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## The "Politics of Trauma": National Trauma in Poland and Hungary and the Othering of Queer Identities

Keira Hoeflerle

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# The “Politics of Trauma”: National Trauma in Poland and Hungary and the Othering of Queer Identities

By Keira Hoferle

*Abstract: The governments of Poland and Hungary, under the parties Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice) and Fidesz (Alliance of Young Democrats), respectively, have deliberately implemented policies and utilized rhetoric to marginalize the LGBT+ community, a dramatic reversal from years of social progress in the European Union. In investigating this shift, prior scholars have explored social factors and authoritarian, populist politics as causes, yet these cannot explain the extent and viciousness to which both parties attack sexual and gender minorities. In this paper, I demonstrate that both governments have utilized “national trauma” to construct a nationalist space that excludes LGBT+ people, upholstered by a justifying narrative. I argue that these parties have heavily invested in creating a social and cultural infrastructure endorsing their interpretation of past collective trauma. They then use appeals to this trauma to depict LGBT+ people as existential threats to the nation, before exonerating themselves from consequential blame through similar appeals to victimhood. These “politics of trauma” are instrumental in analyzing how states frame and organize intergroup identity aggressively, which is visible through a rise in anti-LGBT+ violence in both countries.*

<b>The New Order (Prologue)</b>	2
<b>Introduction</b>	5
Literature Review	8
<b>National Trauma, Collective Memory, and the Construction of Political Narratives</b>	9
Conceptually Defining “National Trauma”	9
Manifestations and Conditionalities of National Trauma	12
<b>The Rise of Fidesz, Law and Justice, and the “Chosen Trauma”</b>	14
The Collapse of State Socialism	16
“Shock Therapy” and Westernization	19
National Trauma Becomes Mainstream	22
<b>The LGBT+ Community in Poland and Hungary: The Impacts of Social Tension and National Trauma on the Inflicted Group</b>	26
<b>The Politics of Memory: Fidesz and PiS’ Efforts to Construct a “Culture of Trauma”</b>	30
Memorialization	32
Usurpation of Academic Institutions	34
Media Co-optation	35
Weaponizing Lustration and Cultural Funding	37
<b>Invasion: Securitizing the LGBT+ Community as a Threat</b>	39
“Christian” and “Family Values” in the Hungarian/Polish Model	40

“LGBT Ideology”	43
“Child Protection” and Norms Securitization	46
<b>Exoneration: Utilizing National Trauma to Shift Responsibility</b>	50
Diplomatic Constraints and the European Union	52
Blame-Shifting, “Strong” Nationalism, and Retraumatization	54
Government Enabling of Anti-LGBT+ Violence	57
Government Endorsement of Anti-LGBT+ Violence	60
<b>Conclusion: Looking Forward by Looking Back</b>	63
The “Chosen Traumas” in 2022	65
<b>Bibliography</b>	67
<b>Appendix</b>	776

## The New Order: A Europe Drowning in Trauma and Flooded with Hatred

*“A new order is being born. In our world, in our lives as well, great changes are banging at our gates. We have seen our losses as irresistible setbacks for centuries. In the absence of our own strength, we expected a wonderful rescue army to come from the fog of legends, which would change the fate of Hungarians... Let us not be afraid of what we see: we are the ones we have been waiting for. We are the ones reversing the fate of Hungary.”*

- Viktor Orbán, Prime Minister of Hungary (2010-Present), at the Commemoration of the Calvary of Sátoraljaújhely, June 6th 2020.<sup>1</sup>

*“The plans will be presented soon. They are really ambitious, far-reaching... We will present the ‘Polish New Order.’”*

- Jarosław Kaczyński, Leader of *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* and Deputy Prime Minister of Poland, in an interview with *Telewizja w Polsce*, January 21st, 2021.

The 2019 Equality March (as they are known in Hungary and Poland, where phrases like “Pride Parade” court immodesty) in Białystok was, for Western Europe, a stunning example of clashing identities. For the people of Poland, however, it proved another climax in a long procession of hatred seeping back decades. The participants of the March, held in a city that had suffered Tsarist, Nazi, and Soviet subjugation for centuries, looked no different from the LGBT+ members of Hannover or Milan. One girl, documented in video, holds a sign proclaiming, in English: “I have the power of gays and anime on my side,” stressing not only her Internet literacy through a meme popular in LGBT+ online spaces, but her membership to a global queer community.<sup>2</sup> She is one in a procession trundling down the city’s historic streets, protected by police fully equipped in riot gear. Outside the police cordon, one can hear slurs and obscenities

<sup>1</sup> Orbán, Viktor. “Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s Commemoration Speech.” *About Hungary*, June 6 2020.

<sup>2</sup> “Marsz Równości w Białymstoku,” Radio Białystok, July 20 2019, 2:11.

charged at the Marches from the mass of counter-protestors circling them like vultures, hurling stones, bottles, and bricks. As individual members are pulled from the procession and quickly surrounded by a torrent of abuse, the riot police fire dozens of tear gas canisters into the outside crowd chanting nationalist slogans, bathing the uplifting music from the truck in screams of pain and terror (see Appendix, Figure A).<sup>3</sup>

While the Western media looked on in outrage,<sup>4</sup> its Russian counterparts embraced the nationalists, celebrating their “struggle against Western decadence.”<sup>5</sup> The Polish government, under the party leadership of Jarosław Kaczyński of *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (Law and Justice, PiS), was placed in a bind; as it was an unspoken fact that the counter-protests were spurred on by the ruling party. Many of the counter-protestors and members of the “March for Normalcy” came from outside the city. Beyond the reach of Białystok’s centrist mayor, the larger voivodeship declared itself *Strefy wolne od LGBT*, or an “LGBT Free Zone,” to the public support of local PiS officials. Equality Marches had carried a long history of violence, from the 2018 Lublin March where counterprotestors were arrested for handling homemade explosives, to the 2007 Kraków “Tolerance March,” where footage of police dragging away screaming marchers reached international ears. Yet this environment had been tacitly approved by Kaczyński himself, whose brother had once banned such Marches during his tenure as Mayor of Warsaw<sup>6</sup>. Their party had long maintained ties to militant groups like *Młodzież Wszechpolska* (All-Polish Youth), famous for stalking Equality Marches with slogans like “Gas the fags” and batons. Clearly at a loss, Kaczyński denounced the actions of both sides, and his government did little else.

More senior Western journalists connected Białystok to the anti-LGBT+ violence of a decade prior, the era of mass “moral panic” and fierce resistance to the social justice inherent to Europeanization. They had, wrongly, believed that the sights of riot police at Equality Marches would remain in the realm of memory. New polls, however, reported a stunning reverse of the trends towards greater tolerance once recorded. Public intolerance had grown, with 68% of LGBT+ Poles claiming that discrimination against them had gotten *worse* in the past five years.<sup>7</sup> It represented a stark failure not only for the LGBT+ rights movement, but the entire human rights regime the European Union had adopted in Lisbon. With PiS winning reelection a year after, on a campaign built around homophobia, the crisis of anti-LGBT discrimination began to boil into a fever pitch.

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<sup>3</sup> “Hooligans attack LGBT Pride Parade in Białystok. Zamieszki na Marszu Równości w Białymstoku 2019,” Aktywista - Bart Staszewski, July 21 2019, 3:11.

<sup>4</sup> John, Tara., “A city's first pride march was meant to be a day of joy. The far right turned it into chaos.,” *CNN*, July 28 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Poland: Nationalist protesters stage ‘March of Normality’ in Białystok.” *Ruptly*, Sep 20, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Graff, Agnieszka. “We Are (Not All) Homophobes: A Report from Poland.” *Feminist Studies*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2006, pp.434-449. Kaczyński himself said of the March, “I am not willing to meet perverts. All Poles have the right to demonstrate, but not as homosexuals.”

<sup>7</sup> “Memorandum on the stigmatization of LGBTI people in Poland.” The Commissioner for Human Rights, The Council of Europe, 2020.

The bill signed by János Áder, Hungary's President, on May 28, 2020, was remarkably simple on its surface. It provides a legal definition for the word *nem* (sex), once vaguely referred to in anti-discrimination and medical laws, as “biological sex based on primary sex characteristics and chromosomes.” Once sex is assigned at birth, the law argues, it is as immutable as the chromosomes in one's genes. It was in such language that the Hungarian government, helmed by the *Fidesz* (Alliance of Young Democrats) party that controls 2/3rds of the nation's parliament, that an entire population of transgender and intersex Hungarians was legally erased.<sup>8</sup> Theoretically, transgender and intersex people could still live under an identity of *their* choosing, but that identity was, in the eyes of the state, illegitimate. It could not raise a family, it could not claim discrimination, it could not participate in Hungary's democratic institutions. The Hungarian government ensured that its transgender and intersex citizens could never escape their pasts.

The Western media turned immediately to Viktor Orbán, a founder of *Fidesz* and then serving his fourth term as Prime Minister. Orbán had already become a household name outside of Hungary, both for the success of his self-entitled “illiberal democratic” rule and his controversial statements and policies surrounding the 2015 Migrant Crisis, where he declared Muslim migrants an existential threat to Hungary.<sup>9</sup> Many journalists already felt that Orbán's demagoguery had found a new target. After all, it was Orbán himself, using emergency powers he had been granted to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic, who presented the “transgender ban” to the National Assembly on the Transgender Day of Visibility.<sup>10</sup> The eyes of Europe once again fell to him.

The next statement from the Prime Minister *Fidesz* posted to its English website, however, had little to do with the bill. If anything, Orbán would argue that the entire nation of Hungary, not just its formerly transgender citizens, could not escape its own past, or the hardships it once endured. Orbán spoke at the Commemoration of the Calvary of Sátoraljaújhely, a monument in a community that was split in half by the Treaty of Trianon in 1919 when the treaty forged a new, Slovakian state (see Appendix, Figure B). It symbolizes just one of the nations many hardships:

*“We see hundreds of wandering tribes of the great steppe disappear and perish in the dust of history. We see that we Hungarians have neither disappeared nor perished... We fended off the attacks of Western empires one after the other. We recovered from the devastating blows of the Eastern pagans. We did what the other peoples of the steppe could not. We fought, we organized, we adapted and we kept our place in Europe.”*

The Treaty, in Orbán's words, was a “rape of Central Europe” orchestrated by the West, the latest in a long line of betrayals he warns Hungary must neither forget or forgive, even if all parties now co-exist in one Union.

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<sup>8</sup> Knight, Kyle, and Gall, Lydia. “Hungary Ends Legal Recognition of Transgender and Intersex People.” *Human Rights Watch*, May 21 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Thorpe, Nick. “The Man Who Thinks Europe has been Invaded.” *BBC*, 6 Apr 2018

<sup>10</sup> Knight and Gall, 2020.

*“There have been many who wished to bury Hungary, there were those who always hated Hungarians. Today, there is no Czechoslovakia, no Yugoslavia nor a Soviet Union. There is no British or French empire. And what’s left of them is now twisting in the multicultural grip of their vindictive colonies... They said it well a hundred years ago: we will be there at the funeral of those who wanted to put us in the grave. There is not a single nation in the world that could have endured [what we have]. But we are stubborn, tough and resourceful, therefore we have not only endured, but today we are winning again... Only one who knows the way of hardship, who can stand the test, who understands that truth is worth little without power, can have a great nation.”*

It is with that knowledge in mind, that Orbán gives this warning:

*“History is not merciful. It does not forgive weakness. If we are not up to the task, we are lost. If we listen to the kind hearted, we are lost. If we give in to the forces of disintegration, we are lost. Hungarians can never afford the luxury of weakness again. We can only have what we can protect. This is the law and this is our destiny.”<sup>11</sup>*

That, ultimately, is what Viktor Orbán believes “the new order” must be: a state strong enough to protect itself from the conquests of the past and the conquerors of the future. The “new order” must be ready, without hesitation, to cut all those who it cannot save, and all those who do not belong. The bill Orbán presented made it clear who he had in mind.

## Introduction

*“Let’s not be misled by the brutal propaganda of homosexual’s postures of tolerance. It is a kind of madness, and for that madness, our rule will indeed be for them a dark night.”*

- Kazimierz Michał Ujazdowski, Polish Minister of Culture, October 3rd 2005.

*“Let’s stop listening to these idiocies about human rights. These [LGBT+] people are not equal to normal people.”*

- Przemysław Czarnek, Voivode of Lublin and Polish Minister of Education and Science, in a live broadcast as part of the 2020 Presidential campaign, June 14th, 2020.

*“I want to show my community that we no longer have to live in fear... People who have not lived the lives of the LGBT community in this country should not judge us, and nobody should be surprised if we are eventually forced to take things into our own hands.”*

- Małgorzata Szutowicz, known internationally as Margot, founder of the queer anarchist *Stop Bzdurom* (Stop the Bullshit), shortly after her release from prison, September 21st, 2020.

The growth of homophobia and transphobia in Poland and Hungary, often encouraged and legislated by the state, represent a distinct challenge for the EU. Europe is no stranger to divisive politics and political crises - the years between 2008 and the COVID-19 pandemic have been characterized by them. Rather, the nature of *Fidesz* and *PiS*’ attacks on human rights, democratic norms, and the protection of minorities target the Union’s own purported values,

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<sup>11</sup> Orbán, 2020.

rather than its interstate unity or financial stability. As both parties engage in brinkmanship, pushing their hatred deeper into the public while gauging the tepidity of international reaction, the human rights that have defined Europe for decades are increasingly challenged by their own members.<sup>12</sup>

It is easy to dismiss these events as moral backlash from socially conservative and largely religious countries, informed by the immense homophobia that was commonplace among former Warsaw Pact members. On inspection, however, discrepancies emerge: by all accounts, the period of violent reprisals and immense government opposition to queer rights has already occurred, during the major visibility campaigns that corresponded with Poland and Hungary's accession to the EU.<sup>13</sup> Into the 2010s, the situation improved: public support grew, legal protections were put in place, and government hostility largely dwindled. The surge of anti-LGBT+ sentiment, then, is a stunning reversal, that reaches to the highest levels of power. It is important to stress that there is nothing "typical" in the politics of *Fidesz* and *PiS* towards the LGBT+ community, nor in the organized, persistent, and aggressively hostile environment these governments have built.

My research initially examined the development of *Fidesz* and *PiS* as parties seeking the construction of a "new nationalism" that would redefine Hungarian and Polish national belonging and exclude queer citizens from it. I examined the efforts of these governments to frame the LGBT+ community as unrepresentative and existentially opposed to the "Christian" and "family friendly" Hungarian and Polish nations, often in ways that directly appealed to *Fidesz* and *PiS* voter bases. Through alliances with a dogmatically bigoted Church, securitizing the protection of families and minors, and forcibly shutting down discourse about LGBT+ rights, both parties have found success in turning large portions of their populations against the LGBT+ community.

My research also demonstrated how vicious, paranoid, and ungrounded many of the perspectives these governments displayed were, to such a magnitude as to actively hinder the pursuit of these parties' other interests. *PiS*' conspiracy-theory-laden and "vulgar" bigotry turned away voters in 2007<sup>14</sup>; Poland and Hungary's diplomatic relations are constantly threatened by their hardline attitude, further alienating them from the EU that neither can afford exiting. As "state homophobia/transphobia" is so demonstrable, I chose to realign my paper in understanding

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<sup>12</sup> "Justice Minister: EP Resolution on LGBTQ Rights for Same Sex Marriage, 'Completely Unfounded.'" *About Hungary*, 16 Sep 2021. We can clearly see Hungary responding to the EU's own response towards the "Child Protection Act," which will be explored later.

<sup>13</sup> Renkin, Hadley Z. "Perverse Frictions: Pride, Dignity, and the Budapest Pride March." *Ethnos*, vol. 80, no. 3, 2015, pp. 409-432. The All-Polish Youth, then tied to the *Liga Polskich Rodzin* (League of Polish Families) has already been mentioned. In Hungary, many so-called "hooligans" were attached to the then-far-right party *Jobbik Magyarorszáért Mozgalom* (Movement for a Better Hungary), now a centre-right opposition party.

<sup>14</sup> Graff, Agnieszka. "Report from the Gender Trenches: War Against 'Genderism' in Poland." *European Journal of Women's Studies*, vol. 21, no. 2014.

its apparent success: what makes it so vicious, and why has it captured notoriously untrusting and cynical voters with such force?<sup>15</sup>

Theories about such quandries abound across the scholarship of international relations, political science, queer and gender studies. However, none of these approaches, divided as they are across disciplines and often focusing more on *Fidesz* and *PiS*' authoritarianism, can individually offer an adequate analysis of how these parties have effectively mobilized their voters. Some also lack proper historical and cultural contexts on where this sentiment is rooted; and, further, how those contexts are utilized by both governments.

In attempting to provide such an analysis, my paper employs a constructivist approach built around the concept of "national trauma," still a fledgling in international political discourse. "National trauma," as shall be elaborated further, is the collective interpretation of traumatic events from the nation's history, contextualized within a "trauma narrative" that becomes the principal vector of one's national belonging. This "chosen trauma" permeates through the cultural and political fabric of the nation, and is applied to modern contexts and insecurities. This paper will demonstrate how the Polish and Hungarian governments have consciously created and propagated "trauma narratives" that then provide justification for greater hostility to LGBT+ rights. To do this, I will first examine the historical and cultural contexts that allowed these "chosen traumas" to develop, and how both governments have utilized their power to align key societal sectors to reinforce these narratives. I will then explore how this same infrastructure is used to justify and target LGBT+ discrimination, how national trauma allows these governments to exonerate and export wrongdoing away from their policies.

LGBT+ rights in Poland and Hungary do not exist in political independence, but intersect with numerous social, economic, and political changes that began with the 1989 revolutions and intensified with the decline of the liberal world order. Along with both countries' struggles to adjust within an economic and social peripheral space in the European Union, they have also faced dramatic social changes around religiosity, gender norms, urbanization, and the understanding of history, nationhood, and democracy. By utilizing a constructivist framework, I am better equipped to identify and analyze how these shifts paint the development of anti-LGBT+ politics in Poland and Hungary, and offer a deeper understanding of Polish and Hungarian sentiments occasionally neglected in Western European and North American scholarship. The influence of economic instability, colonial history, and political liminality are critical to understanding the rise and popularity of *Fidesz* and *PiS*, as well as how their own homophobic and transphobic perspectives emerge. Effective answers to the crisis require acknowledging these contexts.

Hearing such voices is quite different than endorsing them, and the continued diplomatic isolation of Poland and Hungary, self-imposed by their bigotry, enable these governments to further exacerbate tensions. The last section of this paper will demonstrate that an environment

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<sup>15</sup> Rose-Ackerman, Susan. *From Elections to Democracy: Building Accountable Government in Hungary and Poland*. Cambridge University Press, 2005.



that permits mass violence against LGBT+ people has developed, and that targeted violence against the LGBT+ community, on a scale not seen in Europe since the Soviet Union's collapse, is a distinct and frightening possibility.

