

György Csepeli

The bitter fruits of 1918–1920 for the Hungarians

Abstract. The paper deals with the social psychological consequences of the newly established international arrangement emerging as a result of the peace treaty closing WWI for Hungary at the Grand Palace of Trianon in Versailles. The treaty was very well accepted by the states neighboring Hungary. The Hungarian society, however, found the peace treaty of Trianon appalling. A trauma which has not gone away. The question is how the Hungarian society will come to terms with this trauma in the framework of the European Union which made the borders between the member states spiritual.

Key words: false realism, Trianon peace treaty, clashing perspectives, collective trauma

The series of events following the loss of the First World War was a surprise for the Hungarians living in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. In the name of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, on November 3, 1918, Viktor Weber von Webenau signed an armistice, equal to capitulation, in Padua, the terms of which were approved by the Supreme Council of War of the victorious powers. The Emperor of the Monarchy, Charles I as Austrian Emperor and Charles IV as King of Hungary, resigned.

In the part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy known as Hungary, the Hungarian king appointed Count Mihály Károlyi as Prime Minister. His opponent, István Tisza, the previous prime minister, was killed by terrorists on the day of his appointment October 31, 1918. As the King of Hungary, Charles withdrew from state affairs on 13 November. Mihály Károlyi became Head of State. It was him who paid a visit to Belgrade on November 13th, where, through negotiation with French General Franchet d'Espèrey, the armistice agreement between the Entente and the Hungarians was elaborated, which was also equal to capitulation.

It was András Gerő who collected the most important publicist and political writings that appeared in Hungary during the first month of peace (Gerő, 218). Although the authors of the writings saw that none of the winners respected the country's boundaries within the Monarchy, there was no one among them to have realized that the country, in which they had grown up and had believed to be real, in fact, had not existed. There was a Hungarian government, there was a Hungarian Parliament, but there was no Hungarian sovereignty. Defense, foreign affairs, and finances belonged to the Austrian emperor. He was sovereign as the ruler of the whole monarchy. As the king of Hungary, he was not sovereign.

When the war was lost, it was only two years after November 1916 when Francis Joseph I, Emperor and King passed away. His successor, Emperor Charles I, as Charles IV of Hungary, was crowned as Hungarian king with medieval splendor in the church of the Blessed Virgin of Buda Castle on the 30th of December, 1916. The coronation confirmed the Hungarians in their belief that Hungary existed, while there was no international convention to recognize the existence of Hungary among the European nation-states (Csepeli, 2017). The reality was that Hungary existed only as part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. However, the Monarchy ceased to exist with the resignation of the Emperor and King.

There was no one among those within the previously imagined Hungary nor the amongst the Hungarian people, political, cultural or economic elite, who would have believed that with the end of the Monarchy, the Hungary they had believed in would as well cease to exist. The followers of István Tisza, who was held responsible for the lost war, and the supporters of Mihály Károlyi, who came as winner from the revolution, could never have imagined that, as a

result of the peace that ended the First World War, in the place of the Hungary that they had imagined, there would arise another, much smaller country, beyond the borders of which one third of the Hungarians would now have to find themselves living.

In the politically, religiously and socially divided Hungarian society, desires took power over reality. István Bibó calls that heuristics “false realism”, which holds the probable to be unlikely and the unlikely to be probable (Bibó, 1991).

The imagined Hungary comprised 320,000 square kilometers of territory within the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The number of its inhabitants was twenty million. The territory of the new, and independent, Hungary defined by the Treaty of Trianon, covered 93,000 square kilometers, where 7 million people lived. Millions of Hungarians remained outside the borders of the new Hungary.

The Peace Treaty signed in the Palace of the Great Trianon in the Versailles castle on June 4, 1920, and its consequences were transformed into a cultural trauma by the Hungarians. As Jeffrey Alexander defines “cultural trauma occurs when members of a collective feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks on their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (Alexander, 2004 1.) The depth of the Trianon trauma was deepened by the unexpectedness caused by the heuristics of false realism.

