the Trianon Treaty, according to the founders of the movement. It presents itself as the only organization in the Carpathian Basin that does not recognize the borders drawn after Trianon. As the program of SFCYM states, the goal of the movement is to achieve the revision of the Treaty and the establishment of territorial autonomies. Despite its clear political goals, the organization puts a lot of emphasis on activities related to cultural events, humanitarian action, and "nationally - oriented" education. The movement, under the charismatic leadership of László Toroczkai, played a leading role in the creation of two popular musical and cultural events: the Magyar Sziget [Hungarian Island] and the Székely Sziget [Szekler Island] festivals. These initiatives relied on the dynamic "national rock" scene as a resource and entrenched the organization as a significant actor on the far right (Feischmidt-Pulay 2017).

The SFCYM has forged close ties with Jobbik. During the campaign for the 2010 parliamentary elections, the two organizations signed a cooperation agreement (together with the Magyar Gárda [Hungarian Guard] and other organizations). The strong collaboration with Jobbik became looser in the time preceding the 2018 elections, but did not prevent the SFCYM from maintaining a distinctive profile. It achieved this through the appropriation of certain themes and stylistic elements, successfully carving out its own unmistakable position on the far-right scene. It organized the first Trianon commemoration on June 4, 2001, together with the then-popular Hungarian Revisionist Movement lead by György Budaházy. In 2005, the SFCYM managed to mobilize a significantly larger crowd for the same commemoration, most likely thanks to the general shift in public opinion toward the right. In 2008, there were already several commemorations, but the SFCYM and Jobbik mobilized by far the largest crowd. The website of the organization featured a map that showed all the locations where commemorations were held simultaneously, mostly in collaboration with Jobbik's local chapters. The SFCYM focused on preparing the Budapest festivities. In recent years, Jobbik has spent additional effort on the installation of monuments in connection to Trianon commemorations. These commemorations usually take place at the site of the local Trianon memorial, provided there is one. The installation of such monuments was sometimes realized with the help of the church or local government.

The new generation of far-right politicians (the so called Jobbik generation), taking advantage of the popularity of local Trianon commemorations, used its newfound strength and legitimacy to challenge the silencing strategy pursued by left-liberal elites. It thereby established Trianon as a symbol on which a novel kind of anti-establishment politics could be built. The official adoption of the symbol by the new right-wing government, and the subsequent political career of the Trianon cult, attest to the mobilizational power of Trianon. While certain figures within the ruling party, such as Zsolt Bayer, played a role in the effort to establish Trianon as a *lieu de memoire*, the decision to incorporate the commemoration of Trianon into the state's official memory politics was clearly motivated by the desire to rob an emergent political contender of a powerful mobilization tool.

## Glory and Anomie: Historical Nostalgia as Remedy for Disempowerment

In the last section, I address the discursive appropriation of the symbol of Trianon and the socially relevant meanings associated with it. According to an opinion poll conducted in 2003 (and repeated in 2007 with similar results), only 10% of Hungarians thought that the partition of the country in

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1920 was the consequence of the politics that the Hungarian state had adopted in relation to ethnic minorities, while 30% expressed the opinion that the blame should be placed on "the Jews," "the Left," and foreign powers (primarily France). Another poll highlighted the persistent relevance of Trianon. In 2007, half of respondents (twice as many as four years earlier) declared that "they cannot bow to Trianon," meaning that they did not accept the consequences of the Trianon Treaty (Vásárhelyi 2007).

Within the framework of a recent study I conducted to examine the political attitudes and national identity of young Hungarians, I had the chance to talk to members of local Jobbik organizations who were involved in the organization of Trianon commemorations in the period of 2009–2013 (Feischmidt 2014). One of my interviewees, who was active in the local Jobbik group in Dunaújváros, portrayed the Trianon commemorations as manifestations of community action and as occasions for the public expression of national identity. The leading role played by Jobbik in the organization of such events and in the mobilization of youth for community-related activities was also recognized by interviewees who were not members of Jobbik.

Among young interviewees, there was a consensus that the treaty, which "forced Hungary to give up two-thirds of its former territory," constitutes a "national tragedy." In the words of one participant: "This was a gigantic nation, and they cut its legs and arms. They left a small piece in the middle to show that there was once such a thing." The grief caused by this loss is particular in that it possesses significant mobilizational power. Its discussion triggers indignation, hatred, revenge, and revolt—emotional responses that can consequently be channeled into hostility towards the nation's enemies and symbolic action aimed at redressing the injustice. Such action is oriented toward the symbolic reconstruction of pre-Trianon Hungary ("Greater-Hungary"), which is portrayed as the natural manifestation of the Hungarian nation's economic, cultural, moral, and political supremacy over inferior neighbors.