### Literature Review

Countless scholars have analyzed the recent politics of Poland and especially Hungary as cases of the larger nationalist and populist movements that have developed across the European Union. Far fewer (such as Verpoest, who also analyzed similar anti-LGBT+ policies in Russia<sup>16</sup>) have explored the relationship between *Fidesz*, *PiS*, and their LGBT+ communities, despite years of targeted opposition. Scholars have instead focused on these governments' broader hostilities to neoliberalism and "pan-European" elites,<sup>17</sup> or on the response of both governments to the 2014-2015 migrant crisis, where similar demagoguery was platformed (and, unlike with contemporary anti-LGBT+ politics, endorsed) by the broader Western media as part of a pan-Continental debate.<sup>18</sup> Even when contemporary scholars apply theoretical frameworks to *PiS* and *Fidesz*' rule, as Körösenyi, Illés, and Gyulai have done, the particularities of anti-LGBT+ politics are left unexplored.<sup>19</sup>

Considerably more is written about this topic, as one would expect, in queer and gender studies. Both *PiS* and *Fidesz*, as socially conservative parties, have fought back fiercely against women's rights and feminist organizations under the same "gender ideology" umbrella often used to justify anti-LGBT+ sentiment. As such, and in a fashion one encounters less in Western Europe, feminist and LGBT+ advocacy groups have largely unified, and earn similar scholarly coverage.<sup>20</sup> By far, the most prolific of these writers is Agnieszka Graff, who has diligently written about the community from its first major visibility campaigns to the rising wave of nationalist opposition.<sup>21</sup>

National trauma first appeared conceptually within the Israeli psychological community<sup>22</sup>, but was quickly adopted by queer and post-colonial scholars for its ability to examine structural, multigenerational difficulties in their subjects. National trauma is, however, still ill-defined, requiring me to develop a unique definition that incorporates the perspectives of several international relations scholars. Kinnvall, for instance, analyzes the role of trauma and

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<sup>16</sup> Verpoest, Lien. "The End of Rhetorics: LGBT Policies in Russia and the European Union." *Studia Diplomatica*, vol. 68, no. 4, Egmont Institute, 2017, pp. 3–20

<sup>17</sup> Rydliński, Bartosz M, 2018.

<sup>18</sup> Nyyssönen, Heino. "Viktor Orbán's Anti-Brussels Rhetoric in Hungary: Barely Able to Keep Europe Christian?" *National Rhetorics in the Syrian Immigration Crisis: Victims, Frauds, and Floods*, edited by Clarke Rountree and Founi Tilli, Michigan State University Press, 2019, pp. 97–124.

<sup>19</sup> Körösenyi, András, Illés, Gábor, and Gyulai, Attila. *The Orbán Regime*. Routledge, 2020.

<sup>20</sup> Hall, Bogmillia. "Gendering Resistance to Right-Wing Populism: Black Protest and a New Wave of Feminist Activism in Poland?" *American Behavioral Scientist*, vol. 63, no. 10, 2019, pp.1497-1515.

<sup>21</sup> Graff, 2010.

<sup>22</sup> Plotkin-Amrani, Galia, and Brunner, José. "Making Up 'National Trauma' in Israel: From Collective Identity to Collective Vulnerability." *Social Studies of Science*, vol. 45, no. 4, 2015, pp.525-545.

“insecure identities” in promulgating anti-immigrant and extremist sentiment in Europe.<sup>23</sup> Ó Gráda analyzed the ability of the state to redirect the collective memory of traumatic events to contemporary political contexts.<sup>24</sup> Schick discussed the state’s role in interpreting and recovering from national trauma events, and its ability to encourage “post-traumatic violence.”<sup>25</sup> Lerner analyzed the role of poverty and economic insecurity in intensifying national trauma narratives<sup>26</sup>.

Primary sources for my research come from the immense coverage performed by journalists, LGBT+ advocacy groups, and human rights NGOs (Human Rights Watch, the Polish and Hungarian branches of Amnesty International, the *Kampania Przeciw Homofobii*, the *Háttér Társaság* and ILGA-Europe). Poland and Hungary have substantial English-language press and media coverage, and this is aided especially by declarations, speeches, and statements that both governments publish in English. International organizations, namely the Council of Europe and the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) have also published numerous investigations of human rights violations in both countries. While their governments have stymied queer voices on traditional media and academic channels, many individual LGBT+ Hungarians and Poles have continued to publish photographs, statements, and videos online, or have corresponded with me personally and have thus provided invaluable insight.

### National Trauma, Collective Memory, and the Construction of Political Narratives

*“The greatest sources of our suffering are the lies we tell ourselves.”*

- Bessel van der Kolk, psychiatrist and researcher, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 2014.

#### Conceptually Defining “National Trauma”

*National trauma*, despite growing interest, remains under-discussed and ill-defined in international political discourse. As such, this section of the paper establishes a framework for understanding national trauma before it is applied to contemporary Polish and Hungarian politics. This necessitates an examination both of constructivism within an international political context, and “collective trauma” within group psychology.

Constructivist interpretations of international politics are similarly youthful, endorsed by contemporary scholars such as Said, Sikkink, Finnemore, and Wendt, and mainly emerged in opposition to the “neorealist” school that dominated Western foreign policy circles in the early 2000s. Constructivism sought to demonstrate the importance of social norms and frameworks (in a sense, socially *constructed* perspectives) in analyzing political decision-making. In one of the school’s seminal pieces, for instance, Alexander Wendt argues that the neorealist interpretation of international politics, built around interstate anarchy and Darwinism, was itself an

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<sup>23</sup> Kinnvall, Catarina. “European Trauma: Governance and the Psychological Moment.” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*. Vol. 37, no. 3, 2012.

<sup>24</sup> Ó Gráda, Cormac. “Famine, Trauma, and Memory.” *Bealoideas*, vol. 69, 2001, pp.121-143.

<sup>25</sup> Schick, Kate. “Acting Out and Working Through: Trauma and (In)Security.” *Review of International Studies*, vol. 37, no. 4, Oct 2011, pp.1837-1855.

<sup>26</sup> Lerner, Adam B. “Theorizing Collective Trauma in International Political Economy.” *Review of International Studies*, vol. 21, 2019, pp.549-571.

interpretation built on a specific fashioning of beliefs, experiences, and practices. In acting out these constructed viewpoints, neorealists create an international legal system that mirrors their own views; in his words, “Anarchy is what states make of it.”<sup>27</sup>

“National trauma” is one possible framework by which a nation constructs its identity in relation to other states, focusing specifically on events that either traumatized a significant portion of the collective group, or created a “crisis of meaning” that fundamentally altered the group’s self-perception.<sup>28</sup> This construction is inculcated and reproduced both by the general populace and its decision-makers. In a sense, trauma informs policy, and policy often reinforces the importance of that trauma to group identity.

It is extremely important to stress that *collective* trauma (including national) and *individual* trauma differ in substantive ways, namely in how trauma is suffered and reinterpreted. Collective trauma was first explored prominently both by the displaced European Jewish community in analyzing the collective impact of the *Shoah*,<sup>29</sup> and by anti-colonial scholars, most prominent among them the psychiatrist Frantz Fanon, in understanding the development of structural psychological distress. Fanon, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, attempted to psychoanalyze the experience of colonized groups, and the inferiority and dependency complexes that are collectively constructed in response to the intense structural changes brought on by colonialism.<sup>30</sup> Collective trauma did not emerge as a codified concept until the 21st century, as Israeli psychologists tried to understand the impact of indirect trauma on the Israeli population, especially its Arab minority, during the Second Intifada.

While their work would later be criticized as an attempt to commercialize a widely televised conflict,<sup>31</sup> the logic of national trauma was largely embraced by the Israeli mental health community. National trauma explained the onset of post-traumatic *insecurities* (rather than the symptomology encountered in, say, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) among a growing number of Israelis that developed in association with their sense of national belonging. As one mental health expert, Bleich, explains:

*“When we speak of trauma of national origins we also refer... to our feeling of identification and belonging... As members of the Jewish nation, for example, there is no doubt that we were raised on myths such as 'remember that which the Amalekites did to you', and that 'in every generation, they rise up against us to annihilate us'. Such myths may mold our psyche in such a way that we would feel, instinctively and overwhelmingly, that we are threatened by other nations, that we are victims of constant persecution on their part, and as a result of that develop, on our part, a suspicious and threatening attitude towards others. From a psychological perspective, this influence can be attributed to the 'collective unconscious', through which unconscious forces are expressed, because of our collective association.”*

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<sup>27</sup> Wendt, Alexander. “Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics.” *International Organization*, vol. 46, no. 2, 1992, pp.391-425.

<sup>28</sup> Hirschberger, Gilad. *Frontiers in Psychology*, Aug 2018.

<sup>29</sup> Eyerman, Ron. “Social Theory and Trauma.” *Acta Sociologica*, vol. 56, no. 1, 2013, pp.41-55.

<sup>30</sup> Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skins, White Masks*. Grove Press, 1952. Translated by Richard Philcox.

<sup>31</sup> Plotkin-Amrani and Brunner, 2015.

Hirschberger describes the impact of national trauma as follows:

*“Collective trauma undermines a fundamental sense of security with long-standing effects among second and third generations of survivors. At the personal level, these individuals display significantly higher rates of psychological distress; at the social level second and third generation survivors display heightened individual and collective fear, feelings of vulnerability, injured national pride, humiliation, a crisis of identity, and a predisposition to react with heightened vigilance to new threats, such that the pain of past generations is conflated with threats facing the current generation... Although trauma is undoubtedly destructive, meaning is often unexpectedly found in calamity... Trauma may contribute to the creation of a national narrative, a sense of identity, and cognitive working models that ostensibly function to ensure the safety and well-being of the group and provide it with values and guidelines for the future. Collective trauma may, therefore, facilitate the construction of the various elements of meaning and social identity: purpose, values, efficacy, and collective worth. These effects of trauma on the construction of collective meaning may, ironically, increase as time elapses from the traumatic event because the focus of memory shifts from the painful loss of lives to the long-term lessons groups derive from the trauma.”*<sup>32</sup>

“National trauma,” then, only mirrors the most extensive of psychological traumas experienced by an individual, those which cause major disruptions to prior personalization and self-concept, such as in situations of chronic domestic or child abuse.<sup>33</sup> One can see its intersection with minority stress and the multigenerational trauma of inequality, which helps explain its popularity among postcolonial scholars seeking alternatives to individualistic and “Western” perspectives of trauma.<sup>34</sup> Individual trauma *can* inform and reinforce this collective trauma, but, more commonly, individual experiences have a complexity and personification that contradicts the simple and uncomplicated narratives utilized in “national trauma.” As one might imagine, this can potentially isolate survivors and their perspectives.

Alternative perspectives to the “chosen trauma,” internally or otherwise, are met with fierce resistance, due in large part because of the emotional investment and self-perception that are incorporated with the trauma narrative. An attack on the narrative becomes an attack on their identity, feeding further into the chosen. On a state level, practitioners are more likely to suppress these alternatives by whatever means available, to obvious consequences for democratic institutions. Schulman, calling this suppression “the narcissism of trauma” argues that this desire to protect the narrative is often as strong as the desire to protect the group, and can create serious barriers to policy discussion that challenges this “trauma-conceptualization.” She uses the Israel-Palestine peace process as an example, and how the concession of wrongdoing on the part of

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<sup>32</sup> Hirschberger, 2018.

<sup>33</sup> Van der Kolk, Bessel. *The Body Keeps the Score*. Penguin-Random House, 2014.

<sup>34</sup> Masson, Francine, and Harms Smith, Linda. “Colonization as Collective Trauma: Fundamental Perspectives for Social Work.” in *The Routledge Handbook for Post-Colonial Social Work*, edited by Tanja Kleibi et al., Routledge, 2019.

Israeli's is resisted partly for its incoherence with the nation's "chosen trauma."<sup>35</sup> Schick argues similarly, noting that this suppression of discourse makes the escalation of violence a greater possibility, as alternative and peaceful resolutions are wilfully avoided.<sup>36</sup>

With these contexts in mind, I define *national trauma* as the present, constructed response to past group experiences, which shape collective identity and are incorporated by the state and civil society as a foundational source of national meaning. Thus incorporated, this trauma influences the behavior both of the state and its citizenry, where normative interpretations are reapplied to modern insecurities and policies, creating a worldview and political framework predominantly focused on the recognition and avoidance of past collective pain. This framework is, by design, exclusionary both of those not in the national "in-group" who are perceived as unable to conceive this pain, and any in-group opposition towards the normative interpretation of the trauma or its effects on the collective identity.

### Manifestations and Conditionalities of National Trauma

It is not particularly difficult to identify possible examples of "national trauma" in contemporary history, such as the discriminatory policies in Israel most often associated with Revisionist Zionism or the sudden political and cultural emphasis on counterterrorism in the United States after the September 11th attacks. Nearly every human being, and countless groups across the species, have experienced some form of trauma, and their self-perception and group identification have likely been shaped by trauma in some way. Thus, I must specify that my definition of national trauma distinguishes itself in that trauma becomes the primary vector by which both group identity and state policy is framed. Trauma is not merely a facet of the collective, but becomes the *basis* of the identity itself. In this paper's context, to *be* Polish or Hungarian is to know past suffering, and to be prepared for any actions that can halt future suffering. From a governmental perspective, every decision in foreign and domestic policy is viewed from its potentiality to recreate group pain.

A recurring question that emerges from this paper is whether *Fidesz* and *PiS*, the two sample governments, deliberately develop a chosen trauma for their own political ends, or if the government leaders themselves have internalized the narratives. For both parties, contradictory evidence exists. If the former, pragmatist perspective is taken, it is worth mentioning what both parties stand to gain politically. Hirschberger mentioned how group solidarity and national self-identification can be greatly emotionally strengthened by shared trauma; this especially benefits populists and nationalists, respectively. Both *PiS* and *Fidesz* have been described as such, with their leaders traditionally labeled "authoritarian." While I disagree with that particular label, it cannot be denied that, if they are, the ability to drown out oppositional voices for contradicting chosen traumas is politically valuable. In fact, evidence exists that both parties *have* utilized the chosen trauma to this effect, as I shall demonstrate later. Additionally, I would argue that

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<sup>35</sup> Schulman, Sarah. *Conflict is Not Abuse: Overstating Harm, Community Responsibility, and the Duty to Repair*. Arsenal Pulp Press, 2016.

<sup>36</sup> Schick, 2011.

national trauma is particularly valuable for states seeking concessions on the international stage. As international politics are increasingly framed around global justice, human rights, and the establishment of grievances, a certain language of victimhood needs to be established by any nation seeking to correct past wrongs. National trauma, obviously, corresponds with such language.

The “recognition of past pain” can materialize in various forms and require greater state-civil society convergence. Art and media can depict and reinforce trauma narratives; governments can create memorials and museums that exalt it, or incorporate it into national symbols. It is also not uncommon to encounter governments investing in historical societies or academic institutions designed to investigate the national trauma; the work of Yad Vashem is perhaps the best-known example. While the efforts of such organizations are commendable, they can unintentionally reinforce trauma narratives, or be usurped by the state with this purpose in mind.

The “avoidance of past pain,” in turn, quickly transforms into securitization politics. Group members are encouraged to remain vigilant, and governments are pushed to enact policies that insulate both the group and the chosen trauma from what are perceived as outside threats. Securitization changes with the particularities of the trauma narrative: a country that was invaded, for example, might expand its defense capabilities or tighten border controls, or it dogmatically oppose any interaction with the former occupier. Since national trauma focuses on a national group identity, it is hardly surprising that exclusionary securitization generally occurs on ethnic lines; like in any group, determining a “real” member occupies an inordinate amount of discourse. In this paper, I will demonstrate how *Fidesz* and *PiS* broke away from ethnic politics by instead incorporating specific norms that are “foundational” to each nation and were/are vulnerable to past/future attack, which serve a shockingly similar purpose.

There are a few other elements of “national trauma” that escape my definition but are instrumental in understanding the concept. The first is that “insecure” identities - those more at risk of targeted violence, such as Arab Israelis in the original study, or those in a “peripheral” geo-political position - are more likely to experience harsh psychological effects from national trauma. They are more likely to adopt the national trauma into self-conceptualization; in the case of the Arab Israelis, destructively.<sup>37</sup> As Kinnvall tries to demonstrate, those in liminal spaces are more likely to close down mediation and support hardline stances to better create a break with one of the conflicting identities.<sup>38</sup> This “peripheral” status helps explain why the Hungarian and Polish chosen traumas became so popular in the years following Europeanization and why some queer Poles and Hungarians are especially zealous believers in the narrative. The conflict between the national and sexual/gender identity produces a small LGBT+ minority in both countries that actively invests in what might be called “assimilation politics,” and another that aggressively repudiates any national belonging altogether.

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<sup>37</sup> Plotkin-Amrani and Brunner, 2015.

<sup>38</sup> Kinnvall, 2012.

The second element is mentioned by Lerner in his analysis of collective trauma's impact on the international political economy. He argues that poverty, and its consequences across generations, can catalyze collective trauma. As Lerner explains:

*"While scholarship on collective trauma has often considered the psychological and sociological consequences of forced evacuation, famine and other situations of economic suffering as forms of collective trauma, it has scarcely considered the way in which the experience of poverty itself can entail vulnerability to trauma... we must address the way in which poverty serves as a reservoir of collective trauma and how the continuous vulnerability to stresses and shocks it entails contributes to identity when narrated."*<sup>39</sup>

Lerner likewise argues that visible economic disparity, such as that made evident in the development inequalities in the European Union, can heighten the impact of trauma. I expand this argument to include economic and financial uncertainty, above the contextualization of poverty independently. Kinnvall argue that these conditions, which erupted into the West during the Great Recession, have intensified identity politics throughout Europe.<sup>40</sup> Trauma, then, is tied both to economic and "ontological" insecurity. Not only do these factors increase one's vulnerability to trauma, but they empower the trauma narrative's applicability to contemporary challenges faced by individuals.

The final element is that trauma narratives are malleable. One can easily identify similar qualities in individual trauma, as well; studies have demonstrated that one's memory of a traumatic event can be easily replaced by one more conducive to the reformed self-concept.<sup>41</sup> Ó Gráda wrote prominently about this, from the national perspective, in analyzing the revisionism surrounding the Irish government's vision of the Great Famine during the 150th Commemoration ceremonies.<sup>42</sup> National trauma, like nationalism in general, lends itself to myth-building, and continued reinforcement of the chosen trauma by the state and society can submerge "original" memories where little knowledge or space for alternatives is present. This malleability has been instrumental in both government's framing Polish and Hungarian national trauma in opposition to queer identities, as both countries have historically been lenient in suppressing queer identities compared to their then-overlords.

### **The Rise of Fidesz, Law and Justice, and the "Chosen Trauma"**

*"Today's enemies of freedom are cut from a different cloth than the royal and imperial rulers of old, or those who ran the Soviet system; they use a different set of tools to force us into submission... Today the international media's artillery bombardments, denunciations, threats and blackmail are enough. In Europe today it is forbidden to speak the truth, but a muzzle is a muzzle - even if it is made from silk."*

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<sup>39</sup> Lerner, 2019.

<sup>40</sup> Kinnvall, 2012.

<sup>41</sup> Chen, Ingfei. "How Accurate Are Memories of 9/11?" *Scientific American*, 6 Sep 2011.

<sup>42</sup> Ó Gráda, 2001.

- Viktor Orbán, Speech Commemorating the 15th of March (the Anniversary of the 1848 Hungarian Revolution), 2016.

*“Jeszcze Polska nie zginęła, / Kiedy my żyjemy. / Co nam obca przemoc wzięła, / Szablą odbierzemy. (Poland has not yet perished, / So long as we still live. / What the foreigners have taken from us, / We shall with saber retrieve.)”*

- The first verse of “*Mazurek Dąbrowskiego*,” the Polish National Anthem, modern lyrics and translation

If national trauma is a constructed narrative force, then it is critical to identify where and how this construction has emerged, and whose narrative, if anyone’s, has become the “chosen trauma” defining Polish and Hungarian belonging. Enter *Fidesz* and *PiS*: since their resumption of power in 2010 and 2015, respectively, both parties have increasingly incorporated national trauma into their political regimes, which have historically defied easy classification. This section will discuss the development of both, in detail, as well as the historical and contemporary factors that enabled these governments to take power and to so effectively bring national trauma from the ultranationalist muck of its birth into the political mainstream.

