Peace without Transitional Justice

Cultural Heritage as a Means of Taming Collective Memory on the Example of Post-Trianon Hungary

Mirosław Michał Sadowski

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2048-2073

Abstract

In the past several decades, the concept of transitional justice (TJ) has been applied to various societies both past and present. TJ is linked to reconciliation, which was supposed to be the ultimate goal of a transition from a non-democratic regime to a democratic one. Reconciliation, and therefore TJ, are thus seen as preconditions for peace by the majority of scholars currently in the field. This position, however, loses sight of other potential approaches towards the understanding of social processes amongst major changes and tends to preclude other narratives. For instance, TJ is still used to explain various events taking place in Central and Eastern Europe today, over thirty years since the transition. This chapter takes a different path, showing that also where no transitional justice – and no reconciliation – took place, the transmission of collective memories of trauma through cultural heritage can still achieve peace. My case study is Hungary after the Treaty of Trianon (1920), an event that continues to be immortalised in numerous monuments spanning every political era in Hungary. While these monuments – and other objects of cultural heritage created in the treaty's wake – stand for the antithesis of transitional justice's goal of reconciliation, keeping the collective memory of the national trauma of losing two-thirds of territory alive today – following other disastrous events of the twentieth century – their presence evokes and facilitates peace. Still reminders of trauma and minders of counter-memories in relation to its neighbours, Hungary's Trianon monuments have become a vital part of national identity. At the same time, I argue, their role is more of

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carriers of peace rather than means of revisionism, catalysing, as reminders of a ‘glorious’ – but in reality much more complicated – past, much ongoing resentment towards Hungary’s neighbours, thus realising cultural heritage’s peacebuilding value in a convoluted but nonetheless effective way. Following a theoretical introduction to cultural heritage’s relationship with collective memory and transitional justice, as well as its role in maintaining peace and relationship with monuments and identity, I move to the question of the Trianon Treaty. I trace its origins and reverberating effects over the past hundred years, ultimately focusing on the monuments commemorating the treaty as both carriers of memory and objects of cultural heritage. I conclude by showing their peacebuilding role as catalysts of collective memories of trauma, thus sketching out the links between the legal (Trianon Treaty), the political (construction of monuments as a major part of Hungary’s cultural heritage and official narrative) and the social (the monuments’ role in sustaining – and placating – collective memory). In doing so, I hope to uncover an alternative account of the intimate details of the relationship between cultural heritage and peace, one that taps into narratives that do not necessitate the full conceptual apparatus, institutional machinery, and political load of transitional justice.

Keywords

cultural heritage, monuments, transitional justice, Trianon Treaty, Hungary, collective memory

Introduction

For all of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th the Habsburg empire, since 1867 known as Austro-Hungary, stood as a *constans* amongst the changing Europe – and world – with the Emperor Franz Joseph, on the throne since the Springtime of the Peoples (1848-1849) until 1916, presiding over a country of contrasts, be that geographical, ethnic or religious, dubbed "Europe in a nutshell" (Csáky 2014, 190-191).

Whether there existed a Habsburg identity or a Habsburg society has been much debated over the years (Bruckmüller 2006, 1-2); however, there is no doubt that the whole country, and not only the "Austro" part of Austro-Hungary (known as Cisleithania), became unified in many ways in the second half of the 1800s, with a common economic and customs area, universal military conscription and single diplomatic representation. At the same time, within one country, there existed two state citizenships: Austrian and Hungarian (ibid, 14-15).

Ever since the 1867 Austro-Hungarian Compromise (*Ausgleich, kiegyezés*), the Habsburg Empire became officially more than a sum of its parts, with the second half – the Kingdom of Hungary – given large liberties in the matters of legislation, economy and public administration. Importantly, this other part of the Empire not only comprised Hungarians but also included Slovaks, Romanians, Ukrainians, Croatians, Serbs and other minorities who, as it became clear over the years leading up to 1918 much to their despair, were supposed to come together under one banner of Magyar nationalism through the process of enforced Magyarization (Varga 2020, 9-15)

Ultimately, "with the end of World War I, the Habsburg Monarchy dissolved into a variety of nation-states" (Csáky 2014, 187). What became a moment of freedom and independence for a number of countries that were born or reborn on the rubble of Austro-Hungary (e.g., Czechoslovakia, Poland, Ukraine – the latter only for a brief period), for Hungary – which itself regained independence after a long time – was a moment of national

tragedy, with the 1920 Trianon Peace treaty – analysed in greater detail below – becoming an intergenerational symbol of national loss. The purpose of this paper is to analyse how these processes of memorialisation have been taking shape over the years, becoming elements of the Hungarian cultural heritage, with a particular focus on contemporary times, approaching these phenomena from the perspective of transitional justice and peace processes following the dissolution of Austro-Hungary.

The chapter is structured as follows: in the first, theoretical part I introduce the concept of a cultural heritage – collective memory – transitional justice (CHCMTJ) nexus, analysing the relationships between the three elements and their resultants, i.e., the questions of identity, peace, and commemorative monuments; the second part is devoted to the place of the Trianon treaty in the Hungarian collective memory and national identity; in the third part, I provide an overview of the spatial memorialisation of the Trianon trauma in Hungary; and finally, in the conclusions, I analyse these practices of commemoration from the viewpoint of the CHCMTJ nexus while also putting forward some more general remarks on the nature of this multifaced relationship.

