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## **Emotional Processes in Elaborating a Historical Trauma in the Daily Press**

**A longitudinal study of the Trianon Peace Treaty in the mirror of the Hungarian newspapers**

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### **Abstract**

Twentieth century has witnessed several cases of mass traumatization when groups as wholes were ostracized even threatened with annihilation. From the perspectives of identity trauma, when harms are afflicted to a group of people by other groups because of their categorical membership, ethnic and national traumas stand out. This paper aims to investigate long-term consequences of permanent traumatization on national identity with presenting a narrative social psychological study as a potential way of empirical exploration of the processes of collective traumatization and trauma elaboration. A Narrative Trauma Elaboration Model has been introduced which identifies linguistic markers of the elaboration process. Newspaper articles (word count = 203172) about a significant national trauma of the Hungarian history, Treaty of Trianon (1920), were chosen from a ninety year time span and emotional expressions of narratives were analysed with a narrative categorical content analytic tool (NarrCat). Longitudinal pattern of data show very weak emotional processing of the traumatic event. Results are discussed in terms of collective victimhood as core element of national identity and its effects on trauma elaboration.

### **Keywords**

historical trauma; narrative categorical content analysis (NarrCat); Narrative Trauma Elaboration Model; collective victimhood

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## **CONCEPT AND CLASSIFICATION OF TRAUMA**

Concept of trauma shows up in a broad spectrum of disciplines and involves an extensive scope of seemingly very different phenomena of traumatic experiences. Philosophers, historians, clinical and social psychologists describe various cases of emotional shock under the label of trauma, including child abuse, maltreatment, constant humiliation, assaults, accidents, natural disasters, terrorist attacks, wars or massacres.

Psychological trauma is an emotional shock, which challenges relation of a person to reality. This emotional shock can evolve through a sudden unexpected event but constant

exposure to stress can also cumulate into a traumatic experience. Both cases of traumatization lead to similar psychological effects, although long-lasting traumatic experiences may more likely entail identity consequences.

Though processes of individual and collective traumatization are often interrelated, in case of collective traumas a whole group of people is affected by the same traumatic events. Moreover from the perspectives of identity trauma, when harms are afflicted to a group of people by other groups because of their categorical membership, ethnic and national traumas stand out. Those national traumas, which endure through years or decades or occur repetitively through the history of the group can be termed as *historical traumas*.

Natural disasters such as earthquakes or floods may exert traumatic effect to large groups of people causing long lasting emotional disorders and require elaboration and healing, however, man-made disasters, i.e., traumas caused by human beings, more likely evoke Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms compared to natural disasters. More importantly, group traumatization caused by other people always takes place within the dynamic field of intergroup processes.

### **PSYCHODYNAMIC CONSEQUENCES OF TRAUMA**

Freud's paper on trauma repetition (Freud, 1914) outlines first how people try to cope with their traumatic experience by suppressing it. Freud argues that until they manage to elaborate it, this experience compulsively reoccurs in dreams, phantasies and misdeeds ("trauma reexperiencing") and seriously endangers the person's psychological wellbeing and her adaptation to reality. Similarly, Freud (1917) describes the process of grief as elaboration of traumatic object loss, which re-establishes the person's relation to reality where the beloved and lost object does not exist anymore.

Contemporary psychopathology devotes substantial attention to mechanisms and consequences of individual traumatization. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV (DSM IV) classifies these consequences under the diagnostic category of PTSD. Main psychological effects of traumatization appear around three main symptoms: persistent *re-experience* of the traumatic event when trauma-related memories, thoughts and feelings intrude uncontrollably into the person's mind; *perceptual narrowness* when persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma define acts of the traumatized person and *hiperarousal* which manifests in hipervigility, irritability and atonement to danger.