*Fidesz* and *PiS* have unique regimes in the European Union. Orbán’s government, for instance, is one of the most personalistic in the Union’s history, and his antagonists quickly point to it as evidence of authoritarian or dictatorial rule. Körösi, Gábor, and Gyulai, perhaps the most prolific Hungarian political scientists to study *Fidesz* in depth, use Werberian models to demonstrate Orbán’s reliance on charismatic forms of power to effectively govern as an elected strongman. To them, he views all elections, from national referendums to local polls, as a plebiscite of his rule. When popular support turns against him he immediately alters course. This has been observed several times, such as during his 2014 implementation of an Internet tax or the forced closure of shops on Sundays in 2018, which were met with widespread disapproval. When Orbán wins elections, however, he views them as proof of a special, potentially divine mandate to rule Hungary as he deems necessary.<sup>43</sup> The language of trauma and security is paramount to this governance: Hungary is under threat from a revolving door of national enemies, and Orbán, who has mythologized himself into a tradition of martyred national leaders, is portrayed as the hero Hungary needs to stand against them.<sup>44</sup> So far, Orbán has provided little evidence that the dangers Hungary faces have waned. His self-professed “illiberal democracy” might be considered Bonapartist in substance.

*PiS* has, so far, not created a government anywhere close to Orbán’s personalism, but its reliance on nationalism and populist rhetoric have closely aligned the two, and they frequently celebrate each other’s political victories. The party emerged from Poland’s political quagmire following the collapse of the trade-union-turned-political-party *Solidarność* (Solidarity), of which *PiS* claims to be a direct successor, hoping to reignite the national awakening they believe

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<sup>43</sup> Körösi, Illés, and Gyulai, 2020.

<sup>44</sup> Kovács, Zoltán. “Yes to protecting women - no to gender ideology and illegal immigration!” *About Hungary*, 7 May 2020. Kovács says this nearly verbatim.



occurred with the Solidarity Uprising in 1980. While the party attempts to maintain *Solidarność*'s more social democratic policies and thus appealing to disillusioned manufacturing workers through an expanded welfare state and stronger unionization, its support is strongest in rural areas. Its fierce nationalism, agrarian opposition to "cosmopolitanism" and allegiance to the Catholic Church and its doctrines have given it immense popularity from the deeply conservative and religious farming bloc.

### The Collapse of State Socialism

Given their emergence during "state socialism," an explanation of that system is warranted. Claims of classlessness aside, two major socio-economic groups emerged in Soviet puppet states. The first was the proletariat of workers and farmers, the majoritarian bedrock of both countries, and the second the *nomenklatura*, a new elite that emerged with the rise of universities and large state bureaucracy. The *nomenklatura* eventually developed into a privileged class, enjoying wide political influence and economic luxuries even as the state socialist economy collapsed around them and inequality began to widen into the 1980s.<sup>45</sup> During this late era, two distinct branches of resistance emerged against state socialism: democratic socialist trade unions, such as *Solidarność*, which rallied around working class figures like Lech Wałęsa, and dissidents from *nomenklatura* backgrounds. The latter collection of dissident intellectuals, led by young idealists like Adam Michnik, was particularly inundated with Western liberalism, then entering its renaissance period, and had contacts with the West. Both groups congregated during the civil unrest in 1980.

The eventual founders of *PiS*, Lech and Jarosław Kaczyński, came to revolutionary prominence as lawyers, defending the rights of *Solidarność* union members that were imprisoned *en masse* as the Polish People's Republic declared martial law to crack down on the protests. Their proximity to the working class brought them into Wałęsa's circle, where both pushed for conservative politics in the tradition of Pope John Paul II. Poland's first Pope, famous for his anti-Communist advocacy, was a major inspiration to the Kaczyński's in stark contrast to their *nomenklatura* peers. Like many other intellectuals, the brothers escaped the military crackdown, which arrested many of Solidarity's left-wing, proletariat leaders. This discrepancy pushed the Polish resistance firmly away from socialism and closer to the Western political sphere. Throughout the 1980s, the dissidents made contact with interested Western parties from hiding.

One of these contacts is worth specific mention: George Soros, a Jewish native of Hungary and billionaire financier who evaded the Nazis and Soviets both before fleeing to America as a child. Soros was adamant in democratizing the regimes of Central Europe, and his Open Societies rang through dissident circles to find capable leaders. In Hungary, he stumbled across the student group known as the Alliance of Young Democrats (acronym *FiDeSz*), which in 1988 was organizing a radical youth-based democratic opposition in contest with more popular, moderate factions. Inspired, Soros located a particularly promising firebrand, the 25-year-old Viktor Orbán, and secured for him an education at Oxford the student would terminate

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<sup>45</sup> Hardy, Jane. *Poland's New Capitalism*. Pluto Press, 2009.

as revolutionary sentiment heated in 1989. In a desperate attempt to court moderate activists, Hungary's government planned to re-bury and re-honor the leaders of the 1956 Revolution, which had briefly escaped the Soviet sphere through a socialist democracy organized by the reformer Imre Nagy. Willfully ignoring government orders to leave Nagy's name unmentioned, Orbán, in speaking at the burial, encouraged Hungarians to capture the essence of this former resistance until complete Soviet withdrawal. This Antonian performance secured a permanent position for Orbán in the radical opposition (see Appendix, Figure C).

Even then, Orbán and the Kaczyński brothers framed their ideologies along lines of trauma, depicting the Soviet military presence as the latest in a long line of foreign occupations stretching back centuries. Swedes, Austrians, Germans, Russians, Germans again, Ottoman Turks, Russians again, and so forth had, at some point, occupied these countries throughout most of modern European history. Brief windows of independence in the interwar period - Poland's semi-militarist republic and Hungary's authoritarian Horthy regime - were stamped apart by the Nazis and Soviets both in a colorful story of betrayal and slaughter. That story was willfully suppressed; the Soviets had deliberately destroyed cultural and national landmarks it could not accommodate into its imperial vision. In this environment, national histories were celebrated domestically, passed down by family members as well as a thousand Western and local channels piercing the Iron Curtain of information. In Poland's case especially, the Catholic Church maintained a cultural influence unique in the Soviet sphere, both through a concerted campaign of resistance and hesitant collaboration with the regime.

Brevity forces me to forsake detailing this long history, documented in countless other locations. Rather, I shall only include elements of the historical narratives that would prove fundamental to the development of *PiS* and *Fidesz*' "national traumas." In Poland, this focuses heavily on the Second World War, where the country was an infamous victim of the Nazis' genocidal plans. Beyond using the country as the major site of the Holocaust, Poland's occupation regime was dedicated to transforming ethnic Poles into a slave caste, and enacted harrowing policies towards that end at the expense of millions of lives and untold hardship. The Soviets were hardly better: of particular note, their migration policies led millions of ethnic Jews and Germans to vacate the country (forcefully or otherwise), leaving behind a newly homogenous Poland stripped of much of its non-Catholic culture and history.

Hungary's history is more complicated. Orbán romanticizes Hungary's interwar leader, the right-wing Miklós Horthy, as a savior of the newly-independent state from a Bolshevik Revolution in 1919. Holding the reins of power from the collapse of Austria-Hungary to 1944, Horthy maintained a repressive, dictatorial rule noted for its rabid anti-Semitism. The Regent, as he was called, maintained legitimacy among nationalists and monarchists through his constant refusal to recognize the 1919 Treaty of Trianon, which broke apart the Austro-Hungarian Empire and granted large swathes of Hungarian land populated with ethnic minorities to corresponding ethnic nations. With 2/3rds of its pre-war territory and a 1/3rd of its ethnic Hungarian population separated into other nation-states, many right-wing Hungarians saw Trianon as a deliberate attack against "Greater Hungary" by Western elites and their liberal, cosmopolitan allies. Horthy

used such tensions to maintain popular support. Unsurprisingly, such irredentist politics led Horthy to collaborate with the similarly scorned Nazi regime, implementing Nuremburg-esque laws and joining Operation Barbarossa. A combination of Horthy's reluctance to send Jews to their deaths in Poland and secret parleys as the Soviets reached Hungary's borders prompted the Germans to overthrow him and invade their ally. They helped establish a vicious collaborator regime, the Arrow Cross, and oversaw a bloodletting of Hungarian Jews before being driven from Hungary by the Red Army. In retaliation for their collaboration, the Soviets exiled Hungary's large ethnic German minority. In conjunction with the Holocaust, Hungary's heterogeneity, like Poland's, was permanently displaced.

The brutality of the state socialist regimes is well documented, even during the "moderate" period, and the trauma narratives incorporate this hardship with narratives of resistance and martyrdom. One example in Poland comes from the 1944 Warsaw Uprising, which saw the Reich beat back a nationalist partisan revolt as the Soviets tactically disengaged to weaken future anti-imperial resistance. In Hungary, the liberal, anti-Austrian Revolution of 1848, led by Lajos Kossuth, and the Revolution of 1956 are commemorated in national holidays. These revolutions also demonstrated a history of popular, "Western" dissension that seeped into the Orientalism that framed Polish and Hungarian liminality. The dissidents, through this past, saw themselves at the border of democratic, Catholic Christendom, and the Western civilization that cradled both. Thus can one identify a nascent trauma narrative in Orbán's speech at Nagy's grave:

*"Since the Russian occupation... The Hungarian nation has once had an opportunity, and once only had the courage and strength to try to achieve its goals, national independence and political freedom, set as early as 1848. We won't let go of '48 today, so we won't let go of '56 either. We have learned from their destiny that democracy and communism are incompatible. The bankruptcy that is falling on our shoulders today is a direct consequence of the fact that our revolution has been stifled in blood and we are being forced back into the Asian impasse from which we are now trying to find a way out again..."*

*[We, the youth] are puzzled that those who have recently insulted the revolution and [Nagy] in unison today unexpectedly realize that they are the successors of [his] reform policy. Nor do we understand that the party and state leaders who ordered us to be educated from the textbooks that falsified the revolution are [today touching these coffins], as a sort of lucky talisman.*

*Today... we have a chance to achieve peacefully all that the '56 revolutionaries gained in the bloody battles, if only for a few days, for the nation. If we believe in our own strength, we will be able to put an end to the communist dictatorship, if we are determined enough, we can squeeze the ruling party to submit to free elections. If we do not lose sight of '56's ideas, we can choose a government that will begin negotiations to begin withdrawing Russian troops immediately. If we have the courage in us to want all*

*this, then, but only then, can we achieve our revolution. No one can believe that the party state will change on its own.*"<sup>46</sup>

When the Iron Curtain crashed and both resistance movements triumphed in their nation's first elections, however, they quickly encountered serious difficulties. In Poland, the working class *Solidarność* members turned to their liberal, intellectual compatriots in an awkward alliance built around Wałęsa.<sup>47</sup> In Hungary, *Fidesz* found itself rapidly sidelined by the moderate factions who quickly developed rapport with the former Communists, now social democrats, that rallied old *nomenklatura* voters.<sup>48</sup> Neither was equipped to handle the deficit-ridden, shortage-infested economies they had inherited; they instead turned to the West for aid.

### "Shock Therapy" and Westernization

The West's response came from its intellectuals. The most prominent by far was Harvard Professor of Economics Jeffrey Sachs, whose team was funded by Soros to begin the privatization of Poland's large, uncompetitive manufacturing and service sectors. Sachs, inspired by the success of neoclassical strategies in the West, encouraged Poland to implement mass marketization as quickly as possible, and he had the conditional promises of Western debt amnesty and IMF aid to support him.<sup>49</sup> This strategy, officially named the Balcerowicz Plan for its lead Minister, came to be known as "shock therapy."<sup>50</sup> With equally little recourse, Hungary followed suit.

Shock Therapy, indeed, removed much of state socialism's residue. After several years of sweeping reforms, central banks were able to stabilize both countries' deficits and currencies while securing a position (albeit, a poor one) in the larger European economy. The social costs, however, proved devastating. For its faults, the People's Republics had built expansive welfare states that not only included extensive health, family, and retirement care, but incorporated a dearth of state-sponsored civil society institutions: community centers, athletic clubs, volunteer groups, and so forth. Poland's social spending dropped from 35% to 3% of GDP in two years, demolishing this network. Rural citizens, the elderly, and mothers were particularly affected; in the absence of other community services, rural Poles and Hungarians flocked to the Church.<sup>51</sup> The *nomenklatura* largely survived the collapse of the state that supported them by transferring their technical skills to the private sector. As shall be demonstrated, this class, despite its association with state socialism, became the primary beneficiaries of liberalization.

Shock therapy inhibited civil society in other ways. The *nouveau bourgeoisie* protected the urban artistic, educational, and community institutions, which quickly fell in with the secular Western movements that had long been denied to them. Local NGOs, widely held by Western

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<sup>46</sup> Cseresnyés, Péter. "Milestone of the Regime Change: 1956 Martyr Imre Nagy Reburied 30 Years Ago." *Hungary Today*, 06 Jun 2019. I had aid from a contact in translating the speech.

<sup>47</sup> Domaradzki, 2018.

<sup>48</sup> "Our History" *Fidesz*, 07 Apr 2020.

<sup>49</sup> Sachs, Jeffrey D. *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities in Our Time*. Penguin, 2005.

<sup>50</sup> Hardy, 2009.

<sup>51</sup> Haney, 2000.

intellectuals as foundational for the rapid development of stable democracy, struggled to survive, as the government grants they expected never effectively materialized.<sup>52</sup> With little recourse, they too turned to the elites, or to larger Western NGOs and their political objectives. This renaissance in one pole, and mass return to Catholicism in the other, created a deep cultural divide in both countries, heightened by a renewed historiography that often neglected the contributions of ethnic and religious minorities no longer present. The idea that “to be Polish is to be Catholic,” absurd a century before, rapidly became mainstream.<sup>53</sup>

Economically, early privatization was a devastating affair, with dramatic shortfalls in production, employment, and living standards. Polish and Hungarian firms had grown unaccustomed to competition, and many of them struggled to stay afloat on globalized markets. Foreign firms quickly took advantage of these circumstances, as well as the sudden disbanding of state-sponsored unions, buying privatized factories for cheap and pushing wages and labor standards as low as they could.<sup>54</sup> The working class chafed as poverty rates doubled, and high inflation hounded both economies throughout the 1990s. The intellectual dissident inheritors (now largely referred to as the liberals) realized this was a politically untenable situation, but had few alternatives. The international system had moved firmly away from social service expansion, and neither country could afford isolation from global economic aid.<sup>55</sup> Instead, both countries zealously pursued Europeanization and the development it could bring; both joined the European Union in 2004 and the Schengen Area in 2007. Europeanization did, in fact, bring much-needed development funding, but did little to resolve the gross inequalities between Poland, Hungary, and their Western neighbors. It also exacerbated a massive emigration crisis, and millions of young Poles and Magyars fled to the (relative) prosperity of Western Europe’s lower classes. By joining the global and European economy, the Polish and Hungarian elites seemingly placed their countries permanently below the development of their neighbors. To this day, the average Polish and Hungarian wage is roughly a third of Germany and Austria’s. The monolithic liberalism of Polish and Hungarian politics meant that these economic travesties, and others like the 2008 Financial Crisis, were met with further privatization and free market policies, exacerbating the same tensions.

These conditions are vital in understanding the popularity of national trauma in both countries. The collapse of safety nets and family care made poverty a real threat to millions for the first time; competitive wages could not compete with inflation rates and market trends, and mass emigration threatened families more dependent than ever on their youth. When wealth did enter the country, as it began to in the 2000s, it disproportionately fell into the hands of the *nomenklatura* and liberal elites: before the transfer systems built by *PiS* and *Fidesz*, Poland and

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<sup>52</sup> Grzymski, Jan. “Civil Society as Jargon: Central European Experience of Civil Activity Since 1989.” In *Understanding Central Europe*, edited by Moskalewicz, Marcin, and Przybylski, Wojciech, Routledge, 2018.

<sup>53</sup> Porter, Brian. “The Catholic Nation: Religion, Identity, and the Narratives of Polish History.” *The Slavic and East European Journal*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2001, pp.289-299.

<sup>54</sup> Zeniewski, Peter. “Neoliberalism, Exogenous Elites and the Transformation of Solidarity.” *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 63, no. 6, 2011.

<sup>55</sup> Hardy, 2009.

Hungary had some of the highest measures of wealth and income inequality in the European Union. These stressors created an atmosphere of permanent crisis that are reflected in both nations' politics; they also enabled a deepening ontological crisis as Europeanization continued. Despite the claims of being a "Western bulwark," Poland and Hungary both experienced an immense culture shock as Western media, norms, secularism and businesses flooded the country in escalating quantities. Half a century of Western cultural development, once a trickle from the *nomenklatura*, surged into Poland and Hungary in conjunction with widespread internet usage and the sudden opening of many spaces once closed by the Soviets. For some Poles and Hungarians, it proved too much to accommodate.

Some of those disillusioned, however, utilized these new spaces to pursue nationalist ends once banned under the Soviet puppet regimes, quickly joined by right-wing academics returning from a long, Communist-enforced exile. Most of these eventually organized into the skinhead and hooligan subcultures found throughout Europe. They exported their rage into their subculture's historic pastimes of forming militant groups, attending large nationalist and religious rallies, and organizing attacks on Jews, Romani, and LGBT+ people. A few entrenched themselves in a bizarre nationalist academia that would become the incubator of *Fidesz* and *PiS*' trauma narratives. In Poland especially, these pseudo-intellectuals merged with Catholic fundamentalist groups and borrowed from them some of the more absurd homophobic claims that occupy both government's visions of the LGBT+ community. These include conspiracies of a "gay agenda" seeking the expansion of global pedophilia, deliberately constructed by globalist liberals and the "International Jewry" led by Soros.<sup>56</sup> In the 1990s and early 2000s, these groups, rarely banned and largely tolerated even by progressive governments, organized around a number of radical parties. In Hungary, the main beneficiary was *Jobbik* (an acronym of Movement for a Better Hungary), which came third in the 2010 election. In Poland, they organized across a dozen parties, but the largest were *Samoobrona Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej* (Self-Defense of the Republic of Poland), *Liga Polskich Rodzin* (League of Polish Families), and, later, *Solidarna Polska* (United Poland).

The mainstream parties, however, struggled throughout the 1990s. Shock therapy led to the collapse of the moderate dissident *Magyar Demokrata Fórum* (MDF) party and their government. The social democrats and liberals, under the *Magyar Szocialista Párt* (MSZP) and *Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége – a Magyar Liberális Párt* (MSZDP), respectively, won the next elections with promises to expand social securities. These never materialized, and thus the previously isolated *Fidesz* rose to power in 1998 as a center-right, self-proclaimed "Christian Democratic" party. Orbán, though Prime Minister, was not the leader he would become; constrained by the other, more left-wing founders, and still in full support of liberal politics, Orbán cut an awkward figure in Hungarian politics and lost power within four years.<sup>57</sup> He held his fellow founders responsible for creating the discord that crushed *Fidesz*' chances, forcing them from the party and bending what remained increasingly around himself. It was somewhere

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<sup>56</sup> Povedák, István. "Religious Neo-Nationalism in Hungary." 2020.

<sup>57</sup> Körösnéyi, Illés, and Gyulai, 2020.

between his defeat and the 2006 election that Orbán and his compatriots began to seriously explore nationalist circles.

