“National narratives usually deal with acts of aggression, hostile neighbors and international conflicts across borders, and present history as a national suffering and victories. Major victories for one nation are invariably tragedies for the others. Thus, what nations set out to accomplish creates a European map of conflicting and often overlapping narratives, the (re)representation of the national past(s) and the reciprocal harm done by nations and nation-states to one another.”

This quote points out the essential problem that one has to tackle when trying to reconcile conflicting ethnocentric narratives based on adversarial interpretations of the “common past.”

The authors of the book *The Disintegration of Historical Hungary and the Treaty of Trianon* are well aware of the implications of this problem. Their assumption, according to which mutual understanding is impossible unless both Slovak and Hungarian historiographies (and societies as a whole) break out from their closed ethnocentric narratives, is explicitly or implicitly present in all of the articles of the publication.

The book is divided into five main chapters: *Historical Perspectives, Political Discourse, Education, Textbooks and Didactics of History, Ritualisation of Cultural Memory* and *Cultural Trauma*. The main finding of the first chapter is that the debates regarding Trianon in both countries are highly uneven, and the comparison is very asymmetrical. The first article offers a comparison of Slovak and Hungarian historiographical production dealing with Trianon. The well-written text by László Vörös accentuates several important facts regarding the different understanding and significance of Trianon in Slovak and Hungarian national narratives. While in the Hungarian narrative, the concept of Trianon involves the events of 1918–1920 and represents the crucial trauma of twentieth-century national history, in the Slovak narrative it is merely a historical fact connected solely with the peace treaty signed on 4 July, 1920, and it has no significant place.

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in the national narrative. As the article by Peter Macho demonstrates, this Slovak “disinterest” can be dated back to the 1920s. In his article, Etienne Boisserie questions the traditional Slovak assertion according to which the year 1918 represents a radical break in every direction of Slovak political life. He writes about continuity in discontinuity in the sense that many “Hungarian patterns” survived the border changes and continued to influence Slovak developments. While this notion is not entirely new, it is still marginal in Slovak historiography.

Despite the qualities of Vörös’s writing, there are a few minor inaccuracies in his text. The continuity of the Slovak Marxist narrative of the 1950s with the “bourgeois” interpretation of the past was not as smooth as he indicates (he makes this assessment based on the contrast with radical discontinuity in the case of the “bourgeois” and Marxist narratives in Hungary). For example, much as Hungarian historians had to reinterpret Trianon, their Slovak colleagues rewrote the narrative about Slovak participation in the 1848 revolution. What had been characterized as a heroic event became a damnable struggle against the allegedly progressive Hungarian revolution. Even the formally existing concept of the Slovak nation was nearly completely overshadowed by the idea of the Czechoslovak working class. Only the resurgence of national identity-building master-narratives in the late 1960s enabled the partial return of pre-Marxist nationalist patterns, both in Slovakia and Hungary.

It is perhaps symptomatic of the Hungarian–Slovak discussions about Trianon that even in a book criticizing the hegemony of political history, the chapter on political discourse is the longest. It consists of five articles. Ignác Romsics deals with the presence of Trianon in Hungarian political thought. For a Hungarian reader, his text would probably be just a collection of well-known facts; but a Slovak reader in all likelihood is far less informed on this topic. At the end of his article, Romsics suggests that a significant number of Hungarians still could not handle the dissolution of “historical Hungary,” and there is little hope of changing these sentiments in the near future (p.96).

The situation seems different in Slovakia. According to surveys presented in the article about Trianon in the collective memory in Slovakia by Štefan Šutaj, the vast majority of Hungarians in Slovakia regard the Beneš decrees (and not Trianon) as their biggest “historical trauma.” This seems logical, in part because there are still many people who have direct experiences with the

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postwar developments, but no one has first-hand memory of Trianon anymore. However, these findings regarding the purported relative insignificance of the Trianon trauma among Hungarians in Slovakia in comparison with the key role of this topic in Hungary deserve more elaborate analysis than they are given here.

The article by Attila Simon about “loyalist Hungarians” in interwar Czechoslovakia also deconstructs the generalizing topoi of Trianon as the national trauma. The author emphasizes that the traditional closed agrarian communities were affected to a significantly smaller extent than the Hungarian elites in the cities (p.118). However, the attitudes of representatives of the political left among the Hungarian minority in Czechoslovakia would constitute an even more interesting factor, and while Simon makes mention of this, he does not give it adequate analysis. Their opinions represented a unique approach to the solution of the post-Trianon problems, an approach that differed strikingly from the visions of the ruling elite in both Budapest and Prague.