Diagnostic category of PTSD has been criticized by some trauma experts (see Herman, 1992; van der Kolk *et al.*, 2005) because it neglects some significant and characteristic symptoms that are mainly typical in case of long-lasting traumatic experiences. Judith Herman (1992) suggested the category of *complex post-traumatic stress disorder (C-PTSD)* as to distinguish traumas which happen once and sudden from those that develop gradually and penetrate the whole personality. Long-lasting traumatization as persistent abuse, maltreatment, wars, captivity in concentration camps may evoke loss of feeling secure, increased vulnerability, low self-esteem, loss of feeling of self-coherence and the risk of further traumatization. C-PTSD disrupts integrity of the self and causes dysfunctionality in many areas of the personality and social relationships.

## INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE TRAUMAS

Until recently relatively less attention has been given to processes of mass traumatization. Philosophers and historians, such as Ricoeur, La Capra, Novick or Rüsen have attempted to draw parallels between individual and collective traumatization. As Ricoeur points out, Freud himself performed such transpositions from individual to collective level in his essays (Totem and Taboo, in Moses and the Monotheism or in Future of an illusion). Ricoeur (2006, p.78) carries the issue of collective trauma elaboration even to the opportunities of therapy. He claims that the role of the psychotherapists in collective trauma elaboration should be taken by critical thinkers, who assist society to cope with its traumas in the public sphere of open debates.

As being the most extreme traumatization of the twentieth century both in size and in systematic cruelty, the Holocaust and trauma elaboration of the holocaust survivors have eminently challenged psychologist and historians. Historian La Capra (2001, p.144-146) argues that elaboration of the holocaust experience is not possible for survivors. Even their off springs, the so called second generation Jews suffer from trauma repetition and even for them it is hard to elaborate the emotionally disturbing experiences into "matter of fact" memories. There is a growing literature on trans-generational traumatization (e.g. Kinsler, 1981; Danieli, 1998; Daud, Skoglund & Rydelius, 2005).

A serious problem with the parallel between individual and collective processes is that whereas loss of a beloved person by death is final and unchangeable, territorial or prestige losses of ethnic or national groups will never seem to be irreversible. This problem is aggravated that in several cases compatriots, i.e. ingroup members remain in the lost territory whose destiny may keep the trauma alive. Not to speak about the historical experience of "shuttleing" territories between ethnic groups or states. Even more salient difference between individual and collective processes is that in case of collective traumas members of the traumatized group often experience the trauma indirectly through identification with compatriots.

## TRAUMA ELABORATION

In psychoanalytic tradition process models have been developed both for trauma elaboration and grief. For example in Laub and Auerhahn's (1993) approach, trauma elaboration can be considered in the continuum from not knowing to knowing in which narrative organization of experiences plays significant role. Going along the stages of elaboration involves psychological distancing from the trauma and at the same time integration of the event into the former self-conceptions. A parallel can be drawn between trauma elaboration and Kübler-Ross's (1969) widely known grief stages i.e. denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance, as well. Horowitz (1976) conceptualizes processes of loss and trauma elaboration in relation to the organization of beliefs and other cognitive structures. According to his view process of elaboration befalls in five phases in which the integration of the traumatic experiences is forewent by constant oscillation between avoidance and intrusion of the painful memories.

In individual personality development creative solution of a crisis or successful elaboration of a trauma may strengthen a person's ego. The term post-traumatic growth refers to positive psychological change experienced as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1999, 2001). The post-traumatic growth entails better coping capacities and higher level of stress tolerance.

On the other hand, psychopathological disorders manifesting in symptoms such as feeling insecurity, regressive functioning, constant readiness to prevent the reoccurrence of the threatening event, increased sensibility, rigid emotional and cognitive reactions, etc. may appear when subject of the trauma is incapable to cope with the emotional shock. On collective level similar consequences can be expected, with corollaries such as mistrust toward other ingroup members or toward outgroups.