Poland's politics proved even more dysfunctional. The class tensions within the party were exacerbated by Wałęsa's belligerent presidency, which alienated many allies, including the Kaczyńskis. *Solidarność* broke into a dozen splinter parties, each as incapable of addressing Poland's economic and social crises as the other, and taking turns at power like a carousel.<sup>58</sup> To provide an example, after dropping Solidarity, the Kaczyńskis founded the self-described "anti-Communist" Centre Agreement, which won 44 seats in the *Sejm* in the 1991 election and lost 44 seats in the 1993 election. The brothers then joined the center-right agrarian Solidarity Electoral Action, returning to the original trade union, which found immediate success against the incumbents and won 201 seats in 1997. In 2001, the party lost all of them, though at that point the brothers had already jumped ship and founded *PiS*, which held the government for a single election cycle from 2005-2007. It was not until 2019 that a single incumbent government ever won reelection in Poland.<sup>59</sup>

### National Trauma Becomes Mainstream

Under Law and Justice, the Kaczyńskis' primary platform focused on an expansion of lustration: the process of weeding out former People's Republic and KGB collaborators from public office.<sup>60</sup> The rise of the aforementioned ultra-Catholic parties allowed *PiS* to coalesce with those closer to its social values, rather than the centrist *Platforma Obywatelska* (Civic Platform).<sup>61</sup> The rise of this far-right to power coincided with the most violent backlash against the LGBT+ community to date. The government made its opinion on this issue known: some politicians banned Equality Marches, occasionally using the police to enforce their wishes. As one *PiS* member of the *Sejm* put it, "if deviants start to demonstrate, they *should* be bashed with a baton."<sup>62</sup> Paramilitary violence became a stark reality for many queers, and garnered the attention of an EU itself grappling with LGBT+ rights. After *PiS* and *Fidesz* fell, a series of centrist and left-wing governments enshrined important protections for LGBT+ people, mainly in employment and legal gender change, matching EU and NGO pressure after the passage of the Treaty of Lisbon. Though popular support was firmly against some equality measures, such as same-sex marriage and adoption, progress was marching forward.

In 2006, the MSZP-SZDSZ coalition held firm, but had to fiercely resist an opposition now dominated by Orbán. Within a matter of years, he had completely remodeled his image: bold, energetic, erudite with a touch of humor and commonality. An even more dramatic change came in his political messaging. The 2006 election saw the debut of Orbán's trauma narrative, wrapped around the theme of *betrayal*. Hungary's revolution, he argued, had been backstabbed.

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<sup>58</sup> Stanley Bill & Ben Stanley. "Whose Poland is it to be? PiS and the struggle between monism and pluralism", *East European Politics*, 36:3, 378-394, 2020.

<sup>59</sup> Hardy, 2009.

<sup>60</sup> Domaradzki, 2018.

<sup>61</sup> Hardy, 2009.

<sup>62</sup> Graff, 2006.

The *nomenklatura* and their liberal stooges, who he claimed had been deliberately falsifying reports of economic growth and social security expansion, had betrayed the common Hungarian by stealing their wealth and denouncing their culture. They had been aided by the Western elites, or, in Orbán's language, the "Brussels Bureaucrats," more interested in creating a cheap labor camp than a proud Hungarian nation. Appeals to history were ubiquitous throughout, as Orbán pointed to 1956, the Treaty of Trianon, and other examples of Western indifference to Hungarian suffering, while painting his opposition as traitors of the same class that signed Trianon or opened Buda's gates to the Turks. His solution was lustration on an even greater scale; a renewed revolution that would permanently cripple the *nomenklatura*'s power.<sup>63</sup>

The tactic nearly worked, and *Fidesz* only lost by a hundred thousand votes. To moderates, however, many of Orbán's claims appeared pure conjecture, and too baseless to actually represent his opposition. Several weeks after the election, however, a leaked recording of a speech by Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány to inner party members not only inflamed Hungary in sweeping protests, but completely vindicated Orbán's accusations. In it, Gyurcsány, with very strong language, told his cabinet ministers that Orbán's calculations had been correct for months. The government had been deliberately falsifying budget reports to stay in power, power which, in his words, Gyurcsány "fucking loves" in such a "country of whores."<sup>64</sup>

The outrage surrounding this recording was fuelled by a bungled response to the 2008 Financial Crisis, and *Fidesz* won the 2010 elections in an absolute landslide. The party took enough seats to achieve a constitutional supermajority, and Orbán pressed his advantage, telling his broad support base that the revolution had arrived and that a new constitution, completely separated from the 1949 People's Republic constitution then utilized, would serve as its catalyst.

The Foundational Law enshrined Orbán's "illiberal democratic" rule by ensuring a parliamentary supermajority to whichever party won the popular vote. This was further built in *Fidesz*' favor by expanding the franchise to every ethnic Hungarian in Hungary's pre-Trianon borders, where Orbán enjoyed wide support as a defender of Hungarian minorities that were frequently targeted by nationalist Romanian and Slovakian politicians. Every Supreme Court decision prior to 2011 was annulled, and any law passed by a two-thirds majority in the National Assembly (in effect, anything passed by *Fidesz*) cannot be reviewed by the Court. Political advertising can only be done through state media; anti-Communism and Christianity are enshrined within the document, as is a segment dedicated to acknowledging "crimes of the previous regime." Article L of the Foundation states that: "Hungary shall protect the institution of marriage as the union of a man and a woman established by voluntary decision, and the family as the basis of the survival of the nation." It was used to constitutionally deny homosexual couples marriage or adoption rights.<sup>65</sup> The specifics of Orbán's "revolution" are explored elsewhere, but one can summarize that the Fundamental Law allowed him to bend Hungarian politics and society increasingly to his will, bolstered throughout by arguments of trauma.

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<sup>63</sup> Körösenyi, Illés, and Gyulai, 2020.

<sup>64</sup> "Excerpt: Hungarian 'Lies' Speech." *BBC*, 19 Sep 2006. Translated from the Prime Minister's blog.

<sup>65</sup> "Hungary 2011 (rev. 2016)." *Constitute Project*.



The West's first real alert to these trauma arguments emerged during the 2015 Migrant Crisis, itself only a year after *Fidesz* secured the 2014 election at a considerably smaller margin of the vote. Overnight, Orbán's name quickly became associated with some of the most virulently anti-immigrant policies in the EU, including the construction of a fence along the entire Serbian border. Immigration rapidly became the dominant issue in Hungarian politics, and Orbán's trauma narrative quickly adapted to it. His most famous claims concerned Hungary's "destiny" as a defender *against* Islam. He argued that the migrants represented a deliberate effort by the "Brussels Bureaucrats" and their ally, George Soros, to destroy the Hungarian nation, and that any relaxation of immigration policy could very well spark an "invasion."<sup>66</sup> Körösenyi, Illés, and Gyulai point to Orbán's immigration policy as the pinnacle of his ability to force Hungarian politics into his "crisis narratives," further reinforcing his charismatic legitimacy as a heroic savior against these largely invented threats.<sup>67</sup> It worked stunningly well. *Fidesz*' popularity among voters returned, bolstered by the many far-right groups that abandoned *Jobbik* as the Hungarian government began to appeal to *them* directly, strangling one of its last rivals.

Many Western governments, journalists, and NGOs were horrified by this demagoguery, only to watch as another member delved into similar politics. After it lost power in 2007, *PiS* had been dealt a further blow in 2010 when Lech Kaczyński, then President of Poland, perished with his wife and 94 others in a plane crash in Smolensk. His brother moved the party forward, still relentlessly pushing for colder relations between Russia and the European Union, deeper lustration policies, fierce Euroscepticism and an expanded welfare state. This populism was initially submerged by bringing moderate *PiS* members into the spotlight. While these moderates helped the party secure a majority government in the 2015 election (a first for Poland), they were nearly all replaced within the administration's first two years. *PiS*, too, took advantage of its majority by restricting the powers of constitutional courts and tightening the party's control of state media, though *PiS* never reached the popularity needed to redraft the constitution. Against the opposition this garnered, Kaczyński appealed to Polish trauma:

*"The opposition will act without any limits... They are trying to convince people that in the middle of a hot summer it is a freezing, harsh winter... These are not people who are right in the head... Right here are the people who think, and who know perfectly well that in Poland there is no threat to democracy...."*

*This is mostly about fear. About ensuring that the gigantic wave of abuse that took place over the past eight years does not come to light.... Those who, during the so-called transformation, abandoned communism, but only gave up power for property—they want to continue to get fat. And those who were co-opted into that group, too... That's what this is about. Not to give anything to the ordinary Pole, but to make it possible to continue to rob Poland... The Constitutional Tribunal was supposed to be the last defense for that network. For everything that was bad and disgraceful over the past 26 years."*

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<sup>66</sup> Nyssönen, 2019.

<sup>67</sup> Körösenyi, Illés, and Gyulai, 2020.

It is harder to place where *PiS* began exporting its “chosen trauma,” though it likely emerged from the far-right circles the party had previously aligned itself to. What is undeniable, however, is that national trauma played an important role in the 2015 election, where *PiS* provided a political narrative coincidentally similar to Orbán’s. From a television address Kaczyński gave:

*“In Poland there is a fatal tradition of national treason. And this is precisely tied to that. It is sort of in the genes of some people, the worst sort of Poles. And that worst sort is precisely now extraordinarily active, because they feel threatened. Just consider WWII, then communism, then the [liberalization]: precisely this type of person dominated, was given every chance. They are afraid today that the times are changing, that the time is coming when things will be as they are supposed to be, and another type of person—that means, those having loftier, patriotic motivations—will be placed in the lead, and that will apply to every aspect of social life, including economic life.”*

Once again, one sees an appeal to answering unanswered crimes, to righting historical injustice, and claims that the Revolution of 1989 was unfinished. However, these rhetorics were supplemented by the largest welfare expansion in the Republic’s history, focusing specifically on pension reform and a new, natalist subsidy. Both proved especially popular in rural and more elderly communities. As such, when *PiS* went on to claim that it had renewed the mandate of *Solidarność*, far more were willing to believe them.<sup>68</sup> In a country exhausted by its own political chaos, *PiS* thrived; despite fielding far more radical candidates in 2019, it secured an even greater proportion of the vote (see Appendix, Figure D).

A key source of *PiS*’ support is, and always has been, the Catholic Church, which in Poland is dominated by its eldest and most politically extreme clergy. As mentioned, the Church secured a fundamental role in rural communities, but even this has failed to stem a growing secular trend in urban spaces and falling Mass attendance rates among young Poles. This, and a series of crippling scandals surrounding collaboration with the KGB and widespread child sexual abuse have placed the Church at a precipice.<sup>69</sup> Explicitly desperate to avoid a fate similar to the clergy of Ireland, the Church has increasingly endorsed *PiS* politicians, who, in turn, alter their social policies and legislation within days of the Bishops’ Conference recommendations. Much of *PiS*’ particularly virulent rhetoric about the LGBT+ community is taken, verbatim, from the words of Archbishops and Cardinals.<sup>70</sup> *PiS*’ party platform provides insight into the importance of Catholicism in government policy:

*“In our history the Church played, and continues to play, a unique role, different than in the history of other nations. It not only created our nation and our civilization, but also protected it—when the Church, already in the Middle Ages, rejected efforts by foreigners to rule, when later the first authors calling for a renewal of the Republic came from the clergy. In the extremely unpropitious circumstances of the time when Poland was partitioned, just as in the*

<sup>68</sup> Porter-Szücs, Brian. “PiS in Their Own Words.” 05 Feb 2016.

<sup>69</sup> Puhl, Jan. “The Catholic Church in Poland: The Battle for Souls.” *Der Spiegel International*, 8 Jan 2007.

<sup>70</sup> Ciobanu, Claudia. ““Foreign Ideology”: Poland’s Populists Target LGBT Rights.” *Balkan Insight*, 26 Jun 2019

*Polish People's Republic, the Church was the foundation of Polishness, and fulfilled its role as a substitute for the non-existent sovereign state... To this day, the Church sustains and proclaims moral teachings that are universally recognized in Poland. There is no competition in the wider society... For these reasons, the unique status of the Catholic Church in our national and state life is extraordinarily important. We must maintain it, and we believe that attempts to destroy the Church, and unfair attacks on the Church, are threats to our social life.*

*[The Polish-Catholic relationship] is clearly evident with regards to the family. Polish tradition always treated the family as particularly valuable, and in the period when we lacked independence, the family was very often the foundation of national identity... The spread of the ideology of gender is threatening for families and parents in Poland. Its spread has an artificial character, conditioned above all by a stream of financial resources, mostly from abroad. Nonetheless, its activity grows, particularly among the youth, and it leads to a spread of conditions that are not conducive to forming families and having children. Setting up barriers against the spread of gender ideology is important."*

As the Migrant Crisis dwindled from public memory, both governments grew increasingly vocal about the need to preserve families. This was both to address the mass emigration both countries had experienced over decades of unequal development and to protect them from "gender/LGBT+ ideology." *Fidesz* and *PiS* began to informally restrict adoptions by individual queers, as well as the legal and medical means by which one can transition. It avoided Union attention until 2019, when nearly a hundred Polish localities, in protest to the Mayor of Warsaw's open support for expanding LGBT+ rights, declared themselves "LGBT Ideology-Free Zones." Both parties quickly made LGBT+ rights dominant issues in their campaigns (Poland's 2020 Presidential election and Hungary's 2022 Parliamentary elections). Members of the press called this rapid escalation "the Rainbow Curtain" or the "War on Gender."<sup>71</sup> Trauma, and the narratives fashioned from it by both governments, not only fuelled both parties' rise to power; this paper demonstrates how it trickled through the entire crisis, enabling its transformation into one of the largest and most organized attacks on LGBT+ rights in European history.

### **The LGBT+ Community in Poland and Hungary: The Impacts of Social Tension and National Trauma on the Inflicted Group**

*"Yes, I observed the 2004 Queer Parade from the inside, I chatted with the queers. I still maintain that there was no problem with that parade. Now, in 2008, go ahead and bombard them and eradicate their organizers. In 2004, and earlier I think, events were absolutely acceptable. Politics got hold of it, and the whole thing degenerated into an advertisement for wild-liberal values... it is no accident that fewer and fewer normal homos support the parade."*

- Tamás "Tomcat" Polgár, software engineer and far-right Internet activist, Budapest, 2008.

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<sup>71</sup>"Life Beyond Europe's Rainbow Curtain." *The Economist*, 21 Nov 2020.

*“Most of us are scared, but furious; being proud of ourselves is no crime, one woman says. Others, though, are more ambivalent. After listening for a while, Milán, a young, conservatively dressed man, nervously stands up and announces that, although he has long taken part, he has always felt the [Budapest Equality March] was ‘too provocative,’ and that the ‘exhibitionist’ behavior of some of its participants incited right-wing anger. People like drag queens, he insists, just make things worse for LGBT people ‘trying to live normal lives.’”*

- Hadley Renkin, Professor at the Central European University, describing the environment of the Budapest Equality March after multiple Marchers were injured by nationalist counterprotestors, 2007.

Much of the trauma narrative *Fidesz* and *PiS* has constructed around the LGBT+ community is conjecture: stereotypes, strawmen, and fierce misrepresentation of the needs and desires of the actual hundreds of thousands who suffer from their actions. As such, the community itself is not *critical* to understanding national trauma in Poland and Hungary. However, recognizing their own growing voicelessness in local and Western media, I feel obligated to provide information relating to the community’s development during liberalization and the intense social divides across said community. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate how the LGBT+ communities in both countries have organized and fractured, and how this has interrupted larger resistance to government policies. As shall become evident, one finds the community, and the movement that endorses it, a victim of inopportune timing instead of unaccommodating radicalism.

The Soviet Union was among the most violently homophobic regimes in history. Sodomy was an offense that saw (mainly male) perpetrators immediately sent to the Gulag, and, to expand its vital foundation of forced labor, the KGB organized raids throughout the Warsaw Pact designed to lure homosexuals.<sup>72</sup> In this environment, an organized political movement was nigh impossible; it also enshrined different interpretations of queer identities than those that developed in the West. For example, legal and social distinctions for “passive” and “active” homosexuals were widely recognized. The meaning of “transsexual” moved away from the discourse around gender dysphoria because of the USSR’s policy of awkwardly changing the legal gender of “irrecoverable homosexuals” to create heteronormative couplings. Hungary and Poland were the most tolerant countries in the Pact, with Poland maintaining its interwar legalization of sodomy and Hungary decriminalizing in the 1960s. Both, however, remained victims to the KGB, and the culture that developed around it.

The LGBT+ community only became a political movement in the 1990s, when it had the space to do so. In collaboration with major Western NGOs, nascent local activist groups began hosting major visibility campaigns into the 2000s. These not only include the Equality Marches, which began in Budapest in 1997, but campaigns such as “*Niech nas zobaczq*” (“Let Them See Us”), which displayed billboards depicting same-sex couples throughout Poland in 2003. These campaigns succeeded in bringing LGBT+ rights to mainstream discussion, but also courted

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<sup>72</sup> Essig, 1999.

intense backlash by conservatives and nationalists alike, who quickly began to organize attacks on Equality Marches and advocates.<sup>73</sup> This, in turn, terrified older LGBT+ members more than willing to keep their identities either closeted or out of discussion. Renkin provides an amazing account of how this culture clashed with a newer queer generation more willing to explore its identity. Many of the older LGBT+ members advocated for incorporating nationalist symbols, removing “excessiveness” and “decadence” from Marches, and excluding less well-known identities, such as drag queens, asexuals, non-binary and genderqueer people from participating. Defending these practices as preventative measures, such politics created permanent wedges between liberal and conservative queers.<sup>74</sup> Over time, the expansion of Europeanization and the internet has fuelled younger LGBT+ members into the liberal and radical camps, where they largely express their identities on grounds similar to their Western counterparts. Modern LGBT+ identity, in this sense, has largely “globalized,” with English signs, Pride flags, rainbow colors, and internet references growing commonplace.<sup>75</sup>

Other major faultlines exist by class, gender identity, and location. Rural, lower class, and transgender LGBT+ Poles and Hungarians have much less access to queer spaces, are at a higher risk of discrimination and violence, and are undercovered by human and LGBT+ rights NGOs.<sup>76</sup> Middle and upper class LGBT+ Poles and Hungarians, in turn, fill the ranks of advocacy NGOs such as *Kampania Przeciw Homofobii* (Campaign Against Homophobia) in Poland or *Szivárvány Misszió Alapítvány* (Rainbow Mission Foundation) in Hungary. They also have the means to emigrate, greater involvement in prior governments (the Civic Platform, for example, has fielded several wealthy LGBT candidates), and are astronomically more likely to complete their education.<sup>77</sup> This environment has given LGBT+ rights in Poland and Hungary a “neocolonial” veneer, according to Binnie, as major cities are seen as bastions of tolerance against a bigoted, backwards countryside.<sup>78</sup> Left-wing critics (Binnie included), argue that this veneer is a byproduct of upper class queer inclusion in global capitalism, and ultimately damages LGBT+ rights activism by presenting these issues as part of the “elitist” neoliberal policies that have brought havoc to millions of Poles and Hungarians. Lower class LGBT+ people, like their cis-hetero counterparts, are far more likely to see NGOs as unrepresentative, and thus engage far less in their campaigns.<sup>79</sup>

This divide does not keep lower class LGBT+ people from activism, but rather shapes the advocacy networks and politics themselves. The backlash against the LGBT+ community has

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<sup>73</sup> Graff, Agnieszka. “We Are (Not All) Homophobes: A Report from Poland.” *Feminist Studies*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2006, pp.434-449.

<sup>74</sup> Renkin, 2015.

<sup>75</sup> “Soar with Us, with a Light Heart: Photos from Krakow’s 2019 Equality March.” *Krakow Post*, 19 May 2019.

<sup>76</sup> “LGBT Survey Data - Poland.” *European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights*.