The Cultural Heritage – Collective memory – Transitional Justice Nexus

The impact cultural heritage has on a society, and, in certain cases, all of humanity, does not relate only to its historical and aesthetic aspects; rather, it depends on the relationships heritage has with the different processes taking place within a group it has been placed in and, in most contemporary instances, also created by (however, throughout history, there have been many instances of heritage being placed by the oppressor, e.g., communist monuments in CEE) (Sadowski 2020, 220-221).

While this is not the place for a detailed study of all the different interactions cultural heritage has within society, I propose to focus on the two key relationships from the viewpoint

of my research – with collective memory and with transitional justice – together creating a nexus that allows for the analysis of the questions of identity, peace process and the role of monuments within it (see Figure 1 below).

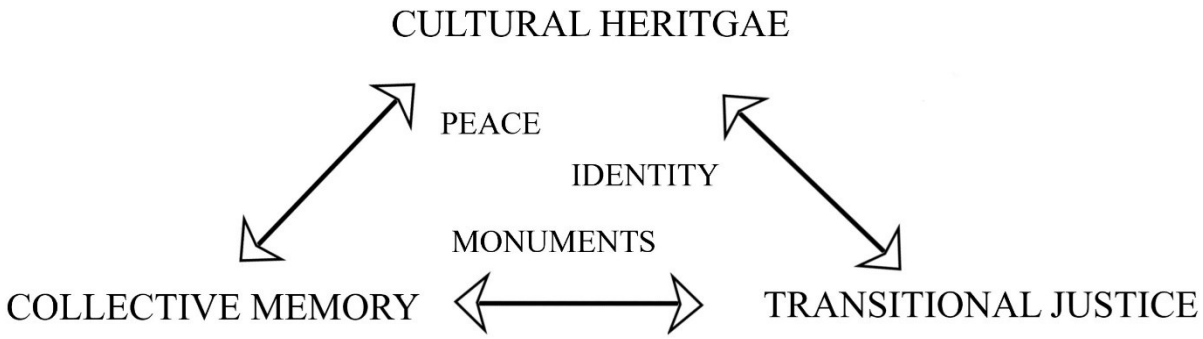

Figure 2.1: The cultural heritage – collective memory – transitional justice (CHCMTJ) nexus (source: Author).

Before moving to the analysis of the respective relationships, I first introduce the three key concepts. Cultural heritage may be defined as "the tangible and intangible products of cultural past," including built heritage, landscapes or traditions, which are "of notable historical, social, religious, artistic, architectural, etc., importance for the local, regional, national and (or) global community which has a dynamic relationship with them based on collective memory," which leads to the heritage being protected by law from destruction and, in some cases, even from reconfiguration (Sadowski 2022, 101).

In turn, collective memory can be perceived as "a social memory, one which is not created individually, but within a group, with one person having a wide array of collective memories functioning on different levels," e.g., familial, educational, work-related, and which is not free from influences, in particular by the authorities "both on the local and the national level" (Sadowski 2020, 221), as it is with the Trianon narrative in Hungary.

Last, transitional justice is a concept that encompasses "the various processes taking place following a regime change, including the different mechanisms employed to manage the legal, political and social aspects of the transition" with the goals of a peaceful transition to a democratic order, rehabilitation and retribution, as well as "nation-building, social

transformation based on shared collective memories, and reconciliation", which are of particular interest here (Sadowski and Zavarei 2023, 8).

The first of the elements of the nexus that needs to be investigated is the relationship between cultural heritage and collective memory. The two concepts are closely linked, given that, as de Clippele poignantly notes, "heritage offers a narrative of the past in order to transfer it to future generations," thus providing "a tangible support to the present memory of such narratives, by preserving physical remains of the past" (2021, 625). Not only is collective memory clearly "related to space," which becomes particularly visible within the urban landscape, but heritage also takes on the role of an unwavering keeper – and carrier of memories among the changing times (Ringas et al. 2011, 185).

As such, a landscape is no mere "background for human activity;" rather, it is "an entity that interacts with humans in their everyday life and, therefore, contributes to and is a part of collective memory," being one of the major elements in the establishment of "identities and a sense of belonging," as landscapes become "engraved in people's memories" (Boreiko 2020, 72; 74). This phenomenon was observed already by the creator of the collective memory concept, Maurice Halbwachs, who also remarked upon the ways in which cultural objects "help the ruling power […] control or delay the inevitable shifts in the collective memory" of the social group in question. (Bilsel 2017, 5). It needs to be noted that exactly which memories are chosen to be "visible (or invisible)" in public spaces is a result of "people's commemorative decisions and actions as embedded within and constrained by particular sociospatial conditions" (Rose-Redwood et al. 2008, 161), especially on the part of the state, typically taking on the role of "the steward of cultural heritage" (de Clippele 2021, 624).

Importantly, the collective memory stored in cultural heritage relates not only to the positive aspects of the past but "also consists of trauma, social discord, political oppression and resistance" (Bilsel 2017, 2). It is in particular "in times of political change and conflict" that the

various groups, including the nation, establish places of commemoration in the hopes of giving "legitimacy of their public identities and histories" (Rose-Redwood et al. 2008, 161-162). For this reason, heritage also has a particular relationship with transitional justice, which forms the second element of the CHCMTJ nexus.