Collective memory works in a self-serving (group-serving) way. However, it not always depicts glorious history. If not other examples, traumatic experiences of a group exemplify that collective remembering carries on historical interpretation which are destructive or harmful to group identity. Volkan (1988) describes the phenomenon of "chosen trauma" when ethnic groups or nations stick to their heroic defeats without being able to elaborate or mourn the loss.

## **TRAUMA AND NARRATION**

If traumatization shatters relations to reality, re-establishing a new, adaptive relation means re-establishing coherence of life. Pennebaker and his colleges (Pennebaker & Beall, 1986; Pennebaker, 1993, 1997) convincingly argue that repetitive narration of a traumatic event increases narrative coherence and thereby improves mental and physical health of traumatized people.

Historians also investigate the role of historical narration in trauma elaboration. La Capra (2001) calls attention to the dilemma that in telling the holocaust narrative both taking the victims' perspective and adopting a factual stance distorts historical experience. Rüsen (2004) argues that presenting in rational, linear causal order what masses of people experienced as irrational "limit" events necessarily banalize the memory of victims. Hayden White (as cited in Friedlander, 1992) suggests that historians when dealing with the Holocaust and similar "limit events" should borrow literary techniques instead of insisting to conventional narrative realism. It is interesting to note that Imre Kertész' Nobel Prize winner holocaust novel the *Fateless* employs a narrative technique, which is lacking any temporal retrospection. The major narrative device, time, is missing from the narration.

## **EMPIRICAL STUDIES ON COLLECTIVE TRAUMAS**

Systematic empirical investigation of psychological effects of collective traumas in the field of clinical and social psychology are confined mainly abrupt traumatic events such as the September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 terrorist attack (e.g. Knudsen, Roman, Johnson, & Ducharme, 2005; Cohn, Mehl & Pennebaker, 2004) or the March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2004 Madrid terrorist attack (Conejero & Etxebarria, 2007; Paez, Basabe, Ubbillos & Gonzalez, 2007). Most of these surveys

use self-report questionnaires for studying some issues of coping with the trauma; for example social sharing of experiences (Rimé, Paez, Basabe & Martinez, 2010, Paez, Basabe, Ubillos & Gonzalez, 2007) or emotional climate after the trauma (Conejero & Etxebarria, 2007; Kanyangara, Rimé, Philippot & Yzerbyt, 2007). Other line of studies reveals processes of trauma elaboration through analysing trauma-related narratives, but these researches approach trauma-related phenomena mainly from the point of view of individuals (see Mehl & Pennebaker, 2003, Igartua & Paez, 1997; Shortt & Pennebaker, 1992).

An empirically grounded stage model of social sharing after traumatic experiences has been developed by Pennebaker & Harber (1993) (see also Pennebaker & Gonzalez, 2008). This stage model emphasizes dynamic aspects of group traumatization deriving from changes of the social environment of trauma elaboration over time. The first 2 or 3 weeks after the trauma is the time of social sharing of experiences and social bonding. In this *emergency stage* people seek help together in order to cope with the emotional shock. This exaggerated social activity is followed after a couple of months by the stage of *inhibition* with a decreased level of communication about the event. Although people speak less about the trauma, increasing rates of illnesses, trauma-related dreams and assaults can be observed. Lastly, in the final *adaptation stage* people are no more engaged in the event, they continue their normal lives.

Although empirical findings of these studies help to predict people's reactions to traumatic events, the ways in which members of nations may cognitively and emotionally cope with traumas with single and temporarily limited events, but in case of long-lasting collective traumas - such as the Holocaust and periods of repression or cumulative traumatic experiences like continuous wars of intractable conflicts - the question is how collectives accept and integrate defeats and losses into their identity. Long-term consequences of these all-pervading historical traumas on national identity are comprehensible only with consideration of societal-historical context of the events. Historical narratives as written accounts of past experiences are available sources of collective memory representations that make them valuable tool for identification while also enabling the empirical analysis of linguistic markers of trauma elaboration.