<sup>77</sup> Mizielińska, Joanna. “Traveling Ideas, Traveling Times: On the Temporalities of LGBT and Queer Politics in Poland and the ‘West.’” In *De-Centring Western Sexualities: Central and Eastern European Perspectives*, edited by Robert Kulpa and Joanna Mizielińska, 2016.

<sup>78</sup> Binnie, Jon. “Neoliberalism, Class, Gender, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender and Queer Politics in Poland.” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2014.

<sup>79</sup> Rose-Ackerman, 2005.

also emboldened its more marginalized members, especially from the transgender and non-binary community, into extremist politics. The most noteworthy of these, *Stop Bzdurom* (Stop the Bullshit), is a queer anarchist group that has been implicated in several incidents of vandalism and (alleged) violence against anti-LGBT+ advocates. *Stop Bzdurom* gained international attention after the arrest and hunger strike of its founder, Margot, prompting several riots countered with severe police action (see Appendix, Figure E).<sup>80</sup> Since its inception, *Stop Bzdurom* has raised hundreds of thousands of euros, indicating a shift towards radical action not seen in the West for several decades. As one might imagine, more moderate LGBT+ members, including all major NGOs, have denounced such politics, which, in turn, brings further conflict within the community.

Overall, however, little distinguishes the values of LGBT+ Poles and Hungarians from others of their generation. Many still identify as Catholic, some maintain a Euroscepticism no different from their governments, and several I have spoken to firmly believe in elements of *Fidesz* and *PiS*' trauma narratives.<sup>81</sup> In following research on national trauma, one can easily argue that the constant conflict between member's national and sexual/gender identity creates a more extractive mental toll than their cis-hetero neighbors.

As this conflict of identity intensifies, the LGBT+ community only finds itself fracturing further. One critical element of this fracturing is the emigration of thousands of LGBT+ Poles and Hungarians, who justifiably flee violence and harassment but weaken what community remains. The costs of this emigration cannot be understated; individuals testify to closing contact with families and friends, feeling isolated from their native culture, and many remain doubtful of possible return.<sup>82</sup> Against the weakening community, the Polish and Hungarian governments can continue their assaults with dwindling domestic opposition, spurring higher mental tolls and greater emigration, until only the most disempowered remain. From a pragmatic perspective, this fracturing is absolutely critical to these governments' political strategies, as they provide a relatively low-risk target for demagoguery.

But this very fracturing is also a sign of the larger tragedy of historical homophobia and transphobia in these countries: the LGBT+ movement is only this disorganized because of its own youth. The community had spent decades, if not centuries, in darkness, the identities it encompasses shrouded in ignorance and shame, its members living in constant fear. For a few years, and under intense resistance, the LGBT+ movement and the people it represents began to reach for light and progress; in doing so, they courted the same neoliberal forces that devastated not only their countrymen's lives, but many of theirs as well. This cost has largely been ignored in the imaginations of their governments, gleefully pinning them by association as arbiters of thirty years of discord. The radicalism these governments claim is rampant within the community are mere reactions to a worsening situation, and every outside attempt to aid the movement is

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<sup>80</sup> "Queer Without Fear [Crime Doesn't Pay?]" *Stop Bzdurom*, 2021.

<sup>81</sup> Ash, Lucy. "Inside Poland's 'LGBT-Free Zones'." *BBC*, 21 Sep 2020.

<sup>82</sup> Pronczuk, Monica. "In Poland, an L.G.B.T.Q. Migration as Homophobia Deepens." *The New York Times*, 24 Apr 2021.

weaponized against them, as shall be demonstrated. There has been a single window in Poland and Hungary for the LGBT+ community this century, and it is rapidly closing.

### **The Politics of Memory: *Fidesz* and *PiS*' Efforts to Construct a "Culture of Trauma"**

*"God Bless the Hungarians...*

*We are proud of our forebears who fought for the survival, freedom and independence of our country...*

*We promise to preserve the intellectual and spiritual unity of our nation torn apart in the storms of the last century...*

*We are proud that our people have over the centuries defended Europe in a series of struggles and enriched Europe's common values with its talent and diligence...*

*We hold that after the decades of the twentieth century which led to a state of moral decay, we have an abiding need for spiritual and intellectual renewal....*

*We believe that our children and grandchildren will make Hungary great again with their talent, persistence and moral strength....*

*Our Fundamental Law shall be the basis of our legal order, it shall be an alliance among Hungarians of the past, present and future."*

- Excerpts from the Preamble of the Fundamental Law, Hungary's 2011 Constitution

"In Poland, gays are the new Jews" was a commonplace phrase among the LGBT+ community during the first administration of *PiS*. It not only plays on historical similarities to the Interwar government's widespread anti-Semitism, but also to a perceived history of widespread marginalization by Catholic governments.<sup>83</sup> This phrase, however, serves as a dual-critique of Law and Justice's many attempts to negate controversial parts of Polish history, which the government collectively labels the *polityka historyczna* (Historical Policy). It represents a massive effort to enshrine within Polish national consciousness what Michliq calls a "soothing narrative" of unsullied victimhood and martyrdom.<sup>84</sup>

Before these governments can utilize national trauma against the LGBT+ community, they have to incorporate it into collective memory. The *polityka historyczna*, and the other policies detailed below, enable both governments not only to place the "chosen trauma" into everyday consciousness, but to dominate it. *Fidesz* and *PiS* may maintain democratic institutions, but their authoritarian obsession with controlling political and historical narratives in their countries does little to democratize thought. Increasingly, these governments have demonstrated immense intolerance to narratives that deviate from "national victimhood," including those that would support LGBT+ inclusion in these nations. Since LGBT+ discrimination in these countries is seen through and justified by trauma narratives, the forced development of this narrative by nearly every conceivable means the state can afford warrants examination.

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<sup>83</sup>Graff, 2006.

<sup>84</sup> Michlic, J.B. "'At the Crossroads': Jedwabne and Polish Historiography of the Holocaust." *Dapim Studies on the Holocaust*, 2017.

Once again, two lines of reasoning behind *Fidesz* and *PiS*' obsession emerge, depending on how much their leaders believe these narratives. In examining Israel, Schulman argues that efforts to silence contradictory voices mirrors the "mass flight response" seen in trauma victims. The trauma narrative is necessary for processing ontological pain, and alternative perspectives risk that pain reemerging. As such, strong psychological incentives exist for limiting these perspectives by any means.<sup>85</sup> Though the intent of this paper is not to psychoanalyze either government, it is clear that they are deeply uncomfortable with the complicated history of past occupations, such as collaboration in the Holocaust. A pragmatic origin for these policies exists as well; "crisis narratives" are *vital* to the charismatic legitimacy of both parties, and they are thus incentivized to propagate these narratives whenever possible.<sup>86</sup> Regardless of intention, both governments have made considerable efforts towards enshrining a "culture of trauma," and I will show five elements of this culture: The use of memorials, museums, and other monuments; the state capture of historical academia and suppression of academic counternarratives; the state capture of media; the use of lustration; and the co-optation of cultural institutions.

Ironically, the justifications for this cultural development are often rooted in the trauma narratives themselves. To both parties, "retaking" control of these institutions is vital to reverse the course of national treason exemplified by the 1989 revolutions and liberalization - or, as the Fundamental Law labels it, "spiritual revival." Given that the *nomenklatura*-liberal elite dominated many of these sectors prior to *Fidesz* and *PiS*' rise to power, conspiracy theories of their alleged efforts to further "weaken" Hungary and Poland through the media abound in government rhetoric. Orbán has been quite vocal regarding his beliefs that only a loyal and nationalist elite can counter this effort, which he claims emanates from the "Brussels Bureaucrats" to better prepare Hungary for future invasion and dominance.<sup>87</sup>

In Poland, the government turns its populism against "anti-Polish" cultural figures through the *pedagogika wstydy* (pedagogy of shame) conspiracy theory. According to this theory, much of academia and the old intellectual center of *Solidarność* has unwittingly become a victim of Western "political correctness," which has been deliberately designed to encourage Poles to denounce their national identity and heritage.<sup>88</sup> The Historical Policy, then, is the obvious counter to this infestation of anti-Polish sentiment which, again, is a primer for future EU invasion. Its utilization simultaneously allows *PiS* to deny other dissident voices a legitimate claim to *Solidarność*; Stanley and Stanley have written about the tremendous importance of the trade union's legacy in Polish politics. Every major political party actively claims to have inherited its tradition, and denying the opposition such claims allows *PiS* to revoke from them a certain degree of "Polishness" that has proved valuable among voters.<sup>89</sup>

In fact, *PiS* utilizes its influence over the current leadership of the trade union to engage in what could be called "legitimacy clashes" against prominent historical Solidarity leaders. This

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<sup>85</sup> Schulman, 2016.

<sup>86</sup> Körösenyi, Illés, and Gyulai, 2020.

<sup>87</sup> Körösenyi, Illés, and Gyulai, 2020.

<sup>88</sup> Michlic, 2017.

<sup>89</sup> Stanley and Stanley, 2020.



was most visible when the union claimed ownership over materials displayed at the European Solidarity Center, a museum complex built out of the husk of the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk, where the Solidarity Protests first began. The ESC, as *Solidarność* has contemptibly noted, is sponsored by opposition figures like Adam Michnik and Lech Wałęsa, whose liberal policies they blame for the closure of the Shipyard decades ago. Wałęsa, in turn, calls the modern union a puppet of *PiS*, a party composed of “fake activists who weren’t even arrested by the Soviets.”<sup>90</sup> The fact that these conflicts are still emerging forty years later demonstrates the importance of historical narratives to Law and Justice, and merely one aspect of the massive infrastructure it has built to this end.

### Memorialization

The most evident state-cultural linkage of national trauma, in any polity, is the construction of memorials and other commemorative works. These are designed not only to commemorate exemplary or martyrous citizens, but to illustrate national mythology. Unsurprisingly, both governments have zealously released hundreds of memorials during their rule confirming chosen traumas. Orbán, for instance, initiated the construction of the House of Terror, a museum placed in the former KGB headquarters, which displays the horrors inflicted by the Communist and Nazi regimes while ignoring the contributions of Hungarians to both (see Appendix, Figure F). Kaczyński ordered the construction of the Warsaw Rising Museum, which promotes the narrative that non-Jewish Poles were as much a target of the Nazis as the Jews.<sup>91</sup>

Of the two, *Fidesz* has spent more of its growing Cultural Ministry budget on dozens of memorials to Trianon, both in Budapest and small border towns. Horthy’s government and his “heroic efforts” to reverse the Treaty have been given special attention by *Fidesz* as a Hungarian golden age, to the extent that swathes of Budapest have been remodeled to match Horthy-era appearances through contracts with *Fidesz*-aligned construction companies. Benazzo claims that this intense memorialization has likely created *more* outrage over the Treaty than in prior generations, including those who experienced it.<sup>92</sup>

This lionization of Horthy deliberately overshadows any discussion of his anti-Semitism and collaboration with Hitler; as shall be seen, revisionism surrounding the Holocaust is a primary theme of both Historical Policies. Both parties show fierce intolerance towards any discussion of the genocidal acts performed by Polish and Hungarian collaborators, which is a glaring contradiction to their victimhood narratives. This revisionism is reinforced in other memorials, such as the Monument to the Victims of the German Occupation, which was widely criticized for depicting Hungary as an innocent victim in World War II (see Appendix, Figure G). The memorial led Nobel Prize laureate and *Shoah* survivor Elie Wiesel to rescind a state

<sup>90</sup> Higgins, Andrew. “Poles Tussle Over an Icon of Their Past, With an Eye on the Future.” *The New York Times*, Jul 27 2021.

<sup>91</sup> Radonić, Ljiljana. “‘Our’ vs. ‘Inherited’ Museums. PiS and Fidesz as Mnemonic Warriors” *Südosteuropa*, vol. 68, no. 1, 2020, pp. 44-78.

<sup>92</sup> Benazzo, Simone. “Not all the Past Needs to be Used: Features of Fidesz’s Politics of Memory.” *Journal of Nationalism, Memory, and Language Politics*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2017.

honor in protest to the government's "whitewashing."<sup>93</sup> *PiS* unsuccessfully pressured the Warsaw Museum of the History of the Polish Jews to remove any mention of the Jedwabne pogrom, in which hundreds of Jews were murdered by their neighbors with light German supervision.<sup>94</sup>

In 2016, *PiS* released the Ulma Family Museum of Poles Who Saved Jews in World War II on a site close to *Auschwitz-Birkenau*. Along with the Chapel of Remembrance administered by *PiS* ally Tadeusz Rydzyk, it commemorates the 7,000 Poles listed as "Righteous Among the Nations," who sacrificed their lives to save targeted Jews and were, to the exclusion of *PiS*' narrative, often violently reprimanded by their own communities. The Righteous Among the Nations are frequently used by *PiS* as evidence that widespread allegations of Holocaust collaboration are part of the "pedagogy of shame." Similarly, Mária Schmidt, a former advisor to Orbán and the director of the House of Terror since its opening, announced plans to initiate a Holocaust museum called the House of Fates. The museum would portray, in Schmidt's words, "an uplifting story of love between Hungarian Jews and non-Jews."<sup>95</sup> This museum rapidly lost the support of the Jewish organizations it planned to work with, but demonstrates the audacity with which both governments have pursued historical negation in their monuments.<sup>96</sup>

The constant release of memorials allows *Fidesz* and *PiS* to propagate trauma narratives not only by broadcasting these memorials through state-aligned media, but also through the hundreds of commemorative speeches opined by party members. These have become a breeding ground for "trauma politics": one example comes from László Kövér, the current Speaker of the National Assembly, who attacked adherents of "political correctness" in his speech on the opening of Monument of National Martyrs in Budapest:

*"[Béla Kun's Communists], who took the entire country hostage, were driven by angry anti-Christianism, ardent internationalism, an intense hate of the nation, a conscious effort to disintegrate families... In 1919, those who denied God, homeland and nation called your grandfathers bourgeois... today, they call us nationalist, populist, anti-European, xenophobic, Islamophobic, homophobic, and who knows what else just because we stick to our communities, our culture, our traditions. Don't have any doubts that if you allow them, they will come back and stamp your children, your grandchildren. The descendants of Lenin's boys are still standing in front of us today."*<sup>97</sup>

The memorials provide a massive cultural and political playground for both parties to inculcate their images of Hungarian and Polish history, and provide a persistent media space to export them to their citizens. It is, by far, the most direct effort through which both governments enshrine national trauma narratives.

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<sup>93</sup> "Wiesel raps Hungary's Nazi past 'whitewash.'" *Jerusalem Post*, 19 Jun 2012.

<sup>94</sup> Radonić, 2020.

<sup>95</sup> Radonić, 2020.

<sup>96</sup> Benazzo, 2017.

<sup>97</sup> Vass, Ábrahám. "Reconstructed Memorial of National Martyrs Inaugurated in Budapest." *Hungary Today*, 11 Apr 2019.

## Usurpation of Academic Institutions

I have already mentioned *Fidesz* and *PiS*' opposition to academia; the entire discourse around the "pedagogy of shame" emerged after an accredited historian published a book detailing the Jedwabne pogrom.<sup>98</sup> Orbán has occasionally taken it further, constructing entire speeches around criticizing individual "anti-Hungarian" university professors.<sup>99</sup> These attacks will transfer into policy: Orbán notoriously banned the entire academic field of gender studies over its alleged danger to the Hungarian nation. *Fidesz* is also quick to deny state funding and even accreditation to schools that do not comply with their narratives. Premier among these was the Budapest branch of the Central European University, directed by Michael Ignatieff and funded largely by Soros. After a long legal battle, CEU ceased operations in Hungary when Orbán had higher education legislation amended to specifically target the institution. CEU, which he has called "Soros University" on several occasions, was an early victim of his heated political battle with the billionaire, who is often portrayed by both governments as a mastermind behind their conspiracy theories.<sup>100</sup>

The Polish Ministry of Justice, under the purview of the ultra-Catholic Zbigniew Ziobro, has increasingly utilized Poland's Blasphemy Law to arrest academics and queer activists who "offend religious feelings." In 2015, authorities used the legislation to investigate *Kampania Przeciw Homofobii* founder and Słupsk Mayor Robert Biedroń under allegations of removing a portrait of John Paul II in his office. In 2019, Szymon Niemiec, a priest of the United Episcopal Catholic Church and organizer of Poland's first Equality March, was interrogated by police after giving mass to Equality March attendees. In the same year, Elżbieta Podleśna was arrested for publishing an artwork depicting the Black Madonna of Częstochowa, a famous religious and national icon, under a rainbow halo (see Appendix, Figure H). Ziobro has funded several academic institutions to investigate claims of "rising Christianophobia."<sup>101</sup>

The negative press garnered by these stunts, however, have prompted both parties to subtler tactics. *Fidesz*, for instance, has utilized its Cultural Fund to subsidize and publish the works of the far-right nationalist pseudo-academics I discussed earlier. As one might expect, controversy around these author's racist, Islamophobic, and anti-LGBT beliefs abound.<sup>102</sup> *PiS*, in turn, has co-opted the largest historical society in Poland: the *Instytut Pamięci Narodowej – Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu* (Institute for National Remembrance – Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes Against the Polish Nation, IPN). It was initially founded in 1998 as a hybrid historical registrar and prosecutor's office for Nazi and Soviet era crimes against humanity (which have no statute of limitations). It also provides education materials and recommendations for street and monument name changes.<sup>103</sup> The IPN has become

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<sup>98</sup> Michlic, 2017.

<sup>99</sup> Orbán, 2021.

<sup>100</sup> Thorpe, 2018

<sup>101</sup> Wądołowska, Agnieszka. "Should Poland Abolish Its Blasphemy Law? Five Expert Views." *Notes from Poland*, 13 Mar 2021.

<sup>102</sup> Povedák, 2020.

<sup>103</sup> "The Statutory Tasks of the Institute of National Remembrance." *Instytut Pamięci Narodowej*, 2006.

the largest employer of history graduates and doctorates in the country. During *PiS*' initial leadership, it was widely criticized for its ties to the government, its "rapid fire" and unsubstantiated historiography, and for opening a "lustration bureau" under the direct control of *PiS*. When *PiS* returned to power, it forced the resignation of the majority of IPN's board of directors, replacing them with party supporters.<sup>104</sup>

This *PiS* meddling eventually culminated in the party, under IPN's recommendation, attempting to pass legislation imposing massive restrictions on speech to, in the words of Ziobro, "defend the good name of Poland." The law in part reads:

*1. Whoever claims, publicly and contrary to the facts, that the Polish Nation is responsible or co-responsible for Nazi crimes committed by the Third Reich... or for other felonies that constitute crimes against peace, crimes against humanity or war crimes, or whoever otherwise grossly diminishes the responsibility of the true perpetrators of said crimes—shall be liable to a fine or imprisonment for up to 3 years. The sentence shall be made public."*

Understandably, this legislative revisionism sparked mass international outcry, and *PiS* attempted to defend its decision with rhetoric such as that offered by then Prime Minister Szydło: "We Poles were victims, as were the Jews... it is the duty of every Pole to defend our country's good name."<sup>105</sup> *PiS* would pull back the legislation as a diplomatic crisis with Israel loomed, but little has been done to stem an increasingly partisan historical institute; one that has persistently repeated claims confirming *PiS*' trauma narrative.

Unsurprisingly, both *Fidesz* and *PiS* have published history textbooks promoting their respective trauma narratives, with Schmidt in Hungary and the IPN in Poland being core parts of the educational approval process. This whitewashing goes beyond defending past crimes; Benazzo finds that Hungarian figures that were Jewish or homosexual have these aspects of their identity erased.<sup>106</sup>

The combined efforts to silence voices of opposition in academia and replace them with trauma-endorsed substitutes represent not only a concerted effort to control the historical narrative, but to remove a vital branch of support to the LGBT+ community in particular and the human rights movement in general by strangling its strongest voices.