Given the importance of cultural heritage for a group's identity, it is perhaps surprising that the traditional transitional justice discourse does not give much focus to the importance of links between the two (Deacon 2022, 218), with the different truth (and reconciliation) commissions – the most typical transitional mechanism employed following a conflict – created internationally over the years failing to address even the most pertinent heritage-related issues, i.e., the destruction of tangible cultural heritage (Coakley and McAuliffe 2022, 313-314).

The reason behind this disregard for cultural heritage by transitional justice approaches lies perhaps in the still prevalent perception that heritage is a "'luxury' if the basic needs of the population cannot be met," which ignores its aforementioned importance for the affected communities (Wartenberg 2021, 60). Nevertheless, there is a place for cultural heritage acknowledgement within the already existing transitional justice approaches, one that would allow for open discussions on the local level regarding the potentially detrimental social cohesion "memories of destruction, human rights violations, history, and the past (all of which are substantial components of heritage construction)," thus providing a basis for a stable future (Jaramillo 2015, 208), with a focus on cultural heritage helping advance the transitional justice goals (Wartenberg 2021, 63).

In that, putting the existing human rights law and heritage law into the transitional justice perspective may open new alleyways for post-conflict resolution, potentially allowing for a recalibration of "the attention on the underlying political values associated with monuments when deciding what to do about them" following a transition, as well as for more meaningful approaches to the conservation of the "sites of atrocity, reinterpreting them for the

future, promoting redress and seeking to rebuild societies after conflict" (Deacon 2022, 219). A transitional justice approach to cultural heritage could also make it possible to address "the power differentials that prevent meaningful participation by communities in their heritage," allowing for "countering harmful foundational narratives of difference and recognising the legitimacy of cultural variance" (Coakley and McAuliffe 2022, 314; 332).

Ultimately, the third element of the nexus needs to be remarked upon: the relationship between collective memory and transitional justice in the context of cultural heritage. Already visible 'on the sidelines' when analysing the links between heritage and transitional justice, it needs to be stressed that memory also has particular, direct links with the latter. Following every regime change, "whatever the history of social and political repression," the new authorities need to "deal with remembrance, reconciliation, and revenge," as without working through the difficult collective memories, they will continue to haunt the post-transition society for years to come (Curry 2007, 59), hindering reconciliation.

These memories, "differentially fragmented along the lines of gender, age, class, as well as ethnic, political, and religious affiliation," also diverge in the ways in which "they are negotiated, selected, and presented by people to order their past, to shape their present, and to show responsibility for what they imagine their future to be" (Kienzler and Sula-Raxhimi 2019, 173). As such, transitional justice mechanisms, which may "re-emphasize, re-tell or silence traumas of the past" (Orjuela 2020, 362), need to employ a variety of methods to address collective memory issues (Iturriaga 2019, 13). Some of these relate to the abovementioned matters of cultural heritage,

In the centre of the nexus lay three elements of interest for this paper: identity, peace, and monuments. The matters of identity were already introduced above; however, given that heritage as an idea "cannot be separated from the interrelated concepts of memory and identity" (McDowell 2016, 49), the latter question merits a closer investigation within these contexts.

Looking more broadly, identity should be perceived together not only with the questions of heritage and memory but also of "language; religion; ethnicity; nationalism," which are all "used to construct narratives of inclusion and exclusion that define communities and the ways in which these latter are rendered specific and differentiated," with the ultimate goal of fostering "sameness and group membership" (Graham and Howard 2016, 5).

Given that "national cohesion," as McDowell notes, "requires a sense of collective awareness and identity endorsed through common historical experience," heritage is manipulated by those in power for various goals, both positive, such as "validation, legitimisation and unity," and negative, "to challenge, refute and undermine" (2016, 41; 49). The interplay between these two will be particularly noticeable in the case of Hungary; before moving on to the study of this country, however, I propose to focus on one of the potentially positive effects of heritage on a society, which also lies at the centre of the CHCMTJ nexus, i.e., peace.

There are two main reasons why the protection of cultural heritage is linked to preserving "international peace, stability, and security," first, the proceeds from sale of looted antiquities are often used today to finance terrorism; second, given the importance of heritage for social cohesion, in post-conflict environments, it may be used as a basis for "a new, peaceful national identity," given that all "efforts to rebuild and reconcile society" need to "include discussions of glorious pasts and rich history" (Vlasic and Turku 2016, 1381-1388; 1414). This is the second reason that is particularly vital for this chapter.

It is precisely due to its direct links with the matters of identity and collective memory that the preservation and reconstruction of cultural heritage is perceived as "a normative good that can help minimise security threats, re-establish social cohesion and foster peace," with UNESCO in particular but also the International Criminal Court and the UN Security Council

promoting such narratives surrounding cultural objects and sites (Isakhan and Akbar 2022, 517; 522).