Roman Holec presents the image of Trianon in Slovak fiction, offering the reader yet another perspective on perceptions of the period between 1918 and 1920. The analysis of contemporary Slovak novels confirms the assumption that the concepts of national identity in twentieth-century Central Europe were very flexible, especially among local elites.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the three articles in the chapter dealing with the teaching of history reach fairly similar conclusions. The authors (György Jakab, Viliam Kratochvíl and Barnabás Vajda) criticize the anachronistic system of history teaching, which is designed to produce citizens educated in the national canon. According to the experts, students should learn to “comprehend differences,” be empathetic with so-called “others,” and be able to analyze different primary sources. However, the “progressive” history teaching of the Anglo-Saxon countries highlighted by György Jakab should not be regarded as the ideal solution to all the problems of the teaching of Central European history, without mentioning the existing criticism of the concept and practice of “progressive teaching”.

In the chapter dealing with the ritualization of public memory, Miklós Zeidler offers an excellent analysis of the interwar public manifestations of Hungarian irredentism. Zeidler’s concluding remarks regarding irredentism

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(and nationalism) as a form of “therapy for traumatized society” based on a “mistaken diagnosis” that only leads to greater frustration and political blunders (p.232) is clearly pertinent to both the Slovak and the Hungarian situation today.

The equally interesting article by Balázs Ablonczy handles the development of five Hungarian refugee associations during the interwar period. According to the author, these organizations were unable to process the Treaty of Trianon in interwar Hungary, but at the same time their histories can offer answers to the question regarding how to speak about “traumas of the past” correctly (p.243). A local case study on the history of the János Tuba memorial in Komárno authored by József Demmel and Miroslav Michela analyzes the connection between local and national interest in a town with a Hungarian-speaking majority that found itself outside the borders of the “mother state.”

The last chapter deals with Trianon as a cultural trauma. The essay by Éva Kovács entitled On the Traumatic Memory of Trianon is an accurate, highly critical analysis of the Trianon discourse in both Hungary and Slovakia today, as well as the stereotypes and modes of thinking on which this discourse rests, including essentialism, ethnocentrism, unacceptable generalizations, and disinterest in the findings of the “other” historiography. Kovács raises fundamental questions regarding the term “Trianon trauma”: is it even legitimate to use such a psychological term? How can a heterogeneous “imagined society” be unanimously traumatized? Can we speak about a collective Trianon trauma when we know very little about individual reactions to this event?

The second article of the last chapter, which was written by Dagmar Kusá and M. Michela, offers a general, comparative analysis regarding the Slovak and Hungarian national narratives, politics of memory, instrumentalization of history and concepts of cultural trauma. This text provides a well-written methodological and theoretical overview regarding the abovementioned ideas, which are utilized in the majority of articles in this publication. In fact, this text should have been put right after the introduction. It is a little bit difficult to understand why it was made the last article of the book.

One could conclude by asking the question raised by Ablonczy, “What are the results of all of this” (p.243)? In general, the Trianon discourse is still an ideological and often politically shaped one. Historians are largely responsible for the emergence and persistence of a situation in which the word Trianon triggers a stream of associations instead of useful knowledge. As Timothy Snyder comments with regards to the trope of victimhood, “the debate had shifted to contentious claims and counter-claims: who suffered, at whose hands and
how much? Who had a bigger trauma?” Both Slovak and Hungarian narratives vividly accentuate national suffering while strongly rejecting the possibility that the “victimized nation” might have caused suffering to others (the Holocaust discourse is a striking example).

One of the results is the specific language of the “national tragedy and trauma,” which is also used in academic texts, even in the texts published in this book. However, its authors recognize that it is not a homogenous publication, and it can be only a first step towards mutual understanding between two discourses. This could be only done through comparative research on historiography and national historical cultures, with the emphasis on social history (p.307). On the other hand, is the mission of the historian to mediate “national reconciliation”? First and foremost, history should bring information about the past to light and explain why people made particular decisions in the context of the dilemmas faced. If a historian manages to do this without resorting to nationalist bias or discourses of competitive suffering, a more nuanced understanding of “others” should be the natural outcome of his or her work. There is no need to moralize over justice or injustice. However, meaningful discussion of the alleged traumas is possible only outside the paradigm of ethnocentric narratives. Without doubt, this publication provides several useful examples to learn from.

Adam Hudek