### Media Co-optation

The largest targets of *Fidesz* and *PiS*' "revolutions," however, have always been media organizations. *PiS* created similar board reshuffles in state media companies as it did in the IPN, and has imposed heavy taxation on foreign media outlets to deliberately squeeze them from Polish airwaves and newspaper stands. It has been alleged to use private contacts, such as Tadeusz Rydzyk, the host of the ultra-Catholic *Radio Maryja*, to acquire local newspaper and radio networks. Reporters Without Borders alleges that opposition journalists are discriminately

<sup>104</sup> Behr, Valentin. "Historical Policy-Making in Post-1989 Poland: A Sociological Approach to Narratives of Communism." *Foundations and Institutes for National Memory*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2016.

<sup>105</sup> Kelly, Lidia, and Pawlak, Justyna. "Polish Lawmakers Back Holocaust Bill, Spark Israeli Outrage, US Concern." *Reuters*, 31 Jan 2018.

<sup>106</sup> Benazzo, 2017.

targeted by COVID-19 lockdown authorities. Since *PiS* has come to power, the organization has dropped Poland's placement on the Press Freedom Index from 16th to 62nd.<sup>107</sup>

*Fidesz* has employed similar tactics; in 2010, it shortened the duration of press licenses to better deny opposition outlets legal practice. Orbán has relied on a network of *Fidesz*-aligned elites to construct massive media empires; one ally, for example, consolidated 435 newspapers into a single outlet.<sup>108</sup> These networks largely rely on government subsidies for continued operation, coinciding with an expansion of the state in advertising, to the point that 30% of all ad revenue in Hungary comes from *Fidesz*' coffers.<sup>109</sup> In both Poland and Hungary, pro-government outlets not only spew homophobic propaganda, but are occasionally required to do so; Hungarian police have organized raids on Western outlets that have publicly advocated for LGBT+ rights.<sup>110</sup>

These media outlets are used to constantly reinforce *Fidesz*' crisis narratives, occasionally bolstered by National Consultations. The National Consultations are semi-official plebiscites distributed by *Fidesz* at election sites; though they carry no governmental obligation, Orbán relies on them as instruments of his populist legitimacy. The Consultations largely deal with "national trauma" social issues, and the questioning is often framed within the government's narratives. For example, a 2018 Consultation asked Hungarians to weigh their opinions on an alleged conspiracy by George Soros to force migrant quotas on Hungary. This was bolstered by a large advertising campaign depicting a demonic Soros pulling crowds of migrants on puppet strings. This plan was an invention of *Fidesz*, but still saw 97% support among voters, since most of the Hungarian opposition boycotted the vote and the Consultation did not reach a majority turnout. Undeterred, *Fidesz* and its media allies utilized the Consultation as evidence of the popularity of Orbán's anti-immigration policies. A similar Consultation, designed to legitimize Orbán's anti-LGBT politics was held in April this year, with similarly biased questions and a massive media campaign. They read:

- *"Do you support the teaching of sexual orientation to minors in public education institutions without parental consent?"*
- *"Do you support the promotion of sex reassignment therapy for underage children?"*
- *"Do you support the unrestricted exposure of underage children to sexually explicit media content that may affect their development?"*
- *"Do you support the showing of sex-change media content to minors?"*<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> "Poland." *Reporters Without Borders*, 2021.

<sup>108</sup> Körösnéyi, Illés, and Gyulai, 2020.

<sup>109</sup> Sague, Merlin. "Reporters Without Borders lists Viktor Orbán as 'Press Freedom Predator.'" *Politico.eu*, 5 Jul 2021.

<sup>110</sup> Maksimov, Vlagyislav. "Hungarian Media to Publish LGBTI Campaign Despite Risk of Fines." *Euractiv with Telex*, 23 Nov 2021.

<sup>111</sup> "Questions on Controversial 'Anti-LGBT+ Law' Included in National Consultation." *Hungary Today*, 1 Jul 2021.

The use of these Consultations, and their constant advertisement by state-aligned media, demonstrate the vitality and magnitude by which *Fidesz* rely on crisis narratives, of which appeals to trauma play an important role. It similarly demonstrates that anti-LGBT measures are not merely a government side-project, but an electoral priority. Homophobic campaigns by *PiS*-aligned media during the 2020 elections signal a similar importance in the Polish government.

### Weaponizing Lustration and Cultural Funding

Polish state-aligned media also plays an important part in escalating coverage of lustration cases, orchestrated by IPN and still commencing thirty years after the collapse of the People's Republic. Under President Kaczyński in 2007, lustration laws were expanded both in scope and scale; where before only 27,000 government positions were under IPN scrutiny, the new law covered 200,000. IPN was and is incapable of administering this expansion; instead, they were pushed to publish certificates proclaiming “evidence of collaboration” that, while not prompting prosecution, opened individuals to civil litigation. In reality, the qualifications for certificates have far lower criteria, such as the testimony of a single witness. It allowed the IPN to rapidly produce unofficial convictions, which were then given widespread coverage by state-aligned media to inflict serious reputational harm against the accused.

Unsurprisingly, these certificates have been distributed along intensely partisan lines. Critics of the regime, including authors and celebrities, and major political figures, such as Wałęsa, have been accused of Soviet collaboration. Given their ability to destroy careers and lives, the IPN has infrastructure to remove these certificates upon further examination of evidence. This evidence, however, has to be provided by the offended party, and of the 20,000 applications for “injured status,” only 7,000 have succeeded. Since declarations of injured status garner little media attention, the damage dealt is largely irreversible.

Beyond lustration expansion serving as *PiS*' primary electoral promise, there are several reasons behind Poland's new lustration policies. The removal of political rivals is obvious; but its influence on trauma narratives is less so. Through consistent coverage of the certificates, the government is able to constantly reinforce its political narratives of continued anti-Polish treason, of Soviet influences in opposition parties, of the betrayal of Solidarity by “global” elites. Just like the Consultations for *Fidesz*, this furthers the mandate of Law and Justice to impose ever harsher measures as the number of enemies seems to increase.<sup>112</sup>

Lustration is also a tool for *PiS*' greatest ally, the Polish Catholic Church. Not only does this constant promotion of scandals keep attention away from growing allegations against the Church, but the body itself is, after *PiS* reform, immune to certificates despite widespread evidence of direct collaboration between Polish bishops and KGB officials.<sup>113</sup> Law and Justice zealously defends the Church in its many scandals, and utilizes aligned media to suppress or distort such allegations. One noteworthy example emerged after the release of a documentary detailing child sexual abuse scandals by major clergy members. Kaczyński shouted to the press

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<sup>112</sup> Domaradzki, 2018.

<sup>113</sup> Ascherson, Neal. “Catholic Poland's Anguish.” *openDemocracy*, 11 Jan 2007

that “Whoever wants to attack and destroy the Polish nation first attacks the Catholic Church,” before blaming the “rise in pedophilia” evident in these scandals to the growth of the LGBT+ rights movement.<sup>114</sup>

One should be reminded that the wide reach of the Church is also a massive platform for homophobia and transphobia, interspersed with appeals to trauma. The Archbishop of Kraków once told his mass, “The red pestilence that once marched across our land is no more, but a new, neo-Marxist one has appeared... a rainbow plague.”<sup>115</sup> Others have claimed that LGBT+ people contributed to the development of Communism and Nazism, that it “seduces” youth to “captivity and depravity.” These statements are usually celebrated on Polish state media; the “rainbow threat” was the most-mentioned topic in Polish magazines in 2021, and conversion therapy clinics are often broadcasted on local networks. There is little doubt that the Church, often portrayed as “a fortress of Polishness” under threat of destruction, is the primary advocate of aggressive anti-LGBT+ policies in Poland.

*Fidesz*’ relationship with the Church is far less cordial; if anything, churches have been similarly victimized with other major cultural institutions as pawns in Hungary’s “spiritual revival.” *Fidesz* and its elite allies have prioritized the co-optation of artistic and cultural institutions throughout the country. This has largely been orchestrated by the Hungarian Academy of Arts (HAA) and its National Cultural Fund, both of which were endowed by the 2011 Fundamental Law. The HAA oversees exhibitions, rewards prominent Hungarian artists, and administers government grants; unsurprisingly, these are all distributed on partisan lines (see Appendix, Figure I).<sup>116</sup> Of particular note, the National Cultural Fund has been used to subsidize a number of nationalist cottage industries in Hungarian localities that extend the reach of the trauma narrative outside of the urban artistic centers that the government has more difficulty influencing. Shops selling T-shirts celebrating Horthy, wood-cuts depicting Hungary’s pre-Trianon borders, folk music CDs and other paraphernalia have exponentially grown (see Appendix, Figure J). Nearly every major Hungarian church and synagogue has, by government order, initiated revitalization projects with HAA subsidies. This not only boosts *Fidesz*’ credibility as a “defender of the faith,” but gives them a powerful tool for clergy compliance; the HAA is known to abruptly cease funding churches that are critical of the government.<sup>117</sup>

As earlier, elements of civil society that cannot be co-opted are uprooted instead. NGOs, and particularly those supporting LGBT+ rights, have been under constant government scrutiny for years, with both parties attacking them for alleged connections with Western governments and elites like Soros.<sup>118</sup> In Hungary, this climaxed with *Fidesz* passing legislation that requires

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<sup>114</sup> Ciobanu, Claudia. “‘Foreign Ideology’: Poland’s Populists Target LGBT Rights.” *Balkan Insight*, 26 Jun 2019

<sup>115</sup> Tilles, Daniel. “‘LGBT Ideology’ is like Nazism or Bolshevism and Must Be Resisted, Says Polish Archbishop.” *Notes from Poland*, 8 Nov. 2019.

<sup>116</sup> Körösenyi, Illés, and Gyulai, 2020.

<sup>117</sup> Povedák, 2020.

<sup>118</sup> Kovács, Zoltán. “The Soros Network Spent More than 14 Million Dollars Last Year to Lobby the US Government, Focusing in Part on Hungarian Issues.” *About Hungary*, 25 Jan 2018.

NGOs receiving even small amounts of foreign donations to list themselves as “foreign funded” on all official documents, advertisements, and material. In effect, it branded swathes of major civil society organizations with an internationalist stigma both parties have taken decades to build, further delegitimizing voices that run counter to their narrative.

All of these measures are blatantly authoritarian, and in fact these policies represent a significant body of the criticisms levied against both governments. Some are designed to stifle democratic opposition, others to control major facets of free expression. Many Western journalists have argued that they represent mere power grabs, loosely sheathed in rhetorical defense of “national revival” and “renewed revolution.” Their clear contradictions with the democratic values *Fidesz* and *PiS* continue to espouse adds fuel to these arguments.

It is clear that both governments, through every means available to them, seek to enshrine their political narrative into collective national consciousness. By rooting these narratives to trauma, they can become sacrosanct and the fundamental means through which Polish and Hungarian national identity is understood. By arguing that these beliefs are not only under threat, but only understood by *their* party, *Fidesz* and *PiS* have created a nationwide charismatic machine that, ideally, can only falter if the political targets it uses as fuel become irrelevant. As each party’s vision of their nation becomes congruent with the collective, it becomes easier to paint its opponents as enemies of the nation itself.

As the *polityka historyczna* and similar policies demonstrate, reference to trauma is fundamental to these narratives. It not only encourages these “attacks” to be treated with intense urgency by voters, but enables these allegations to maintain a repetitious character. The hypervigilance national trauma incubates allow intense emotionalization and national identification to overshadow what others see as clear political ploys, and both states craftily utilize media, lustration, and other tools to keep reminders of past trauma at the forefront of consciousness. The sheer magnitude through which *Fidesz* and *PiS* pursue these “memory politics” give them a startling influence over the memories and mentalities of their citizens, whose outlooks are increasingly shaped towards their government’s ends.

The next section of this paper will illustrate what these ends are: further securitization of the national body against all agents and all *ideas* that work against it, including those embodied by the queer community. As traumatic feelings intensify, both governments feel increasingly obliged towards pursuing more vicious efforts.

### **Invasion: Securitizing the LGBT+ Community as a Threat**

*“This is not why my parents’ generation for 40 years struggled to expel communist ideology from schools, so that it could not be foisted on children, could not brainwash and indoctrinate them. They did not fight so that we would now accept that another ideology, even more destructive to man, would come along. LGBT is not people... it is an ideology.”*

- Andrejz Duda, President of Poland, on the potential discussion of LGBT+ topics in schools, June 13th, 2020.



*“We can never show solidarity with ideologies, peoples and ethnic groups which are committed to the goal of changing the very European culture which forms the essence, meaning and purpose of the European way of life. We must not show solidarity with groups and ideologies which oppose the aims of European existence and culture, because that would lead to surrender.”*

- Viktor Orbán, Speech at the 28th Bálványos Summer Open, Băile Tușnad, Romania, July 22nd, 2017.

*“We are dealing with a direct attack on the family and children – the sexualization of children, the entire LGBT movement... This is imported, but they today actually threaten our identity, our nation, its continuation and therefore the Polish state.”*

- Jarosław Kaczyński, then Leader of *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, speaking at the University of Technology in Gdańsk, March 30th, 2019.

Homophobia, like all intolerances, manifests in proximity. It is not necessarily the *existence* of homosexuality that drives the hatred demonstrated by these governments, but its visibility, the inevitable confrontation when those considered “Other” are, in fact, members of one’s community.<sup>119</sup> LGBT+ people exist without regards to religion, politics, or nation; this irrefutable fact, and its anathemic incongruence with Hungarian and Polish nationalist constructions of gender and sexuality, is the inspiration for both government’s campaigns.

The first objective of *Fidesz* and *PiS* in Othering queer identities, then, is to deny that fact. They try to prove that LGBT+ people *cannot* belong within the collective identity and the fundamental structures that create it. National trauma pushes the rest forward: since they cannot belong, they must be from elsewhere; if they are from elsewhere, it must be intentional; since it is intentional, they are clearly a threat. The government’s logic justifies treating LGBT people as an issue of national security; the danger of “LGBT ideology” spreading prompts the government to view queer identity as something to be quarantined. Their primary objective is to wall off “vulnerable” Poles and Hungarians from what they perceive as an infection. The next section will detail to whom both parties leave “cleansing.”

In this section, I will explore how both parties construct Christian and “family values” as fundamental to national identity, how they dehumanize LGBT+ people as unwitting “ideological agents,” and the material and legal measures by which these governments force LGBT+ people from the national collective. In doing so, I will also demonstrate how appeals to trauma color and justify policies towards increasing securitization.

### “Christian” and “Family Values” in the Hungarian/Polish Model

The importance of Christian values in the government of *PiS* is already evident, to an extent not shared by their southern ally. Orbán’s peculiar commitment to Christianity, and both

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<sup>119</sup> Jung, Patricia Beattie., and Ralph F. Smith. *Heterosexism : an Ethical Challenge* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993.

parties' incorporation of family values into national policy, need to be contextualized before further analysis of anti-LGBT+ policies.

In Orbán's rhetoric, Christianity serves less function as a religious lifestyle than it does as an ethical bedrock for his definition of "Western Civilization." Within the mythology, Hungary did not become "Western" until it was converted by St. István, who is constantly celebrated by *Fidesz* material and the Fundamental Law itself. Conversely, efforts to secularize or otherwise "de-Christian" Hungary, as the Soviets flaccidly attempted, represent a return to Hungary's "Oriental heathenism" and the cultural decadence *Fidesz* argues that brings.<sup>120</sup> Appeals to this "Christian essence" and the Huntington "Clash of Civilizations" became the core of Orbán's anti-immigrant politics, and represented a new, more spiritual velocity for his attacks on the *nomenklatura* and the "Brussels Bureaucrats." As he argued:

*"...[Syrian migrants] have been raised in another religion, and represent a radically different culture... Europe and European identity is rooted in Christianity. Is it not worrying in itself that European Christianity is now barely able to keep Europe Christian?"*<sup>121</sup>

*Fidesz*, on its website, makes similar appeals:

*"We believe that as a European nation we can only be successful if we respect Christian values as the foundation of our culture and identity, and reject Marxist and progressive ideologies that want to strip us of our roots."*<sup>122</sup>

The extension of this belief to LGBT+ discrimination is fairly straightforward. In the party's view, LGBT+ identities run counter to Christian beliefs on sexuality and gender. Since Christianity is the bedrock of Western civilization, accommodation to LGBT+ rights represents a collapse of the entire Western moral structure, and thus the civilization itself. As such, LGBT+ rights pose an existential, normative threat to Western, Hungarian, and Polish society, just as prior invasions posed a physical threat.

Unfortunately for such proponents, LGBT+ identities are increasingly congruent with the "Western values" of Hungary's fellow EU states. Most Westerners would take issue with the idea that LGBT+ communities are diametrically opposed to their cultures. Even Orbán himself is aware that homosexuality is, at this point, a permanent fixture in Western identity; during his anti-immigration phase, he openly decried Muslim migrants for attacking LGBT+ communities and "spreading homophobia."<sup>123</sup>

With this in mind, both governments have slowly pivoted towards "Central European" family values, which creates greater distance between their Western European counterparts. *Fidesz* started to publicly endorse a "family-friendly Hungary" in 2019 through the efforts of

<sup>120</sup> Reichardt, Adam. "Which Way East? A Conceptual Misunderstanding." In *Understanding Central Europe*, edited by Moskalewicz, Marcin, and Przybylski, Wojciech, Routledge, 2018.

<sup>121</sup> Nyssönen, Heino, 2019, p.105.

<sup>122</sup> "Add tovább aloldal/Our Mission." *Fidesz*,

<sup>123</sup> "Hungary Sends Its Condolences to Victims of Orlando Shooting." *About Hungary*, 13 Jun 2016. The Ombudsman of Human Rights explicitly states that "sexual minorities" deserve "special protections" and are "integral and valued members of our society."

former Family Minister and current President Katalin Novák. As she explained at a “Demographic Summit” held last year:

*“In Hungary, the community’s fundamental building block is the family... The preservation of our created world [from climate change] also entails the conservation of our homes, our homeland, and our culture for generations to come... the family is being attacked.”*<sup>124</sup>

The Demographic Summit makes clear that *Fidesz* sees pro-family policies as vital to resolving their country’s low birth rate and high quantity of youth emigration. It promotes these policies externally as “The Hungarian Model.” The most substantive of their natalist programs have emerged in welfare reform. Hungary’s recent tax laws, for instance, give substantial credits to mothers who have multiple children, up to a full exemption.<sup>125</sup> Childbearing has been promoted zealously by the government, with Orbán declaring it the greatest and most vital contribution a Hungarian woman can make toward “national revival.”<sup>126</sup> One might recall that most of Poland and Hungary’s family-based welfare infrastructure collapsed in early liberalization; as such, these measures have gained immense popularity among some parents. Nor are these measures simply material: Hungary has recently tightened access to divorce, abortion, and aid for domestic violence. *Fidesz* has made it clear that it does not believe single parent households provide proper stability for children, and have thus tried to limit parental separation.

Poland, unsurprisingly, has adopted similar measures, including substantial state subsidies for families with more than two children and an infamous, near total ban on abortion.<sup>127</sup> These governments advertize these policies heavily in their media empires. Both see the “Hungarian/Polish Model” as an effective tool to popularize their governments with conservative Western parties, including and especially the U.S. Republicans. To better court Americans, both governments have hired former Republican political strategists, invited American evangelical groups on state visits, and have tailored the Model to address prominent social issues outside of Poland and Hungary.