Importantly, not only preservation of previously existing heritage but also of cultural objects and spaces that appeared or acquired new meanings during the conflict (e.g., "the concentration camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau, the peace dome in Hiroshima, the bridge at Mostar in Bosnia and Herzegovina or the sunken fleet at Bikini Atoll") (Timmermans and Guerin 2015, 12), as well as of the people who disappeared during it (e.g., Sarajevo Roses or 'Stolpersteine', Stumbling Stones, commemorating the victims of the siege of the Bosnian capital and of the Holocaust, respectively) (Björkdahl et al. 2017, 6-7), are vital components of maintaining peace post-transition.

It also needs to be noted that "peacebuilding is a process that goes beyond the public interface, including design, strategic planning, staff development and long-term community engagement" (Walters et al. 2018, 1-2). While this chapter focuses on the state approaches to heritage, it needs to be remarked that not only top-down but also bottom-up initiatives play an important role in preserving heritage for establishing and or maintaining peace (Teijgeler 2015).

Nota bene, there is a certain level of danger in using heritage to foster exclusionary rather than inclusive narratives, with Holtorf provocatively proposing that "reconciliation may be easier with less heritage preserved" (2018, 641; 646). This chapter focuses on such a case of negative heritage; however, as I intend to show, it may also ultimately lead to peace.

The final theoretical point that needs to be mentioned here, also connected to the CHCMTJ nexus, as noted in Figure 1 above, is the place and role of monuments within society. While oftentimes seemingly innocuous elements of our everyday lives, as we pass them on our way to school, work or back home, as Bajec poignantly notes, "one will always question a past that is not remembered on plaques, in stone, on paper, in media" (2021, 101). After all, "all monuments are efforts, in their own way, to stop time" (Levinson 2018, 5).

Political efforts, it needs to be stressed, as monuments should be considered "mere stand-ins for broader understandings of the individuals and causes they represent" (Sleight 2018, 137), carrying a particular narrative – and a set of collective memories – with them towards the future. This political role only becomes more visible following a crisis and or a transition (Coombes 2014) when commemorative objects are used by the new authorities "to legitimate their claims on power and their visions of society" as new heroes replace the old on the pedestal (Forest and Johnson 2011, 270; 273) through the process of collective memory inversion (Sadowski and Zavarei 2023, 10), which may be perceived as amounting to propaganda in certain instances (Orzechowski and Mikołajczak 2017, 15).

Within transitional justice contexts, all cultural heritage, not only monuments, faces a certain reckoning of memory, as cultural objects associated with the previous regime may be destroyed, moved to storage, museums, or cemeteries, or recontextualised (Forest and Johnoson 2019, 129-130). To cite Niven, "memorials appear to set history in stone, but in fact they may be cultural history's most vulnerable and adaptable hardware, as capable of updates as a modern computer" (Niven 2007, 44). Following the different political and social developments over the past forty years, public spaces in various places around the world have faced a reckoning with new circumstances (Sadowski 2020), requiring a certain thinking through which collective memories should have a place in the contemporary world (Bevan 2022, 5).

Last, it needs to be remarked that among all political monuments, war memorials stand out given the particularly palpable politicisation of memory in their case. While over the years they have evolved from the traditional, 19th century monuments whose "placement in strategic key areas of public space was designed to symbolise the centrality of their message, a message often tailored to the political interests of those leaders who had conducted the war in question" to somewhat democratised spaces of collective grieving and remembering in the 20th century, their "intimate link between the cultural and the political" only became more visible (Niven

2007, 43-44). Although Trianon monuments cannot be perceived as typical war memorials, given that they commemorate a peace treaty ending one rather than a war itself, they clearly are places of mourning following a war, and they will be regarded as war memorials throughout this chapter.

Trianon and the Hungarian Identity Throughout the Years

Before moving to the analysis of monuments commemorating the Treaty of Trianon, not only its context needs to be introduced first but also its importance for the Hungarian national identity. Following the November 1918 armistice cementing the loss of the Central Powers in World War I (WWI), which included Austro-Hungary and thus the Kingdom of Hungary, the Habsburg Empire crumbled into pieces.

On its ruins, a number of independent countries were born, among them a now democratic Hungary with Mihály Károlyi as the head of the government who tried, and failed, to reign in the chaos which took over the lands of the former Kingdom of Hungary, with the new authorities losing circa 50% of its pre-war territory, as well as population, to neighbouring countries by January 1919 (Toomey 2018, 93). The chaos in Hungary continued as the country's independence remained unrecognised by the Entente, with a Bolshevik revolutionary government led by Béla Kun taking over in March 1919. The threat of the revolution spilling over to other countries only cemented the support of the Western, in particular French, powers to Hungary's neighbours, with the Romanian troops occupying large parts of the country, including Budapest, by August 1919. Ultimately, a counter-revolution with Admiral Miklós Horthy at the helm (entering the capital literally "on a white horse") took place; however, it was too late for the country to recuperate its territorial loses, which was furthered by the general lack of interest in the Hungarian cause among the allies who wanted to quickly finalise the peace negotiations (Cox 2020, 6-9).

As such, on June 4, 1920, the Treaty of Trianon was signed, confirming the surrender of over "two thirds of its [former Kingdom of Hungary's] territory and more than half of its pre-war population to Czechoslovakia, Romania, Yugoslavia, Austria and Italy," which resulted in 3,500,000 ethnic Hungarians now becoming a minority in the different countries, the state itself with a largely diminished status (Shevchenko 2018, 65), and its railway and public road systems (Menyhért 2016, 69-70), its industry, as well as economy, largely lost (Cox 2020, 4). In total, the country's population diminished from 21,000,000 to 8,000,000 inhabitants and its territory from 325,000 to 92,916 square kilometres (Gerner 2007, 79).