### LINGUISTIC MARKERS OF TRAUMA ELABORATION

Scientific narrative psychology (László, 2008; László & Ehmann, 2012) postulates that there is correspondence between narrative organization of life stories and organization of life experiences, namely it contends that narrative language is suitable for expressing psychological processes and states of the narrator. Following this conception, our aim was to operationalize descriptions of traumatic experiences stemming from clinical and societal observations through analyses of trauma narratives. Based partly on theoretical models of trauma elaboration (e.g. Freud, 1914, 1917; Laub & Auerhahn, 1993) and partly on previous empirical evidences (Pólya Kis, Naszódi & László, 2007; Pennebaker, Mayne & Francis, 1997; Ehmann & Garami, 2010) we propose a new *Narrative Trauma Elaboration Model* so as to investigate collective processes of trauma elaboration through identifying linguistic markers in group narratives.

Narrative Trauma Elaboration Model is under development and validation, it requires further underpinning studies. Present paper outlines only the conceptual structure of the model that encompasses symptoms of traumatization in levels of narrative organization and assigns narrative markers to related symptoms (see Table 1).

| <b>Narrative Trauma Elaboration Model-Linguistic markers of weak trauma elaboration</b> |   |
|---|---|
| <b>I. Societal features in organization of narratives:</b>                              |   |
| 1.  | Disrupted integrity of the group: <i>constant appearance of polemic representations instead of hegemonic representations</i>  |
| 2.  | Extremities of frequency of appearance of the trauma in social discourses: intense occupation with the topic or total reticence of the trauma: <i>constant rate or re-increase of trauma-related narratives</i>   |
| <b>II. Structural features in organization of narratives:</b>                           |   |
| 1.  | Incoherent identity: <i>incoherent, fragmented narrative</i>  |
| 2.  | Deficit of integrative complexity: <i>attributional simplicity, lack of differentiation, isolated mental contents</i>   |
| 3.  | Paralysis: <i>perseverance of cognitive and emotional patterns interpretation schemes</i>   |
| 4.  | Re-experiencing of trauma: <i>present tense</i> or fragmented time organization in narration, <i>interjections</i>  |
| 5.  | Narrow perceptual field and low level of complexity in the explanation of the events: <i>inability to change perspectives, self-focus</i>   |
| <b>III. Psychological features in organization of narratives:</b>                       |   |
| 1.  | High emotional involvement, inability of emotional distance-keeping reflected in a high number of emotional expressions: <i>explicit emotions, emotional evaluations and extreme words</i> instead of cognitive words   |
| 2.  | Regressive functioning: primitive defence mechanisms, such as denial, splitting (devaluation and idealization) in <i>extreme evaluations</i> , distortion in <i>biased perception</i> and self-serving interpretation of events, projection of negative intentions and feelings in <i>hostile enemy representations (hostile emotion attribution)</i> |
| 3.  | Sense of losing agency and control: <i>low level of self-agency</i>   |

Table 1. Narrative Trauma Elaboration Model (Fülöp & László, 2012)

According to the Narrative Trauma Elaboration Model, weak trauma elaboration is expected to manifest in narrative structural and content characteristics. The model provides multiple levels of analysis. At a societal level, trauma elaboration takes place in the processes of social discourses and formation of collective memory representations. Collective traumas challenge the coping potentials of the group and demand collective activity in order to elaborate the trauma. This usually implies reaching an integrative point of view. As long as polemic representations exist in the society, group level meaning-construction is active. Confrontation of different perspectives is part of the elaboration process by necessity and the more elaborated a collective experience is, the more hegemonic representations, the more integrative narratives develop (see about social representations Moscovici, 1988). At the level of social discourses, the frequency of trauma-related topics seems to be an indicator of collective trauma elaboration. Both over-representation and ignoring of trauma-related topics in societal communication may relate to a degree of obstruction. Relative over-representation, that is, a constant rate of references to the harms in daily conversations in the public sphere or in the media indicates that the group is still overwhelmed with the experiences. On the other hand, ignoring trauma-related topics means that trauma is handled as a taboo that prevents the development of an effective collective coping.