"Greater Hungary" is not only perceived as the mirror-opposite of contemporary "smaller Hungary" but as a potential rallying 'site' for national solidarity:

> Everyone knows somewhere deep inside that Greater Hungary was a good thing. That there is this is small, puny country in Central Europe and that that's no good, and that there was this Greater Hungary, which was a fine thing. So it has in a way become a symbol. That's what has to be destroyed because it creates community. Jobbik would practically not exist if it wasn't for this. If there hadn't been Trianon then there may not have been the kind of patriotic self-defense reflex that we saw in the 1920s. Things would look very different then; Jobbik may not exist at all.

This mobilizational potential is exploited in vernacular objectifications of the Trianon cult such as car stickers depicting the icon of "Greater Hungary." An online debate conducted in 2010 revealed that the most frequently articulated arguments in support of the stickers' use was that they express solidarity toward Hungarians living in neighboring countries and that by putting them on public display one can contribute to the promotion of "historical truth"—a kind of everyday memory politics:

> This sticker depicts the old and complete Hungary. If they would teach us the true history, then everyone would know just how our neighbors managed get hold of certain parts of our dear homeland. Throughout the thousand years of Hungarian history, our kings have always considered the entirety of the Carpathian Basin as being one country (which was dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Patron of Hungary). If someone uses this sticker, all they are doing is giving voice to historical truth.

The online debate referred to above was triggered in 2010 by an article written by Balázs Ablonczy, a well-known historian who currently leads the largest scientific investigation on the memory of

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Trianon. The article was published on the online news portal *Origo.hu* under the title "Historical Hungary: The Sticker of Memory." According to Ablonczy:

> The loss of these territories—and a sizeable Hungarian population with them—was a historical event that, even today, fills many people with sadness and nostalgia. The enthrallment with lost greatness is at the same time an opium and a form of rebellion against conformity.… Those who display the sticker simply want a reminder of the empire.… [The sticker] relates to official memory as graffiti relates to canonized art. Yet, in contrast to graffiti, it only appears on one's own property and can always be removed. It is very much like a removable I Love You tattoo.

In Ablonczy's view, this manifestation of historical nostalgia does not exist in and of itself, but is part of an everyday identity (or popular identity politics) that aims to create an object of national pride, that is, a symbol which can redress a battered self-esteem: "They are only trying to demonstrate their affiliations within a society which, in their view, is disintegrating. They want to leave a mark and to find community. The use of the stickers cannot be prohibited, and it would not be advisable to do so: those pieces of paper are the signs of social anomie—representing a diversity of emotions, not threats" (Ablonczy 2008).

My interviews (Feischmidt 2014) and the online discussion both highlight the importance of remembering Trianon, as well as its direct association with the cultivation of "Hungarianness." Trianon offers an avenue for reasserting personal dignity in a situation of disempowerment. This was brought home to us by the frequent mentioning of "pride," which our interviewees (as well as the participants of the online debate) described as something that they could achieve by learning and teaching Hungarian history; participating in (or in some cases organizing) commemorative events; wearing or displaying "ancient" and once repressed historical symbols (the map of "Greater Hungary" or the Árpád-striped flag); or listening to a new type of "national rock music" disseminated by an emergent cultural industry.

I am convinced that neither historical nostalgia nor new forms of everyday nationalism can be understood independent from the sociopolitical context in which they emerge. Referring to the work of Clifford Geertz, several scholars have identified the nation as a narration—"a story which people tell about themselves in order to lend meaning to their social world" (Ram 1994, referring to Geertz; here Wodak, de Cillia, Reisigl, and Liebhart 2009, 23). It is, however, not only meaning that is at stake. Researchers who have attempted to uncover the structural drivers underpinning support for new forms of identity and memory politics have argued that the success of new right-wing cultural and political entrepreneurs would not have been possible without the presence of economic grievances that compel those who experience them to confront the ideological status quo and its defenders (Kalb 2011). The narratives of our interviewees also highlighted problems such as the disadvantaged position of labor vis-à-vis capital, the presence of unjustified social inequalities, and the state's inability to challenge these, suggesting that these play a role in the emergence of neonationalist and anti-elitist sensibilities. The analytical focus on issues of collective memory does not diminish (even less refute) the importance of socio-economic factors. Claiming that neonationalism is to a large extent driven by a profoundly "frustrated national identity" is not equal to saying that economic matters are irrelevant or secondary. To the contrary: frustrations related to "smaller Hungary" contain both cultural *and* economic aspects that are shaped, among others, by the disintegration of perspectives for social mobility and placing Hungary's position on the periphery of the European Union.