Among the most problematic from the perspective of the Hungarian identity were the losses of Bratislava to Slovakia, which, known as Pozsony, was Hungary's capital in the years 1571-1784, and of Transylvania to Romania, which, a part of the Hungarian monarchy since the Middle Ages, gained a symbolic place in the country's national pantheon over the course of the 19th century (Gerner 2006, 97-98). It needs to be stressed, however, that for the most part, the Treaty only confirmed the *status quo* of the 1918-1919 territorial losses, in certain cases amending the border to Hungary's benefit, clearly forcing the country to only relinquish one region – Burgenland – to Austria (however with its capital, Sopron, remaining in Hungary, following a plebiscite) (Lorman 2020, 37).

Nevertheless, the entrenchment of Trianon as a national loss in the Hungarian identity, which I discuss in detail below, was one of the main reasons for the country siding with the Axis powers in World War II (WWII), resulting in its participation in the 1941 attacks on the Soviet Union and on Yugoslavia, as well as complicity in the Holocaust (Shevchenko 2018, 65). While Hungary manged to regain some territory during that time following the 1938 First Vienna Award, assigning it parts of Czechoslovakia (Thorstensen 2012, 13), and later the 1940 Second Vienna Award, assigning it the north of Transylvania following the ethic lines (Vörös and Bretter 2022, 84-85), as well as a part of Yugoslavia following the joint invasion

(Thorstensen 2012, 13), the Trianon border returned for the most part following the loss of the Axis in WWII and the February 12, 1947 Treaty of Paris (Lorman 2020, 37).

As such, over the years, the Treaty of Trianon has become "invoked as a painful and unifying collective memory" for Hungary, "a lament," carrying such connotations as "humiliation, betrayal, deception, or threat, depending on myriad interpretations and intentions" – as Palmer and Mocan remark, Trianon's "elusiveness is what makes it powerful" to this day (2020, 52). In a way, the collective memory of Trianon overtook the space in the national imagination that might have been otherwise occupied by memories of WWI, itself tragic for Hungary (500,000 dead, 1,500,000 wounded and 1,800,000 prisoners of war), thus helping "to restore the pre-war power structure, and to stabilise the shattered social order" (Kovács 2016, 530) and providing the framework for the newly independent country's identity.

This particular place in the Hungarian national identity has been taken by the Treaty basically ever since its entering into force: during the inter-war period, a slogan *Nem, nem soha* ("No, no never") gained particular popularity, being often placed at name plaques of "the entrance doors of private houses and apartments," (Gerner 2007, 86), which was followed by another, *Magyar az, akinek fáj Trianon* ("A Hungarian is someone who grieves Trianon") (Feischmidt 2020, 132). The widespread conviction that the country has been "maimed" by the Treaty (Menyhért 2016, 73) also found its way to the national declaration of faith in the form of a belief "in the resurrection of Hungary" (Gerner 2006, 98).

During communist times, in particular since the signing of the abovementioned Treaty of Paris through the Stalinist dictatorship and until the late 1970s, "censorship and the policies regarding history in Hungary," as well as the need to uphold good neighbourly relations with other countries of the Eastern Bloc, prevented the collective memories of Trianon from being present in public life and education (Gerner 2006, 79; 82-83; 92). This attempted obscuration does not mean, however, that the Trianon question was of no importance to the general public:

as Egry remarks, the fall of the communist regime in Hungary was only accelerated by the authorities' "alleged negligence towards the Hungarian minorities," as well as "the alarming news from Nicolae Ceaușescu's national-communist Romania in the second half the 1980s" regarding their treatment (2020, 127).

Following the 1989 transition, the collective memories of Trianon returned with full force to the forefront of the public debate (although particularly on the political right) (Gyáni 2012, 103), with the first non-communist prime minister József Antall declaring himself "Prime Minister of 15 million Hungarians in spirit," thus also including nationals living outside of the Trianon border (Merabishvili 2022, 10). In the years that followed, the different political parties tried to balance the support of Hungarian minorities with maintaining a good relationship with neighbouring countries (Putz 2019, 247), as the Trianon question remained of major importance (Menyhért 2016, 82-83)

Importantly, in 2001, the so-called status law was adopted by the Hungarian parliament, granting ethnic Hungarians permission to work and study in the country, as well as giving them the possibility of receiving a state allowance, conditional on their return to the motherland (Gerner 2007, 100). Furthermore, in 2004, a Trianon museum was opened (promoting irredentist views, with this bottom-down initiative receiving significant state funding since 2010) (Feischmidt 2020, 137), and a documentary film pertaining to these matters was released, while "in popular culture it became increasingly common to re-use Trianon-wound and map images on everyday objects […], such as stickers and fluffy toys for cars" (Menyhért 2016, 83). A number of historical journals, as well as non-governmental organisations and even music groups with the goal of preserving the memory of Trianon, have also been established over the years (Gyáni 2012, 107-110).