Deeper analysis of trauma elaboration is feasible by studying not only the frequency of trauma stories within the society but the structural organization of these narratives as well. Structural organization includes narrative features such as structure, spatio-temporal perspective, narrative templates, causal attributions that all can be included in the categories of narrative coherence and complexity. Clinical observations show that unelaborated traumatic life experiences are less reflected and less integrated with other memories that manifests in unstructured and fragmented narratives (e.g. Foa, Molnar, Cashman, 1995; van Minnen, Wessel, Dijkstra & Roelofs, 2002). These narratives contain more repetitions, expletives, incomplete statements and causal incoherence. Regarding the spatio-temporal perspective of trauma narratives, previous empirical findings (e. g. Pennebaker *et al.*, 1997, Ehmann & Garami, 2010, Erős & Ehmann, 1997; Pólya *et al.*, 2007) have shown that accounts of unelaborated traumatic events contain more shifts between verb tenses and deviations from temporal linearity as well as they are often narrated in present tense indicating re-experiencing of the narrated events. Another aspect of perspective-taking is the ability to represent events by adopting and aligning multiple perspectives. In a narrative study on Holocaust survivors, Suedfeld and his colleagues (1998) found relationship between efficient elaboration and complex narration. Coherent causal explanations causal connections and differentiation in the interpretation of events can contribute to the development of a more complex, integrated and, at the same time, clearer point of view. Although there are no direct empirical results whether a self-focused or other-focused perspective corresponds to a constructive coping, it seems a plausible assumption that rigid, one-sided templates are not of benefit to the process of elaboration. Persistence of cognitive and emotional patterns or schemes in general may indicate mental paralysis hindering elaboration.

Psychological aspects of the elaboration process such as emotions, perception or interpretation can be investigated directly in narratives. Empirical studies on narratives of individual traumas suggest that, during the process of recovery, people become more distanced emotionally from the traumatic event while the cognitive level of elaboration becomes predominant (Pennebaker, 1997; Pennebaker & Francis, 1996). Linguistic expressions of high emotional involvement decrease over time when emotional elaboration is efficient.

Early psychodynamic approaches to trauma elaboration (e.g., Freud, 1914, 1917; Ferenczi, 1916/17, 1933) have already described that traumatization implies regressive functioning of the experience. Traumatic experiences mobilize defence mechanisms automatically but various defence mechanisms provide coping strategies of various levels of efficiency. Primitive defence mechanisms are connected to less successful processing of trauma. Denial of the events is closely related to a lack of acceptance or ignoring. Splitting manifests in a biased, self-serving pattern of evaluation, some objects are devaluated while others are idealized that inhibits a differentiated, complex perception and interpretation of events and facing reality. Projection of negative intentions and feelings protects the self from unpleasant mental contents but externalization of these contents prevents coping with them and fosters formation of a hostile enemy representation that induces hostile attitudes and relationships. One of the most typical consequences of traumatization is that

traumatized people feel the loss of self-agency and self-control, that is, they feel that their life is controlled by external factors.

Although most of these mechanisms have been identified in individual trauma elaboration processes, parallels between individual and collective processes enable studying them in relation to group traumas.

### **EMOTIONAL PROCESSES IN ELABORATION OF A HISTORICAL TRAUMA**

In the next section of the chapter, we present a study, which focuses on one single aspect of the above Narrative Trauma Elaboration Model, namely emotional processes of trauma elaboration, and analyses explicit and implicit emotional content of trauma related narratives.

Considering that present study is a descriptive one, only theory based predictions can be conceptualized regarding to emotional processes of elaboration expressed in trauma narratives.