Soon, the search for causes began, resulting in the scapegoating of Mihály Károlyi (and his government), who signed the armistice agreement in Belgrade. Béla Kun also became a scapegoat, he was the de facto leader of the Soviet model republic formed after the fall of Karolyi (Zeidler, 2016). The presence of Jewish-born politicians in both revolutionary governments provided a pretext for influencing anti-Semitic public opinion, blaming the Jews for the loss of the war.

The unexpected and terrible event of the Trianon peace treaty for Hungarians caused happiness and satisfaction among the people of neighboring states. What the Hungarians considered to be injustice was viewed as historical justice by the Romanians, the Serbs, the Croats, the Czechs, and the Slovaks. The conflicting types of vision made it impossible for dialogue between the new Hungarian state and the leaders of neighboring states.

Following the signing of the peace treaty, Hungary remained a kingdom, but it no longer had a king. Miklós Horthy rear-admiral became the Regent of the Kingdom of Hungary, whom Charles I nominated as commander-in-chief of the Monarchy’s naval force. As crowned Hungarian king, Charles wanted to return to the throne twice, but Horthy did not give power over to him. The king was forced into exile, where he soon died.

The paradox of the Hungarian trauma experience is that the peace treaty could even have been considered a success as the dream of independent Hungary was fulfilled in 1920, for which Hungarians had fought for centuries since losing the independence of Hungary in 1526. However, the experience of success was poisoned by the frustration caused by the loss of land and population (Ablonczy, 2010).

The main aim of the new, now sovereign Hungarian state was the revision of the Trianon Peace Treaty, which inevitably led to conflict with Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia with their interest in maintaining the status quo of the post-war world. The Hungarian political elite quickly realized that the revisionist aspirations could only be achieved with external support. First, Italy's support was won. The Hungarian and Italian governments signed the Italian-Hungarian Friendship Treaty on April 5, 1927. As a consequence of the treaty, the Hungarian government rightly believed that Mussolini would support the Hungarian revisionist aspirations.

But the breakthrough was yet to come. The hope of success in revision efforts came to light when Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany on January 31, 1933. Hitler did not make it a secret that he considered the Versailles peace system unacceptable. The Hungarians inferred from this that Hitler would support Hungary, with its borders marked by the Trianon Peace Treaty, in gaining territory from neighboring countries on the grounds that Hungarians are living in the areas to be acquired, and there are cultural and historical memorials important for the Hungarian national identity in those areas.

The moment of the successful revision came in 1938. Mussolini and Hitler took a decision in favor of Hungary in the dispute of Hungary and Czechoslovakia in Vienna on November 2, 1938. As a consequence of the decision, Hungary received 12,000 square kilometers of land from Czechoslovakia, where one million people lived. 4 months later, after Slovakia became independent on March 14, 1939, and Germany established the Czech-Moravian Protectorate, Hungary invaded Transcarpathia. Revision successes continued in the following year. On August 30, 1940, another decision was made in Vienna, which resulted in receiving 43,492 square kilometers from the territory of Romania, with more than two million inhabitants. The last revisionist success was the acquisition of 11,000 square kilometers of land from Yugoslavia, with a population of one million.

The territorial gains brought a lot of happiness and satisfaction among both the Hungarians living in Hungary and the Hungarians in the acquired areas. The Regent always appeared in the outstanding cities of the acquired lands by the same scenario. On a white horse, with a sword on his side, he proceeded to the main square in a military uniform, where he delivered an inspirational speech in Hungarian (which he told in Slovak language as well in *Košice*), and

then he viewed the ceremony of the guard of honor of the Hungarian Army marching in. Contemporary newscasts show that the scene was received by the local Hungarian population with excitement in every town.

But the newscasts do not show that, with the Regent, the newly adopted anti-Jewish laws of the Hungarian state also appeared in the territories annexed to Hungary. In the territory of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, there were a large number of Jews, who, when asked at censuses, declared themselves to be Hungarians. Following the peace of Trianon, about half of the Jews living in the Hungarian parts of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy had become citizens of the successor states. Once they were Hungarian citizens again, they had to experience their deprivation of rights and discrimination. What for the Hungarians was great pleasure, brought a source of sorrow and suffering for the Jews.

Revision successes proved to be short-lived. The heuristics of false realism again prevailed. Hungary joined the Second World War on Germany's side. Although clear-minded politicians warned Miklós Horthy in vain, who was hoping for Germany's victory, he allowed Hungary to attack the Soviet Union and declared war on the United States.