## Conclusions

This article began by recognizing the valuable insights offered by previous researchers who have pointed to the significant role played by memory politics in post-communist countries. Alongside

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Ange and Berdahl, Gyáni, Hann, Todorova, and Gille, I have also argued—through a focus on the rehabilitation of the memory of Greater Hungary and Trianon in the 2000s—that issues of memory have recently reemerged as a central focus of politics and public culture. The analysis I presented can be read also as a follow-up to an article published by ethnologist Tamás Hofer in 1992 in which, taking cue from Bourdieu, he analyzes the social functions and embeddedness of memory politics. With his analysis in mind, I claim that the struggle between emergent elite groups after the change of regime for control over historical symbols and memory was not a unique event. The recent return of the iconography and discourse of revisionism to the public realm suggests that Hungarian society turns to historical symbols in situations of uncertainty. Furthermore, it also demonstrates that when a new generation of politicians sets out to define its position within the Hungarian political arena, it too chooses historical symbols to achieve its goals.

While elite groups played a key role in the establishment of the iconography and memory politics of the new democratic regime, my analysis highlights radical right-wing organizations' efforts to construct novel *lieux de memoire* and a counter-hegemonic memory politics. This effort was centered on the resurrection of the Trianon trauma through local commemorations of the anniversary of the Trianon Treaty, which had been banned under the state socialist period and continued to be neglected by left-liberal elites after the change of regime. I argue that this strategy was greatly helped by popular forms of memory politics, ranging from the publication of semi-professional historical periodicals to the creation of historical memory sites. These played important roles in the rehabilitation of a historically loaded symbolic tool kit, which enabled Trianon to become the mythomoteur of Hungarian neonationalism. This has been achieved by expelling professional historiography and creating space for a historicizing identity politics. The latter was enacted by (typically young) activists associated with the Jobbik party and revisionist movements who began to organize commemorative events in local communities from the beginning of the past decade. Their success in attracting sympathy and a growing number of followers was not only enabled by the proponents of public history but also increasing frustration, which gripped wide segments of society, with the project of regime change and the elites who steered the country through the period of transition. The invention of this old–new political tradition could only have a powerful social effect because it was broadcast "on a wavelength to which the public was ready to tune in" (Hobsbawm 1987, 263). The Trianon cult in Hungary addressed a widespread need for collective self-esteem and personal pride by providing adherents the opportunity to express grievances, channeling grievance into anger against elite groups, and offering an avenue for overcoming collective trauma through the symbolic assertion of national unity and superiority.

The success of "Trianonization" is most clearly evidenced in the reaction it elicited from the mainstream right. Recognizing the power of the discourse and associated symbols, the right-wing governments since 2010 entrenched the commemoration of the "national tragedy" as a key element of the state's memory politics.[5] Although state-sponsored rituals have sought to domesticate a countercultural movement, the narratives focusing on the Trianon trauma retain a subversive—not to say explosive—potential. This is because as a mythomoteur for present-day Hungarian nationalism, the Trianon cult has set in motion a novel kind of nation-building process. Trianon clearly constitutes a watershed between the political and the ethnic conceptions of nationhood. The example of the renewed Trianon cult shows that radical shifts in politics—in this case, the shift from a presentist republican to a historicist ethnic conception of the nation—takes place through the activation of a previously suppressed symbolic repertoire that bears the imprints of its previous uses.

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## Notes

1 Many thanks for Chris Hann for the translation of this part of the speech.
2 I am grateful to Katrin Kremmler for calling my attention to this junction of Trianon commemorations and the idea of Turanism.
3 Publications and reports of the research are available from their webstite: https://tti.btk.mta.hu/lendulet/trianon-100/2579-trianon-100.html
4 In many ways similar to Nagy Magyarország, published by Kárpátia Studio and connected to the website www.tortenelemportal.hu.
5 Most of the empirical evidence used for this article derives from 2009–2013. Historical nostalgia became secondary since 2015, while xenophobic propaganda and securitization of the nationalist discourse became more prominent in Hungary. See Thorleifsson (2017).

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