In the present day, ever since FIDESZ's electoral victory in 2010, various questions relating to the matters of history and memory have been employed as elements in Viktor

Orbán's government illiberal politics (Sadowski 2021), as the "new Hungary" was to be created "to remedy both the ills of post-Communism (the failed change of regime) and Trianon, the dissolution of the national state" (Egry 2020, 129). As such, the latter's memory remains of major political importance: not only did Orbán use thinly veiled references to a possible redrawing of the borders in a number of his speeches since 1998, when he first became prime minister (Toomey 2018, 93) but also in 2021, the then Hungarian president János Áder compared the 1920 loss of territory by his country to the Russian occupation of Crimea, causing major outcry in neighbouring Romania (Vörös and Bretter 2022, 89), with Trianon politics ultimately proving a thorny issue between Hungary and other countries of the region (Gyáni 2012, 105) and potentially damaging to Orbán's project of building an anti-Western coalition within the European Union (Egry 2020, 132).

In the past decade, the collective memory of Trianon has also become legalised: it was enshrined in the new constitution as "one of the greatest tragedies of Hungarian history," and a new commemorative day called the Day of National Cohesion was established on its anniversary (June 4) since 2010 (Feischmidt 2020, 133). Moreover, the new citizenship law granted the possibility of obtaining citizenship to "any Hungarian-speaking descendant of Hungarian citizens who lived within the country's pre-1920 borders" (Toomey 2011, 87-88), who were to be further integrated into the everyday life of present-day Hungary through the System of National Cooperation (Gyáni 2012, 104).

All in all, Feischmidt notes, "the renewed [post-1989] Trianon cult shows that radical shifts in politics […] take place through the activation of a previously suppressed symbolic repertoire that bears the imprints of its previous uses" (2020, 141). Nevertheless, although the "sense of grievance and injustice associated with the Treaty of Trianon is deeply rooted in the Hungarian national identity," revisionist calls do "not hold much potential for political mobilisation" (Sadecki 2020, 32). I would argue that one of the main reasons for this

phenomenon lies in the anchoring of difficult collective memories in specially constructed cultural heritage.

Memorialisation of Trianon Throughout the Years

Just as the Trianon Treaty became entrenched in the Hungarian identity during the interwar period, so did its commemoration in the public landscape. The first Trianon monument was inaugurated only a year after the signing of the treaty in one of Budapest's main squares, the *Szabdaság* (Freedom) *tér*, in a ceremony attended by over 80,000 people (Abraham 2020, 110).

The monument first took the form of four statues, called 'North', 'East', 'South', and 'West', thus representing four corners of Hungary lost following the Treaty. Each statue had a different symbolic, unique to the lost region, and in 1928, the National Flagpole was constructed as an addition, a centre for the four monuments. Twenty meter high, "with a one-meter-long hand on the top (cast after Horthy's own hand)" (Thorstensen 2012, 6-9), from which an eight-meter-long Hungarian flag hang (Erőss 2022, 370), always halfway down, was inscribed with two irredentist inscriptions: Mussolini's *Le trattate non sono eterne!* ('The treaties are not eternal!') and Lord Rothermore's (British magnate sympathetic to the Hungarian cause) "Hungary's place is in the sun" (Gerner 2007, 87). (The flag was fully raised for the first time only following the abovementioned First Vienna Award in 1938) (Thorstensen 2012, 13).

The symbolic of the Flagpole was further strengthened by its base, which was "compiled of soil brought there from the territory of the 72 counties of the pre-Trianon Kingdom of Hungary, from major historical battlefields and the WWI cemeteries of Galicia and Doberdo" (Erőss 2022, 370). Similar, albeit smaller, flagpoles were later constructed around the country, reaching over 700 (Kinchin 2012, 27-28).

During the interwar period, other monuments were constructed in the vicinity of Budapest's Trianon Monument, which, while not always directly relating to the Treaty of

Trianon, represented a phenomenon that I would propose to call collective memory syncretism, the linking of different historical events for one memory narrative: in the case of Hungary in particular of the unsuccessful 1848-1849 Spring of the Peoples uprising and that of Trianon. As such, other monuments pertinent to this study were dedicated to: Count István Széchenyi, a 19th century Hungarian politician who, while vital during the uprising, championed the country's autonomy within the Habsburg Empire; the Hungarian grief, unveiled on the anniversary of the execution of the leaders of the Hungarian 1848 uprising, showing a female nude mourning the loss of her children, i.e., the territories lost due to the Treaty of Trianon; and Harry Hill Bandholtz, an American military man who prevented the looting of Budapest's museums during the aforementioned Romanian occupation (Thorstensen 2012, 10-12).

It needs to be noted that the various images, e.g., of the National Flagpole and other monuments, were widely distributed in Hungary, *inter alia*, on postcards, which also featured "saints and mythological heroes hovering around these memorials," thus further cementing "their role in mediating hidden worlds, past and present," also echoing the Spring of the Peoples, as such confirming the Hungarian collective memory syncretism (Kinchin 2012, 28). In general, during the interwar period, the Trianon remembrance was omnipresent, appearing in shopwindows, advertisements, and on everyday objects (Bihari 2006, 167-168), which, in a way, is again repeated by car stickers and other objects used to disseminate the collective memory of Trianon popular in the present day mentioned above.