Hungary lost the war with Germany. The peace signed in Paris in 1947 declared the two Vienna decisions void and did not recognize the occupation of Transcarpathia, nor Vojvodina. Hungary returned to its starting position of 1920. The psychological situation, known from 1920 was repeated: the grief of the Hungarians became the source of joy for the neighboring peoples. The consequences of counter-emotional responses continue to exist both in the Hungarians and in the neighboring peoples. The wounds have not healed ever since.

It was between the Hungarian revision successes and their disappearance that the deportation of Jews living in Hungary was performed. Deportation took place at record speed in the last year of the war. With the exception of Jews living in Budapest, all Jews living in Hungary were transported in freight trains to death and labor camps. Half of the deported Jews had lived in the territories attached to Hungary between 1938 and 1941.

While in the memory of Hungarians, revision successes nourish the feelings of joy and satisfaction, territorial changes of the Hungarian state between 1938 and 1941 trigger the feelings of mourning and sorrow in the Jewish memory. This resulted in a forever negative relationship between the Trianon trauma and the Holocaust trauma (Csepeli, 2015).

After the Second World War, the small states in Central and Eastern Europe were facing the same fate, regardless of whether they were on the side of the winners or losers at the end of the war. The winners received the same award as what the losers were punished with. The socio-economic system imposed on them by the Soviet Union made it impossible for them to face the past, even, it became the source of newer collective traumas (Pók, 2017).

The change of regime liberated the social discourse regarding the past in all of the Central and Eastern European states. The wounds reopened, the national grievances came up from the obscurity of forced forgiveness. All these countries became members of the European Union and those of NATO. However, the globalization challenges of the 21st century can only be met if they face their own selves and if they learn to live in harmony with their past conflicts.

REFERENCES

- Ablonczy B.* 2010. Trianon legendák. [Trianon Legends.] Budapest: Jaffa.
- Alexander J.C.* (2004), "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma", in Eyerman, Ron, *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, pp. 1–30.
- Bibó I.* (1991). *Democracy, revolution, self-determination: Selected Writings*. Edited by Karoly Nagy, translated by Andras Boros-Kazai. Boulder, Co: Social Science Monographs: Highlands Lakes: Atlantic Research Publications.
- Csepeli Gy.* (2017). Coronation in Na'Coxypan. In: *The First World War. People and Nations*. I.U.E.S. Journal. Anno 4. № 1. March. 73–84.
- Csepeli Gy.* (2015). National Remembrance, National Oblivion In: *Sterile and Isolated. An Anthropology today in Hungary and Poland*. Poznan-Wielichowo: Instytut Etnologii o Antropologii Kulturowej Uniwersytetu im Adama Mickiewicza Wydawnictwo TIPI 101–110.
- A béke első hónapja Magyarországon.* [The First Month of the Peace in Hungary] Budapest: Habsburg Történeti Intézet [Budapest: The Institute of Habsburg History]. 2018.
- Pók A.* 2017, *Remembering and Forgetting Communism in Hungary. Studies on Collective Memory and Memory Politics in Context*. Kőszeg-Budapest: iASK.
- Zeidler M.* 2016. *Trianon*, Budapest: Kossuth.

Горькие плоды 1918–1920 для Венгров

Автор. Дьердь Чепели – профессор кафедры социальной психологии, председатель междисциплинарной докторской программы в области социальных наук в Будапештском университете им. Этвеша Лоранда, старший исследователь Института передовых исследований в г. Кёсег (iASK)

Аннотация. В статье рассматриваются социально-психологические последствия международного урегулирования для Венгрии, возникшего в результате мирного договора, заключенного по окончании Первой мировой войны в Большом дворце Трианона в Версале. Договор был очень хорошо принят соседними с Венгрией государствами. Венгерское общество, однако, нашло мирный договор в Трианоне ужасающим. И эта травма никуда не делась и сегодня. Вопрос, который занимает автора как венгерское общество сможет смириться с травмой, став членом Европейского союза, сделавшим границы между государствами-членами прозрачными?

Ключевые слова: ложный реализм, Трианонский мирный договор, конфликтующие перспективы, коллективная травма.