#### *PREDICTIONS ON EMOTIONAL PROCESSES OF TRAUMA ELABORATION*

Individual therapy experiences (see Pennebaker, 1997; Pennebaker & Francis, 1996) imply progressive capability of emotional distance keeping from the traumatic event through the elaboration process getting the place over to cognitive processing. Studies on sharing of traumatic events in interpersonal level also show (see Rimé, 2009; Rimé, Ruez, Basabe & Martinez, 2010) that intense sharing of emotions - specially without systematic cognitive processing - long time after the events is symptom of high emotional arousal and inconsistent with emotional recovery.

In accordance with these findings both in occurrence of explicit and implicit emotion words (referred in this paper as extreme words) a decreasing tendency was expected in the course of time as indicator of the diminishing emotional intensity related to the trauma experience. Constant or re-increasing rate of emotions in trauma narratives is reckoned as the marker of weak trauma elaboration.

Considering historical traumas of a nation, right-wing papers are expected to use more emotion expressions because right-wing politics is more sensitive to the national feeling.

### **MATERIAL**

One of the most significant events in the twentieth-century Hungarian national history was the collective trauma of the Treaty of Trianon in 1920. The treaty ending the First World War for Hungary approved the detachment of approximately 2/3 of its territory with 3.3 million Hungarian inhabitants, assigning the territory to neighbouring enemy countries. Although till the end of the Second World War there were temporary chances for the revision of the treaty, in 1947 it was ultimately affirmed what meant a re-traumatization for the nation.

Narrative analysis was performed on longitudinally sampled text corpora thereby providing opportunity for examining the *process of trauma elaborations* in its dynamic nature. Following Ricouer (2006) notion that elaboration of group traumas proceed in public sphere



we focused on narratives of the daily press about the Treaty of Trianon. Newspaper articles are part of collective memory. Polemic representations of divergent ideologies emerge in those scripts in a transparent way. Subjective comments, evaluations of narrators are permissible; newspapers with different political orientations represent historical events from different perspectives with different motives fitting their present goals and needs.

The articles (N = 254) were chosen from the period ranging from the year of the treaty (1920) to our days (2010) in five-year intervals. All articles were considered (from all genres: leading articles, letters to the editor, news, reports, interviews, book reviews, short stories, statements) where the Trianon treaty was mentioned. The sample included right-wing, left-wing and centrist papers (for detailed description of the articles see Appendix 1). However, there is no data from the era of communism (1950-1990) because in that period, the issue of the Treaty of Trianon was excluded from political discourses.

## **METHOD**

The NarrCat content analysis system (see László *et al.*, 2012) is based on the psychologically relevant markers (e.g. emotions, evaluation, agency, cognition, time, negation, perspective, etc.) of narrative categories and narrative composition. It is a flexible and comprehensive methodological toolkit for machine made transformation of sentences in self narratives into psychologically relevant, statistically processable narrative categories. The NarrCat system explores the evaluational, emotional and cognitive processes of the self and the other, and the ingroup and the outgroup; furthermore to explore more complex principles of narrative composition, such as spatio-temporal and outer-inner perspectives. The system yields quantitative results about who or which group acts, evaluates, has emotions, thinks something as to somebody or another group. Thus, the output depicts the psychological composition of interpersonal and intergroup relations that are relevant to the construction of identity. The software that presently serves for content analysis in the framework of scientific narrative psychology is Nool, a multilingual linguistic development environment (Silberstein, 2008).

## **EMOTION MODULE**

The dictionary of the emotion module (Fülöp & László, 2006) was compiled from the Hungarian monolingual explanatory dictionary by two independent coders. The selected list was checked and discussed by five independent coders. The list consists of 700 words. Contextual disambiguation and the identification of conjugated forms were solved by local grammars. The module is composed of the emotional valence, the emotional humanity and the moral emotions submodules.

On the grounds of their significance extreme words - i.e. words with high implicit emotional connotation - (e.g. poison, outrage, massacre, suicide, destroy, hell, etc.) were also collected and assessed in the daily press narratives about the Treaty of Trianon.