By aligning with popular international appeal, however, both governments have damaged the efficacy of their policies by ensuring that “model families” reflect bourgeois “Americana” family appearance. These conflict with the historically large and multigenerational families seen in pre-liberalization Hungary and Poland. Regardless, Hungarian and Polish state-aligned media continuously proselytize to elderly voters that the Models are vital to keeping young couples in smaller communities, where they might better care for their parents over Poland and Hungary’s underdeveloped pension and senior care systems.<sup>128</sup> Though one cannot yet determine the Models’ success practically, they have clearly spirited both party’s older voting bases.

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<sup>124</sup> Novák, 2021.

<sup>125</sup> Pivarnyik, Balász. “Family and Gender in Orbán’s Hungary.” *Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung*, 4 Jul 2018.

<sup>126</sup> Orbán, Viktor. “Full Speech of Viktor Orbán: Will Europe Belong to Europeans?” *Visegrád Post*, 24 Jul 2017.

<sup>127</sup> Sussman, Anna Louie. “The Poland Model - Promoting ‘Family Values’ With Cash Handouts.” *The Atlantic*, 14 Oct 2019.

<sup>128</sup> “Inspiring a World of Habitual Savers: The AEGON Retirement Readiness Survey 2015.” *Aegon*, 2015.

The patriarchal and heteronormative structure of the Models, however, create considerable hurdles in accessing welfare for those who do not comply with their government's construction of the family. Single-parent and Roma families continually slip through the state's welfare policies, and incidents of domestic violence continue to rise in both countries.<sup>129</sup> Likewise, LGBT+ groups are usually denied access to these welfare policies on principle, adding a material element to ongoing government discrimination. This is conjoined with both government's unwillingness to enforce anti-discrimination policies, forcing public LGBT+ people to risk the security of their jobs and homes as the expression of their identities becomes increasingly politicized. If anything, these countries have actively targeted companies that enforce EU-originating anti-discrimination laws. After firing an employee that sent homophobic death threats through the company's internal mail service, Poland's Justice Ministry pursued litigation against IKEA for infringing the "religious rights" of the terminated employee.<sup>130</sup>

The Hungarian and Polish governments have employed measures to ensure that LGBT+ people are incapable of legally raising a family, such as constitutional bans on same-sex marriages and, in Hungary, on same-sex adoption. The Polish government has plans requiring authorities to vet single-parent adoptions for a history of same-sex activity.<sup>131</sup> Similarly, both governments have ensured barriers preventing legal gender and name changes remain in place; Transgender Poles have to pursue civil litigation against their parents, divorce their spouse, and deny custody of their children to qualify for state gender change. Efforts to amend these criteria have been repeatedly vetoed by President Duda.<sup>132</sup> Hungary, as mentioned earlier, has made gender assignments legally immutable, which has created obvious sources of difficulty for transgender and intersex Hungarians wherever government documents are involved.<sup>133</sup>

Given the emphasis these governments have placed on the fundamental and spiritual importance of families, both should be fully aware of the harm they cause by denying LGBT+ people access to building them. Regardless, this unequal denial is merely an undercurrent of discrimination against the broader demonization of the community as a whole.

### "LGBT Ideology"

*PiS* and *Fidesz* are hardly the first governments to utilize religious and family politics against LGBT+ rights. They are, however, among the first to argue they are threats to the state. Neither government believes that queer identities are natural developments, and thus flatly deny the agency of LGBT+ people both in determining their identities and advocating for them as a part of human rights. Rather, LGBT+ people are painted as dangerous, if occasionally unwitting, traitorous conspirators, in line with the trauma narrative both governments use. They have been

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<sup>129</sup> Pivarnyik, 2018.

<sup>130</sup> Moskwa, Wojciech. "Ikea Sued by Poland for Firing Worker Over Anti-Gay Comments." *BNN*, 23 Jul 2020.

<sup>131</sup> Baczynska, Gabriela, and Włodarczak-Semczuk, Anna. "Poland to ban gays from adopting, even as single parents."

<sup>132</sup> Towle, Andy. "Polis President Vetoes Major Transgender Rights Bill." *Towleroad*, Oct 2015.

<sup>133</sup> Tilles, Daniel. "Polish Bishops Call for 'Clinics to Help LGBT People Regain Their Natural Sexual Orientation.'" *Notes from Poland*, 30 Aug 2020.

“infected,” not only by other LGBT+ people but by the liberal, *nomenklatura*, and Western elites that seek to subjugate both countries by dismantling the “fundamental institutions” (the church and family) that allowed Poland and Hungary to previously survive their invasions. Since both parties see LGBT+ people as political agents, they must also dehumanize queer identities into a purely political force, “LGBT Ideology,” that can be justifiably securitized like any other “dangerous” political movement. The use of terms like “ideology,” “brainwash,” “deluge,” and “invasion,” in reference to the LGBT+ community are deliberately utilized to recall past occupations and the trauma that resulted.

Restricting LGBT+ rights is steeped in the language of trauma. During the Demographic Conference, former U.S. Vice President Mike Pence commended Hungary for spending decades against “the progressive fist of tyranny,” making an allusion between “LGBT Ideology” and the Soviet Union.<sup>134</sup> *Fidesz* has publicly broadcasted familiar allegations surrounding George Soros and the LGBT+ rights movement, arguing that his dark money is being used to fund supposed “gay/trans lobbies.”<sup>135</sup> Through these connections, *Fidesz* and *PiS* deliberately incorporate LGBT+ people as new antagonists in a decade-old narrative.

Before both parties grew too hostile to accommodate conservative queers, the use of these alarmist phrases was also targeted to engage in what Hungarians call “*szalámitaktika*,” and what the West calls “divide and conquer.” In the 2010s, both governments strongly implied that “good” LGBT+ people, those who divested themselves of their community’s “activists”, were not threats to Hungarian or Polish values. This further intensified the political and social tensions in national queer communities I discussed in an earlier section. Over the past few years, this language has dropped. Orbán now claims that such accommodation is hopeless and the community beyond redemption.<sup>136</sup>

Despite its novel use, “LGBT ideology” did not originate in either country. Conspiracies of a discrete “gay agenda” have haunted the movement from its nascence, and these have been bolstered by the far-right concept of “gender ideology” that emerged in the early 2010s.<sup>137</sup> “Gender ideology” escapes simple classification. Kuhar and Paternotte have argued that, across Europe and North America, it has been used to represent a swathe of social rights and reforms. These include reproduction rights, sex education, and measures against sexual and gender-based violence. “Gender ideology” gives a conspiratorial face to efforts from ethicists, sociologists, anthropologists, and others in academia, as well as affected groups in civil society, to redefine traditional gender roles, sexuality, and gender identities as societal constructs. These partially academic roots have allowed “anti-gender” campaigners, generally from similar ultra-right parties as those mentioned previously, to tie these social movements into their larger opposition

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<sup>134</sup> Novák, 2021.

<sup>135</sup> Kovács, Zoltán. “The Soros Network Spent More than 14 Million Dollars Last Year to Lobby the US Government, Focusing in Part on Hungarian Issues.” *About Hungary*, 25 Jan 2018.

<sup>136</sup> “Interview with Viktor Orbán in the Czech Daily *Lidové Noviny*.” *AboutHungary*, Oct 2 2021.

<sup>137</sup> Przybyło, 2021.. Przybyło provides a banner, utilized by Equality March counter protestors, that deliberately compares the “Rainbow Flag” to the Soviet Hammer and Sickle and Nazi Swastika.

to the European Union, neoliberalism, and multiculturalism.<sup>138</sup> The legacy of other European far-right qualities, such as anti-Semitism and the “Great Replacement” conspiracy theory, are evident; in the latter theory, feminism and LGBT+ rights are seen as attempts to “demasculinize” white Europe and thus make it vulnerable to invasion. George Soros and other Jews are regularly alleged to be masterminds of these plots.

Since *Fidesz* and *PiS* have already co-opted these conspiracies for their trauma narratives, it is hardly surprising that their view of “LGBT ideology” is so similar. In particular, both parties merge the ideology into the alleged threat of Europeanization. In the materials of both parties, “LGBT+ activists” stand side-by-side “Brussels Bureaucrats,” and multiple politicians have argued that the LGBT+ rights movement is “imported,” using the investment of Western-based NGOs as evidence.<sup>139</sup>

To provide an example of how “LGBT+ ideology” can frame native LGBT+ people as “foreign,” one can refer to the way Hungary’s President described transgender people in one interview with a pro-government outlet. Novák counters the claims of European Commission President von der Leyden that transgender rights are “fundamental to Europe” by arguing that no concept for transgender people exists in the Hungarian language at all:

*“[Gender ideological approaches] cannot really be understood in a Hungarian context. If I ask someone what their sex is, they can answer it; but when I ask what their gender is, they don’t really know what to say. The letters of the different ‘social genders’ are often not even known to those who regularly use the term LGBTQ as a whip.”*<sup>140</sup>

There is, in fact, a Hungarian phrase used by transgender people (the “social genders” Novák ridiculed), just as there were gender-nonconforming identities before transgender identities mainstreamed. However, Novák points to the recent adoption of these terms as further evidence that transgender identities are inventions not merely incorporated, but *contrived* by the EU as a political, rather than a real and experienced social identity.

As shall be extensively demonstrated here, the incorporation of “LGBT ideology” into the trauma narrative promotes securitization against its perceived threat, and *Fidesz* and *PiS* both maintain and encourage a hypervigilance surrounding gender politics that borders on paranoia. For example, Hungary’s Foreign Minister, Zoltán Kovács, wrote extensively about his party’s sudden reversal against ratifying the Istanbul Convention that sought to increase international measures for preventing domestic violence. He claimed that the Convention had underhandedly incorporated “gender ideology” in an attempt to challenge Hungarian sovereignty. In his words:

*“Had the Convention stuck to the protection of women’s rights, Hungary would have been among the first countries to ratify it... but the Convention went far beyond this... One of these sections is found in Article 3(c), where the Convention defines ‘gender’ as ‘socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate*

<sup>138</sup> Paternotte, David, and Kuhar, Roman. *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing Against Equality*. Rowman and Littlefield, 2021, Introduction.

<sup>139</sup> “Polish Election: Andrzej Duda Says LGBT ‘Ideology’ Worse than Communism.” *BBC*, 14 Jun 2020.

<sup>140</sup> VP Katalin Novák: “The protection of minorities does not mean depriving the majority of their rights”. *Fidesz.hu*, 11 Nov 2020.

for women and men.” This “social gender” definition, however, conflicts with Hungary’s constitution because the clause denies that there are only two biological genders, male and female. Without biological genders, for example, Hungary’s constitutional definition of marriage (the matrimony of a man and a woman) would become void. By refusing the ratification of the Convention, Hungary can say “Yes!” to protecting women and “no!” to gender ideology.”<sup>141</sup>

Similarly, Ziobro also made multiple attempts to escape the Treaty, calling it “a feminist creation aimed at justifying gay ideology.”<sup>142</sup>

Polish state media has become a mass producer of this hypervigilance, utilizing its large platform to broadcast these theories. By far, the most infamous example of such attacks is *Inwasja* (Invasion), a thirty minute documentary produced by the state news network *Telewizja Polska* (Polish Public Television, PPT), the most-watched network in Poland, several months before the Presidential election. The documentary follows an alleged “undercover reporter” who joins several prominent Equality Marches, not only alleging that many native “activists” receive underhand payment by NGOs, but deliberately compares the “gay invasion” to Stalinization. While libel suits eventually took this documentary off of airwaves, they only did so months after *PiS* had achieved electoral success on their homophobic campaign (see Appendix, Figure K).<sup>143</sup>

The alarmist language populating the film and its producers’ rhetoric has had a substantial effect on their voters’ views: one Ipsos poll found that, even among younger Polish men, a majority found that “LGBT and gender ideology” was the largest threat their country faces in the 21st century.<sup>144</sup> The leverage this provides the state for further “securitization” is clear.

#### “Child Protection” and Norms Securitization

Both *Fidesz* and *PiS* would likely take more aggressive measures against the LGBT+ “threat” if they could, but the constraints placed both by the EU and political moderates are insurmountable through official government means. The politicians of large cities such as Warsaw, Kraków, and Budapest openly support LGBT+ rights; it was Mayor Trzaskowski’s public support for the community that prompted the creation of the “Free Zones” in the first place.<sup>145</sup> The community is no longer invisible, as it was under state socialism; it cannot be “cleansed.”

By incorporating the community as an antagonist in the trauma narrative, however, both parties must find some way to heroically fight off and “save” their countries from LGBT+ people. With necessity and constraint in mind, both governments have sought to securitize

<sup>141</sup> Kovács, Zoltán. “Yes to protecting women - no to gender ideology and illegal immigration!” *About Hungary*, 7 May 2020.

<sup>142</sup> Sanotra, Mark. “Poland Considers Leaving Treaty on Domestic Violence, Spurring Outcry.” *The New York Times*, 27 Jul 2020.

<sup>143</sup> Bretan, Juliette. “Court order Polish state broadcaster to take down online anti-LGBT film.” *Notes from Poland*, 8 Jun 2020.

<sup>144</sup> Walker, Shaun, Davies, Christian, and Tait, Robert. “Anti-LGBT Rhetoric Stokes Tensions in Eastern Europe.” *The Guardian*, 25 Oct 2019.

<sup>145</sup> Gera, Vanessa. “Mayor Joins Poland’s Pride Parade Amid Ant-LGBT Campaign.” *Time*, 8 Jun 2019.

LGBT+ not as an identity, but as a discourse. “LGBT+ ideology,” after all, is not necessarily spread by individuals in the grander narrative, but through the same networks the government’s other enemies utilize. The primary LGBT+ policy objective of both governments has been making queer identities and advocacy as invisible as possible. Through a sort of nationwide “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” that can keep queer identities out of sight, both governments can claim victory without resorting to violent ends. This has, so far, been achieved through what Nunez-Mietz labels, “norms securitization.”

To briefly elaborate, most liberal human rights scholars argue that introducing new human rights in societies previously lacking them require one to disseminate norms regarding those rights through multiple facets of civil society. In order to spread human rights, one must have the language to conceptualize, discuss, and implement them. “Norms dissemination” is a tool towards that end. Norm dissemination was the clear objective of the LGBT visibility campaigns I mentioned earlier; when positive images of the LGBT+ community are made prominent, conversations about their civil needs can be better addressed, and hostility around the subject dwindles as populations become less ignorant. Hungary and Poland’s cultural similarities to Western Europe, with their post-colonial and post-totalitarian context, made them fertile grounds for the implementation of these practices, as the growth of the LGBT+ and women’s rights movements attest. The theoretical language surrounding norms dissemination is known by both governments.

“Norms securitization,” then, seeks to strangle this process and thus better marginalize the LGBT+ community from everyday society and politics. Norms securitization quite clearly appeals to national trauma. The paramount desire to control collective narratives easily intersects with the desire to incubate the group from outside threats.<sup>146</sup> As before, *Fidesz* and *PiS* show a deep desire to remove oppositional voices.

To provide a practical example of norm securitization, I must first discuss the efforts of *Fidesz* and *PiS* politicians to portray the LGBT+ community as a direct threat to children. Both parties frequently associate homosexuality with pedophilia or argue that the tolerance of one will inevitably encourage the tolerance of the other, an age-old trope that proved as popular in state socialist societies as it did in liberal Western ones.<sup>147</sup> When Trzaskowski made his “Warsaw Declaration,” Poland’s then Minister of Education, Dariusz Piontowski, criticized it as “an attempt to sexualize children by force,” that will “raise children to be taken away by pedophiles.” Kaczyński called it “an overt attempt to sexualize infants.”<sup>148</sup> Groups such as *Kampanię Stop Pedofilii*, and far-right members of Parliament have campaigned in both countries to constitutionally ban any promotion of “sexual deviancy,” which *Jobbik* described as “homosexuality, sex changes, transvestism, bisexuality, and other pedophile behavior.”<sup>149</sup> In the first *PiS* cabinet, Roman Giertych, another Minister of Education, supported banning LGBT+

<sup>146</sup> Nunez-Mietz, Fernando G. “Resisting Human Rights Through Securitization: Russia and Hungary Against LGBT Rights.” *Journal of Human Rights*, vol. 18, no. 5, 2019, p.550.

<sup>147</sup> Essig, 1999.

<sup>148</sup> Gera, 2019.

<sup>149</sup> “Jobbik Seeks ‘Gay Propaganda Ban.’” *Budapest Times*, 19 Apr 2012.



people from teaching, as he argued it would create an unsafe environment for children.<sup>150</sup> In this spirit, *Fidesz* and *PiS* frequently claim “concern for the health of children” as justification for imposing harsher anti-LGBT+ policies.

While vile, the tactic is well-calculated. Christian and family values might be ideologically important to voters, but they remain incomparable to material concerns. By focusing on children, *Fidesz* and *PiS* invent a material, identifiable stake for their voters, which can grow increasingly urgent as more children explore their sexuality or gender identity. With that in mind, anti-LGBT+ legislation has often been euphemistically phrased as “anti-pedophile,” “pro-child,” or “children’s rights.”

The crown jewel of these efforts was a series of amendments passed by the National Assembly in 2021, usually shortened as the “Child Protection Act,” or the “Anti-Pedophile Act” in *Fidesz* media. In addition to dramatically increasing the state’s punitive capacity against child sex offenders, the legislation also criminalized sharing information about homosexuality and gender changes to Hungarian children. To realize this, Hungary banned any media from mentioning LGBT+ topics during daytime hours (or permanently for child-targeted media), and banned companies from advertising with LGBT+ symbols or speaking in support of the community. Products using LGBT+ symbols were either destroyed, forced to change packaging, or can only be shown to customers on personal request. The harshest aspects of the law emerged with respect to “educational and religious facilities,” where “spreading” homosexual propaganda, including through sex education and displaying LGBT+ symbols within 200 meters of said facilities, would be considered a form of pedophilia.<sup>151</sup>

To better legitimize what immediately became one of the most controversial laws in the European Union, Orbán transformed its provisions into a National Consultation, which I displayed earlier.<sup>152</sup> The costs to the LGBT+ community were tremendous. Hungary’s largest LGBT+ rights NGO, Háttér Társaság, reported a spike in hate crimes against LGBT+ people, including physical violence, in the days following the act’s passage. None were investigated by the Hungarian government.<sup>153</sup> International human rights NGOs showed open concern for LGBT+ youth in the country, now at risk of incriminating their teachers by confiding in their sexuality or asking for assistance against bullying or harassment. This indirect violence, however, was not an *explicit* desire of *Fidesz*, who has continuously advocated that their bill only bans “pedophile propaganda.”<sup>154</sup>

In conjunction with the constraints placed on “foreign-funded NGOs,” it represents a serious limit on the ability of the LGBT+ rights movement to disseminate pro-LGBT+ norms. Nobody can run an awareness campaign for their rights when mentioning those rights in print, advertising, and television is criminal. Instead, the LGBT+ community is completely at the

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<sup>150</sup> “Poland: School Censorship Proposal Threatens Basic Rights.”

<sup>151</sup> “Dutch PM Rutte: No Place in EU for Hungary with Anti-LGBT Law.” *BBC*, 24 Jun 2021.

<sup>152</sup> Kovács, Zoltán. “Here’s the Latest National Consultation Questionnaire.” *AboutHungary*, 1 Jul 2021.

<sup>153</sup> Kovács, Kinga. “Több a homofób támadás (More Homophobic Attacks).” *RTL*, 18 Jul 2021. The article was translated through a friend.