Importantly, Trianon remembrance through the construction of monuments was not limited only to the capital: many other monuments, taking different forms (in addition to the already mentioned flagpoles), were constructed all around the country, as "the collective consciousness of the nation was presented as being embodied in its monuments, and the iconoclasm directed against them was registered as a trauma to the body politic" (Kinchin 2012, 22-23). It needs to be also noted that during the interwar period, the Hungarian government

pursued a particular, Mussolini's Italy-inspired policy of taking care of the cultural heritage in the areas lost following the Trianon treaty in the hopes of culturally reconnecting them to Hungary (Pleskovics 2020, 264).

Following WWII, with a new communist regime installed in Hungary, the Trianon public memory policy shifted to that of forgetting, as noted above. As such, there was no more place for most Trianon monuments in the public space: while Count Széchenyi's could remain in place, it was decontextualised from any references to the Treaty, (Thorstensen 2012, 16) as the main Trianon monument in Budapest was removed, with the flagpole's base used for the memorial to the Soviet Liberation in 1945. While Bandholtz's statute was moved to the American Embassy, the monument to the proletarian family 'Gratitude' took place of that to the Hungarian grief, which was first moved to a city beach and nicknamed 'the Sunbather', and later retired to Sopron. In other places around Hungary, the Trianon monuments were also often devoid of their intended meaning (Kinchin 2012, 33).

After the 1989 transition, as the Trianon question returned to the political debate, so did the issue of its commemoration. Calls for the replacement of the Soviet Liberation monument on the *Szabdaság tér* soon appeared both among parts of the general public and the politicians; however, the monument has prevailed, with first an "informal memorial set up opposite" it (Palonen 2008, 224-225) and then officially recontextualised by the addition of several monuments in its vicinity: of Ronald Reagan (walking towards it), of George H. W. Bush, of Imre Nagy (the Hungarian prime minister during the 1956 revolution), of Miklós Horthy (the abovementioned controversial head of Hungary during the interwar period), and, also contentious, "monument dedicated to all of the victims of the German occupation, which is seen by some as an attempt at whitewashing the Hungarian role in WWII" (Sadowski 2020, 222).

While the main Trianon monument was not reconstructed, other monuments returned to their original place: that of Bandholtz reappeared on the *Szabdaság tér* before the 1989 visit of

the then president George H. W. Bush, while the cast of the Hungarian grief statue was recovered from a museum basement and reinstated in Budapest on the 80th anniversary of Trianon in 2000. Furthermore, the different smaller monuments around the country were recovered and renovated, while new ones were constructed, often engaging in the aforementioned collective memory syncretism by once again linking the Spring of the Peoples with the Trianon Treaty, this time with an added layer of the remembrance of the communist atrocities, as "the lifecycle" of statues themselves came to symbolise "the death of the nation, its burial and resurrection" (Kinchin 2012, 34-36).

While the exact number of new Trianon monuments constructed following the transition in various parts of Hungary remains unknown, they were most often built as a result of bottom-up initiatives, "spontaneously, 'from the bottom of the heart', typically as a mixture of the eyesore with the banal." Usually, unveiled during widely attended ceremonies, the new Trianon monuments utilise similar motives: the shape of pre-Trianon Hungary, historical crown and flag, the Hungarian double cross, a stylised letter 'T' (from Trianon), one of the "pre-war symbols of the Trianon movement," or mythical bird Turul (Celichowski 2014, 73-74). The latter in particular became "one of the key symbols of the" 19th century romantic "ethnic mythology," linking all the Hungarians together, in spite of the current shape of the borders (Feischmidt 2020, 134).

In other instances, the more particular Trianon monuments also take the form of a *feifa*, a wooden headstone pole symbolising the tradition of spiking a knight's lance into his grave, which first appeared in the Trianon context during the interwar period as a symbol linking Hungarians who found themselves outside of the country's borders with the motherland and then reborn again after 1989 (Koptyś 2021, 102). Additionally, in another echo of the interwar period (e.g., the borderland memorial in Zebegény near the then Czechoslovakia) (Kinchin 2012, 28-29), new monuments came to be constructed on the current Hungarian areas on the

border, e.g., with Slovenia, where a number of such statues were erected, always "somehow related to national discourses that to some extent question the current borders, and in which the post–First World War changes clearly appear in a negative light" (Mód 2019, 106).

Most recently, since FIDESZ came to power in 2010, as the process of collectively remembering Trianon accelerated, so did its memorialisation, not only within the country but also in the areas that Hungary lost following WWI and still have a large Hungarian population, once again repeating the pre-war policy of taking care of cultural heritage in the former Hungarian areas. The latter practice took a particularly intense form in the part of Transylvania known as Szeklerland (from Szeklers, the Hungarian minority living there). Over the years, the Orbán administration supported and sponsored the construction (e.g., of new Trianon monuments and sanctuaries filled with Trianon motives), renovation (e.g., of the already existing monuments and of cemeteries) and recontextualisation (e.g., of the already existing religious sites, including shrines, churches, and sanctuaries by adding anti-Trianon symbols) of various structures, also often engaging in collective memory syncretism between 1848 and 1920 (Chiruta 2022, 80-101).