## RESULTS

The obtained patterns of overall emotions and each emotion category (positive and negative) indicate that from the beginning of the narration a decline can be observed to the 1940s and then the frequency of emotional reactions rises from the 1990s again (see Figure 1).

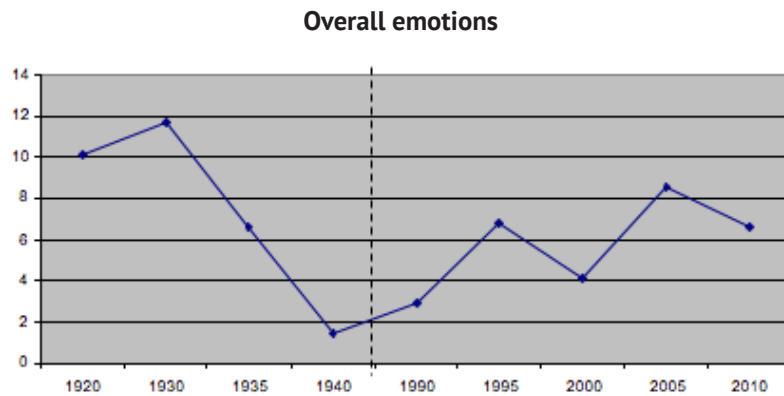


Figure 1. Frequency of emotions in newspaper articles about the national trauma of Treaty of Trianon (in proportion to text length: frequency of expressions/overall words  $\times$  10.000)

The tendency of extreme words (expressions with high emotional connotation) further provides support for this suggestion. Using these linguistic categories rate of expressions remains constant over time (see Figure 2).

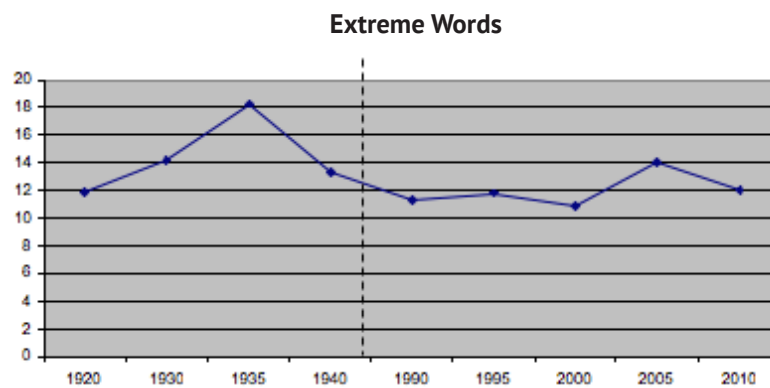


Figure 2. Frequency of extreme words in newspaper articles about the national trauma of Treaty of Trianon (in proportion to text length: frequency of expressions/overall words  $\times$  10.000)

Results show that an initial period of refusal of the national losses until the end of the second world war was followed by a period of ideological repression by the communist rule that prevented the thematization of the trauma, and after the democratic political system change in 1989 the narratives partly returned to the initial narrative representation implying the refusal of the loss.

These representational patterns with recurrently increasing or constant frequency of emotions imply a very weak emotional elaboration of the trauma. Consistent with our preliminary expectations, the articles of the right-wing press are in every period more

emotional than those of the left-winged newspapers, considering especially negative emotions. Contrary to the findings reported by Pennebaker (1997) and Pennebaker and Francis (1996), where emotional words decreased and cognitive processes replaced them during the elaboration process of a significant emotionally straining event, these results represent an emotionally unresolved situation. High level of emotional content in collective trauma narratives can be part of the group's meaning -construction and reframing process and provides emotional support only if the nature of emotions is congruent within the community and valence of emotion turns into a more positive direction.

## DISCUSSION

Previous studies on connection of national identity and trajectory of history (see László & Ehmann, 2012; Fülöp *et al.*, 2012) suggest that identity state of collective victimhood is an integrated part of Hungarian national identity. Collective victimhood has been defined by Bar-Tal, Cheryak-Hai, Shori and Gundar (2009) as a mind-set of members of collectives that is based on the sense of being victim of a harm intentionally committed by another group. Being a victim of repeated traumas, losses, repressions and failures threatens the positive identity of the group, because are opposed to the essential beliefs that the group is competent, strong and capable for resolving conflicts more difficult to maintain. Moreover, they may threaten the integrity or survival of the collective. At the same time, the sense of collective victimhood may have certain identity-serving functions as well. It provides explanation for threatening events, through sense-making it helps the group cope with stress induced by a conflict, it gives moral justification and a feeling of superiority, it prepares the society for future harms, it enhances ingroup solidarity, motivates patriotism, and can potentially gain international support, thus collectives are motivated to maintain this status. By providing a scheme for interpreting subsequent intergroup events, assuming the victim position can become permanent. Collective victimhood is also reflected in the emotional orientation of the group.

It has important consequences on the regulation of intergroup relations, particularly in the management of intergroup conflicts, but collective victimhood has an inhibitory effect on the emotional elaboration of a trauma as well. Extremely negative experiences such as traumas do not diminish automatically over time; elaboration requires active and constructive mobilization of coping potentials. Faced our own misdeeds and undertaking responsibility for them, mourning of losses, ventilation of sufferings, forgiving and forgetting past harms, fading of intense emotions are crucial conditions of trauma elaboration. Stagnation in the position of the victim obstructs healing processes. Experiences of loss of control, lack of outer support, exaggeration and repetition of trials, divergence of inner interests or failures of sharing can contribute to the psychological state of being traumatized. All of them pervaded the Hungarian history.

Even so, the Treaty of Trianon represents an extreme trauma in this victimhood narrative. The detachment of 2/3 of the territory of the country generated not only a very serious injury of the integrity and a threat to the survival of the group but the issues of

the trans-border Hungarian population have remained to be resolved and have become regular topics of political discourses, and the emphasis put on the irreversibility of the losses keeps it on the agenda. Unresolved issues of trans-border Hungarians mean a real challenge for removing the past and leaving the victim role, because being subject to political provisions and casual discriminations they are still real victims on the ground of their nationality. Obviously, this situation has consequences for the identity of the whole nation. This state can be considered identical with other intractable conflicts in respect of its socio-psychological conditions (see Bar-Tal, 2009) and preserves a sense of collective victimhood, although in these situations conflicts of interests occurs not at the level of wars but at the level of diplomacy and political conflicts.

High emotional involvement in, and some divergence of representations of the Treaty of Trianon in newspapers with different political orientations originates from the long-term repression of sharing and the emergence of different political interests after the change of regime. Elaboration entails a process of collective meaning construction through narratives whereas traumatization involves the experience that victims are unable to organize the events in a reasonable and meaningful narrative. Victim identity helps this meaning construction because it offers a coherent perspective, which is on halfway between a constructive coping and a total disintegration. Despite its psychological advantages, the sense of victimhood can never be satisfying. Because of its consequences: *rejection of responsibility, inhibition of elaboration and prolongation of reconciliation* can prevent alternative discourses, thereby victimhood becomes a tradition and the trauma remains unresolved.

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**Appendix 1.**  
**Political orientation of the sampled newspapers**

| Orientation | Right-wing   | Centrist               | Left-wing                |
|-------------|--|------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1920        | Budapesti Hírlap<br>Új Nemzedék                        | Pesti Hírlap<br>Az Est | Népszava<br>Világ        |
| 1930        | Budapesti Hírlap<br>Az Est<br>Új Nemzedék<br>Magyarság | Pesti Hírlap           | Népszava                 |
| 1935        | Pesti Hírlap, Budapesti Hírlap<br>Magyarság            |                        | Népszava                 |
| 1940        | Pesti Hírlap   |                        |                          |
| 1990- 2010  | Magyar Nemzet  |                        | Népszabadság<br>Népszava |