FIDESZ also took a specific interest in the memory landscape of the capital: in addition to general changes to the monuments on the *Szabdaság tér* that took place over the years since the transition, many during FIDESZ' tenure, certain initiatives are directly related to shaping the memory of Trianon. As such, the monument of Mihály Károly, the abovementioned first democratic prime minister of Hungary, was removed from its prominent place in Budapest and "transported to the outskirts of a small town" for his perceived actions that led to the signing of the Treaty of Trianon (Erőss 2022, 376). Even more importantly, in the vicinity of the parliament, a new Trianon monument dedicated to National Cohesion was constructed. Taking the form of a long ramp going several meters below the street level to where the eternal flame is burning, it is inscribed with the Hungarian names of all the cities, town and villages that

belonged to Hungary before WWI and where then lost to neighbouring countries – in that perpetuating the Magyarization practices during the Kingdom of Hungary, which disrespected minorities in rebaptising various non-Hungarian names of municipalities in its territory at the turn of the century (Egry 2020, 124-125). As Kuptyś poignantly notes, this depressing, tomb-like, built from black granite

> monument does not define or represent what the national community is today, and it does not try to express what national unity represents today. It seems that it is stuck in time one hundred years ago, mourning the loss of the former territories and the glory linked to them (2021, 102).

Concluding Remarks

Throughout the course of this chapter, we travelled from the theoretical frames of the heritage-memory-justice nexus to the realms of the Hungarian national identity with regard to the Treaty of Trianon to the review of the ways in which the Treaty has been commemorated in the public space. In this final, concluding part of the chapter, I would propose to return to the theoretical and apply it to the practical, analysing the role commemoration of Trianon plays for Hungarian society.

There is no doubt that the collective memory of Trianon was and is of major importance for the Hungarian identity. Whether we perceive it as artificially orchestrated by the interwar authorities of the country or an actual bottom-up feeling of Hungarian society, what is sure is that these memories are not going anywhere. What also becomes clear following the research conducted in this chapter is that, barring the enforced silences during the times of communism, Hungarian society did not engage in any typical transitional justice processes in regard to the Treaty of Trianon, as the state-induced collective forgetting for the benefit of good neighbourhood relations did not have any impact on the broader society, as evidenced by the return of the Trianon question immediately following the 1989 transition to democracy. This lack of reckoning with the difficult loss of the country's territories to the neighbouring states

rather than being worked through has been enshrined in the country's identity and public landscape.

The veritable cornucopia of monuments commemorating Trianon – old and new, placed in the territory of present-day Hungary or of the former Kingdom of Hungary, linked to the memory of the Treaty directly or through collective memory syncretism – shows beyond any doubt the role of cultural heritage as the carrier of collective memory and identity. It also proves the potential of heritage for coming to terms with the past and bringing peace, even in spite of the negative narrative supported by the Trianon monuments. While as already remarked upon, Hungary did not engage in any transitional justice processes, I would argue that the wide-scale construction of purposeful cultural heritage allowed Hungary to anchor collective memories regarding Trianon in these monuments.

Through repetitive commemoration, the contemporary echoing the pre-war one, and collective memory syncretism, the country was able to find an outlet for the most difficult memories, and as such bury – over the years – any calls for the actual changes to the country's borders within the wood, the stone, and the bronze, thus bringing peace to the region. Therein lies the power of cultural heritage to establish accord: while not immediately successful (as evidenced by the Hungarian revisionist engagement prior to and during WWII), the collective rituals involving monuments commemorating Trianon over the years sustained peace in the region, and actual actions towards granting the Hungarian minorities legal protections and possibilities in their ancestors' motherland took the place of the calls for the redrawing of the borders, thus achieving a *de facto* stability, even if not yet visible in the official rhetoric which is still perceived as inflammatory by the neighbouring countries. Importantly, my remarks in this chapter, while made in the context of Hungary, may be translated to other situations whereby the issues of cultural heritage, collective memory and transitional justice intersect. The question of the use of cultural heritage to further particular narratives and thus certain political

goals shows how multi-layered heritage's relationship with law is, proving that only more profound studies can uncover the full dimension of the role a memory policy is supposed to play within the society. Furthermore, as the phenomenon of memory syncretism shows, the past is never truly set, and various historical events can be reinterpreted centuries later to fit one narrative, given that truth and facts, if not completely lost, need to move to the background as politics takes centre stage.

At the same time, as the Hungarian case demonstrates, there are limits to how the authorities can shape collective memories: not only social forgetting will be unsuccessful if the society is unresponsive to it, but the denied collective memories will return with full force following a regime change, perhaps even stronger than before, fortified as an element of a larger policy of opposition to a government which pushed an unpopular narrative.

Last, the study of Hungary also shows that while it is possible to not engage in typical transitional justice rituals and still successfully put forward at least temporary pathways to peace and stability – in the Hungarian case taking the form of locking collective memories of past trauma in monuments – such processes will come at a cost, with societies risking closing themselves in a veritable *circulus vitiosus* of mourning. As the country's society continues to chase the ghosts of Hungary's past, one may only hope that among the increasingly volatile situation within the region that once again becomes "caught in the Ferris-wheel of history" (Kinchin 2012, 33), the capability of heritage to bring people together rather than to divide, often in spite of the original intentions of its creators, will prevail.

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