<sup>154</sup> Novak, Benjamin. “Hungary Adopts Child Sex Abuse Law That Also Targets the LGBT+ Community

mercy of state-aligned media, which have continued to lambast queerphobic propaganda without limitation. In Budapest, government-sponsored billboards plaster street corners with denunciations of “LGBT+ activists” who seek to abuse Hungary’s children (see Appendix, Figure L).<sup>155</sup> This lackadaisical enforcement makes obvious the opposition to pro-LGBT+ norms, over a complete ban; both parties still need to publicly “fight” the “enemy” to secure votes.

For LGBT+ activists and allies, however, the law is not conjecture: I have already mentioned the police raids on media outlets that refuse to take down “pro-LGBT+” shows.<sup>156</sup> Television pundits who speak in support of the community are immediately fired from state controlled or aligned media networks.<sup>157</sup> In two infamous cases, two children’s books depicting same-sex parents (*Micsoda család!* or “What a Family!”) and transgender protagonists (*Meseország mindenkie*, or “Fairy Tales are for Everyone”) were taken from store shelves after the authors and distributors both were fined by the government.<sup>158</sup>

*PiS* has not yet joined Hungary in implementing such legislation, though it plans to do so, and similarly put state funds into its rhetoric. *PiS* donates tens of millions of *zloty* to media outlets and NGOs that lambast LGBT+ rights, such as the conservative magazine *Gazeta Polska*, famous for distributing “LGBT Free” stickers to its readers. The magazine has seen its advertising revenue grow by 2000% after contributions by state-aligned firms (see Appendix, Figure M). The government has also redirected funding to “LGBT-Free Zones,” usually by withdrawing funds for domestic violence prevention and prison maintenance.

The Child Protection Act exemplifies a familiar cycle: *Fidesz*, at Orbán’s lead, creates a crisis narrative rooted in trauma (in this case “LGBT+ ideology”), forces the issue into the political fore with its propagandistic machinery, and implements greater measures to silence voices that dissent from the trauma narrative. The rooting in trauma is obvious not only in both parties’ incorporation of LGBT+ people in the conspiracy theories of potential invasions and genocides, but in the many referrals to prior occupations that have plagued both nations. Both governments, for instance, have argued that pro-LGBT+ sex education is tantamount to Soviet-era propaganda, and have compared Germany’s support for LGBT+ Poles and Hungarians to Nazi support for *Volksbund* parties in WWII.

Many scholars have argued that these policies are pragmatic instruments. The Child Protection Act, for instance, bears clear resemblance to anti-LGBT+ legislation passed by Russia’s Vladimir Putin, an ideological ally of Orbán, in 2013.<sup>159</sup> If so, the use of trauma to bolster securitization arguments is being deliberately utilized for two reasons. One, it allows both parties to extend their victimhood politics to the minorities they are attacking, which supports the

<sup>155</sup> Photos of these posters were sent to me by several contacts.

<sup>156</sup> Makszimov, Vlagyislav. “Hungarian Media to Publish LGBTI Campaign Despite Risk of Fines.” *Euractiv with Telex*, 23 Nov 2021.

<sup>157</sup> Goldblatt, David. “The Euros Haven’t Started, but Viktor Orban is Already a Winner.” *OpenDemocracy*, 11 Jun 2021.

<sup>158</sup> Haynes, Suyin. “Hungarian PM Attacks Children’s Book for LGBT Fairytales.” *Time*, 8 Oct 2020.

<sup>159</sup> Verpoest, 2017.

moral legitimacy of their actions. If the nation is under siege, these policies appear more justifiable. The second reason is more sinister: appeals to group solidarity and past terrors are excellent instruments for strangling empathy, which is likely the single greatest emotional counter to these policies. The deliberate use of “us vs. them” and other exclusionary rhetoric force queer people out of the in-groups both parties have relentlessly argued should be the only concern of patriotic Hungarians and Poles.

The costs of these policies to hundreds of thousands of their countrymen, however, are so severe that both parties’ obvious electoral pragmatism comes into question. Neither party was founded by power-grubbers, otherwise Orbán and the Kaczyński’s would have long ago taken the easy and lucrative path of the *nomenklatura* they detest. They *were* idealists, and their constant exportation of trauma narratives and willingness to villainize the LGBT+ community speaks to that idealism. The trauma narratives are not merely espoused to seek votes, but are genuinely believed by at least parts of both governments.

This idealism is poisonous to the LGBT+ community, as both governments cannot afford and will not compromise on the narratives they have pushed themselves into. The next steps for either country are difficult to predict, as both leaders are notorious for their spontaneity in policy.<sup>160</sup> If both parties seriously believe that LGBT+ people are child sexual abusers, there is a distinct possibility that the community will be included in the law’s other anti-pedophile provisions. These include the creation of a national registry, restrictions on employment in health, education, and government, and a ban on access to public spaces popular with children, such as zoos and beaches.<sup>161</sup> Nothing in either party’s rhetoric implies they have any compunctures with such an implementation.

Beyond speculation, however, are the very real consequences endured by the queer community as a result of these politics. Those costs, and both government’s use of trauma to evade responsibility for creating them, will be thoroughly examined in the next and final section.

### **Exoneration: Utilizing National Trauma to Shift Responsibility**

*“We do not break taboos by stating that the mother is a woman, the father is a man, and that a little girl has the right to grow up as a little girl and a little boy has the right to grow up as a little boy. Today, we have to state things that are evident, and we must do this to protect the majority - because the protection of minorities does not mean depriving the majority of their rights... If we deprive children of the certainty that he/she is a boy or a girl, we are harming them... The European Commission should act as guardian of the Treaties, but instead it has taken on the role of prison guard and wishes to lock Member States in an ideological prison. I could count countless documents in which gender ideological approaches that they want to force on us appeared out of the blue.”*

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<sup>160</sup> Körösesnyí, Illés, and Gyulai, 2020.

<sup>161</sup> “New Law Passed Will Create Register of Pedophiles.” *AboutHungary*, 16 Jun 2021.

- Katalin Novák, then Hungarian Minister of Families and current President of Hungary, on the European Commission's report on government discrimination of LGBT+ identities, November 21st, 2020.

*"Leszek Mezynski, a retired dairy farmer and deputy head of the regional council, said the conservative district wanted to keep out migrants and liberal ideas like gay marriage to avoid 'civilizational suicide.' But it is more concerned, he said, about losing the economic benefits that flow from European Union farm subsidies, funding for new roads and other dollops of cash."*

- Andrew Higgins of *The New York Times*, describing sentiments held by the PiS-supporting local council of Kobylin-Borzymy, a village in the Podlaskie Voivodeship and self-declared "LGBT Free Zone." October 26th, 2021.

*"I feel bad in Poland. The President says I am not human. One of my friends was kicked out of his house because he was gay. I don't want to live in this country. I don't want to have to fight all the time, just when I want to go outside."*

- David Kufel, an 18-year old attendee of the Katowice Equality March, 2020.

At this point, it is evident that the language used by *Fidesz* and *PiS* matches those encountered in genocidal regimes. Schick, in her analysis of how countries incorporate national trauma, calls violence a climactic aspect of "acting out," or the final stake when a collective refuses to challenge its biases and narratives.<sup>162</sup> National trauma narratives are evident in many instances of genocide. In one example, Michael Ignatieff interviewed Serbian militias during the Bosnian War, and was surprised by how many of them immediately defended their actions through a story of national victimhood harking back 600 years.<sup>163</sup> The politics of victimhood enable increasingly depraved acts. Therefore, important to analyze how *PiS* and *Fidesz*' "war on gender" has created a real atmosphere of violence for their nation's queer communities. I argue that both governments are constrained from the anti-LGBT+ violence one observes in Chechnya. Through national trauma, however, both governments have been able to export this violence away from accountable hands and into those the EU cannot reasonably restrict: paramilitaries, local police forces, pastors, doctors, and parents.

For all queer populations globally, violence is an especially acute concern, and its domestic, informal and structural roots make it particularly difficult to regulate even in progressive governments. However, this violence is rarely overseen and encouraged to the magnitude observable in Poland and Hungary, where such hatred is excused with arguments rooted in trauma and familiar alarms of imminent foreign occupation. Even moreso than in justifying anti-LGBT+ policies, national trauma is utilized by both governments to excuse their gross violations of human rights, and is where the narrative will be most clearly prominent.

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<sup>162</sup> Schick, Kate. "Acting Out and Working Through: Trauma and (In)Security." *Review of International Studies*, vol. 37, no. 4, Oct 2011, pp.1837-1855.

<sup>163</sup> Ignatieff, Michael. *Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism*. Macmillan Press, 1995.

## Diplomatic Constraints and the European Union

Within a few years, two actions of Poland's Justice Ministry, led by the indefatigable zealot Ziobro, finally galvanized the European Union against the Polish government. These were the declared legal support for "LGBT-Free Zones," and Ziobro's efforts to have the Polish Constitutional Court take precedence over all EU legislation.<sup>164</sup> While both of these moves were loudly celebrated by *Fidesz*, the rest of the EU took swift action, cutting development aid to any declared "Free Zone" and forcing Ziobro to higher court. This fierceness, however, was deeply delayed. For years, the Polish and Hungarian governments had willfully attacked LGBT+ rights and the rule of law in general, even as they requested and indeed relied on EU funds for their own country's continued prosperity. Since both parties maintain complete control over their legislation, the EU represents the largest constraining factor over both government's behavior. It is worth inquiring why so little has been done.

For one, both the EU and its nearest ally, the United States, have been mired in similar crises to those encountered in Poland and Hungary, whose peripheral status has previously prompted many Western leaders to excuse their governance as a temporary reaction to the sudden onset of Europeanization, liberalization, and human rights. Poland and Hungary, despite being member states to the European Union, are not always viewed as equals. Despite this, the EU and United States have largely been led by parties sympathetic to *Fidesz* and *PiS*, or the "Christian democracy" they claim to support. Donald Trump has spoken of both parties with overwhelming condonement, and *Fidesz*' former membership in the European People's Party within the European Parliament brought them support from leaders like Germany's Angela Merkel and Italy's Silvio Berlusconi.<sup>165</sup> The EPP's prior dominance of the European Parliament thus served to protect Hungary and Poland from more severe restrictions.

It is also safe to say that, until recently, many European leaders did not much care about LGBT+ rights outside their borders. It was only a decade ago that the majority of EU member states legalized same-sex marriage, and ratified the Treaty of Lisbon that afforded certain employment protections. Since then, however, many Western European states have co-opted LGBT+ rights as part of a greater push to redefine national identities around progressive values. This "homonationalism" has prompted many priorly unconcerned EU leaders to view Hungary and Poland's actions, ironically, as attacks on fundamental European values.<sup>166</sup> Though *Fidesz* has especially worked to court right-wing and populist parties in the West, even center-right parties throughout Europe and North America have demonstrated opposition to both parties' politics. Most famously, the right-wing Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Mark Rutte, publicly advocated for Hungary's removal from the EU after the passage of the Child Protection Act.<sup>167</sup> These have been bolstered by a litany of diplomatic crises emanating from both countries' fierce

<sup>164</sup> Henley, Jon, and Rankin, Jennifer. "Polish Court Rules EU Laws Incompatible with Its Constitution." *The Guardian*, 7 Oct 2021.

<sup>165</sup> "PM Orbán highlights that Hungary's epidemic response law was in compliance with EU laws". *AboutHungary*, 5 May 2020.

<sup>166</sup> Dahl, Ulrika. "Postcolonial Queer Europe in a Time of Growing Nationalism and Racism." *λ Nordica*, 2017.

<sup>167</sup> *BBC*, 2021

utilization of trauma narratives: for example, Law and Justice have had tense relations with Germany after the major EU power opened new relations with Russia. Law and Justice was also implicated in a major scandal with Ireland after its then-*Taoiseach*, the openly gay Leo Varadkar, was accused of child sex trafficking on state television.<sup>168</sup>

As long as both governments remain in power, Hungary and Poland cannot be forced from the EU, as the vote to remove a member state is unanimous-minus-one. The growing isolation of both countries, however, continues to galvanize this membership and EU development funding. If either were to evaporate, Hungary and Poland's economies and governments would promptly collapse. As such, Orbán has recently been attempting to present his governance style and anti-LGBT+ policies as distinct, Central European institutions in an attempt to court right-wing governments in the other Visegrád countries and Eastern Europe, as shall be seen below. These have found mixed success. *PiS* and *Fidesz* courted the populist regimes of Slovakia's Igor Matovič and Czechia's Andrej Babiš, before both were removed from power following corruption scandals, as well as the authoritarian Aleksandar Vučić of Serbia, whose membership to the EU Orbán has proudly endorsed.<sup>169</sup> Romania and the Baltic States, despite widespread opposition to LGBT+ rights such as same-sex marriage and adoption, have forcefully distanced themselves from both governments.

As long as this diplomatic situation persists, neither Hungary nor Poland can too provocatively push against LGBT+ rights, even as their rhetoric continually stresses the need for securitization. This pariah status has, however, given both governments ample opportunity to utilize trauma narratives to further depict themselves as victims of European Union aggression. They hope to allay the anxiety of their isolation to voters with an underdog story of Hungary and Poland's staunch defense against the LGBT ideological bullies and their neoliberal puppet masters. Since much of the trauma narrative utilizes Poland and Hungary's historic liminality between Western and Eastern Europe to present both countries as "Bulwarks of Western Civilization," both governments have been brilliantly able to turn their narratives around. They will proudly defend Western civilization from itself, as one of Orbán's speeches exemplify:

*The Brussels Bureaucrats are not far from "Homo Sovieticus," those who wanted to make everyone forget the two-thousand-year endeavor for a Christ-like man, they considered respect for parents and family outdated junk, insisted that children should be raised only to promote the party and the class struggle, and that life exists only in the material world, without a spirit... They believe that our family ideals are outdated and oppressive and they insist that in line with a progressive approach, children should wear trousers for six months and skirts for another six months... Poland and Hungary reject these ideals, and we bear great responsibility because we understand that these two countries don't just represent their own citizens but also*

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<sup>168</sup> Scally, Derek. "Polish Campaigner Faces Second Trial Over Comments About Perversion and Varadkar." *Irish Times*, 10 Feb 2022.

<sup>169</sup> "PM Orbán: Hungary supports Serbia's EU membership bid." *About Hungary*, 16 Apr 2019.

*those millions of Europeans who are forced to keep their opinions to themselves in their home countries.*"<sup>170</sup>

### Blame-Shifting, "Strong" Nationalism, and Retraumatization

Both parties similarly utilize national trauma to delegitimize queer suffering as incomparable to the trauma both nations continue to suffer from. In congruence with their "child protection" measures, *Fidesz* has often argued that it must choose between the human rights of incompatible groups; providing LGBT+ rights actively *takes away* the right to life of other Hungarians. It is with such logic that Gergely Gulyás, Orbán's Chief of Staff, argued that the child Protection Act was a *compromise* against further anti-LGBT+ legislation. He publicly denounced critics who saw the Child Protection Act as,

*"...harming basic human rights rather than as a child protection measure... We are not advising anyone over 18 on how to live their lives. The Hungarian Constitution ensures human dignity to everyone... regardless of how they live."*<sup>171</sup>

One Hungarian MP, Kinga Gál, accused the European Commission of wilfully neglecting the discrimination ethnic Hungarians face in post-Trianon borders over "overblown" concerns for the LGBT+ community, asking "Are some minorities to be protected by the EC and others not?"<sup>172</sup> *Fidesz*' official website makes similar statements, continually stressing that these "Hungarian victims" deserve more attention from human rights activists than "non-national minorities" which includes immigrants and LGBT+ people.<sup>173</sup> In Poland, *PiS* argues that international human rights concerns over the "LGBT Ideology Free Zones" are further evidence of the "Pedagogy of Shame," designed to tarnish Poland's international image before it is invaded, as the Third Reich had done in 1939. Ziobro has publicly accused the Union of utilizing "cultural blackmail" to force "same sex marriage and pedophilia" onto Poland.<sup>174</sup> Jarosław Kaczyński requested that the Commission not fall for the "myth" that Poland was an "anti-Semitic, homophobic, and xenophobic country" before accusing the larger Union of desiring the creation of a "Fourth Reich."<sup>175</sup>

To push the claims of EU imperialism further, Orbán has created a narrative that his politics are representative of a "Central European tradition" that is distinct from Western European culture *because* of the traumas the region has endured. Per his argument, Western Europe's inability to understand the necessity of the Child Protection Act stems from their experience as cultural colonizers, never facing cultural extinction:

<sup>170</sup> "PM Orbán Touches Upon the EU, Families and Migration." *AboutHungary*, 28 Dec 2021.

<sup>171</sup> "Cabinet Chief: Government rejects LGBTQ propaganda aimed at children." *AboutHungary*, 30 Nov 2021.

<sup>172</sup> "PM Orbán: According to EU founding Treaties, it is a national competence how to raise our children." *AboutHungary*, 8 Jul 2021.

<sup>173</sup> "About Us." *Fidesz.hu*, 2021.

<sup>174</sup> "Polish Justice Minister: 'Unacceptable' for EU to Force Poland to Embrace Gay Marriage." *Voice of America*, 20 Jul 2020.

<sup>175</sup> "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Rights in Poland and Latvia." *Amnesty International*, 2006.

*“For the educated Western public... a nation is now unacceptable, even suspicious. Meanwhile, for [Central Europe, the nation] is an elementary condition of existence; it is as natural as breathing. Our culture, Hungarian national culture... can only exist within us, through us and by us. Without us, it becomes forever lost to the whole of humanity... At the same time, the Tatar incursions, the rise of the Muslim world, Nazi occupation, Soviet occupation and... the years of communism all combined to make the protection of the Carpathian Basin a massive mission of national, Central European significance. Mutatis mutandis, similar processes took place also in the realm of the Polish people and the territories of the Balkans. Here at the border of Latin and Orthodox spirituality, at the frontier of the Western and Russian worlds, at the fault line of Christian and Muslim civilisations, here life is more serious, the stakes are always higher, the self-image of peoples and nations is always more contoured... In Central Europe, every error or mistake can well be the last one ever made... every child is a new guard post.”<sup>176</sup>*

Orbán expresses similar views in several *samizdat*, online essays named after the dissident presses of the late state socialist era. Presenting these as “hidden truths” against alleged European Union censors, these blogs deliberately play into the trauma narrative by implying that Orbán’s opposition to the Union mirrors his opposition to the Soviet occupation as a student. Similar references to the collapse of the People’s Republic and Orbán’s speech at Nagy’s grave decorate his attacks on the EU’s support of LGBT+ rights:

*“A politician with ambitions for high office in Brussels must understand that Central Europe will never surrender its Christian values, national culture and our belief in the traditional – and, for us, the only – family model... A politician with ambitions for high office in Brussels must never forget this. They would be making a mistake if, instead of accepting our cultural and historical differences, they tried to force migrants on us or threatened us with sanctions, withdrawal of funds, starving us out and other assorted torments.”<sup>177</sup>*

In the most recent State of the Nation Address, Orbán accuses the Union of weaponizing the rule-of-law as a means of forcing LGBT+ people onto Hungary, which he likewise proclaims as anathema to Central European values:

*“You have also lived through the imperialist tantrums of Brussels... we are on a different wavelength from the Western European intellectual caste, their experts, policymakers and opinion leaders. The fact that we are on two different wavelengths is beyond doubt... we think differently about the family – and have even come to think differently about the binary structure of society, based on women and men... they did not live under dictatorships, and their freedom is inherited. We, however, lived under dictatorship. Freedom was not given to us: we fought for it... For them, the rule of law is a tool with which they can mold us in their image. They are not interested [in basic facts] or our arguments. They are now fighting a holy war: a rule-of-law*

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<sup>176</sup> Orbán, 2021.

<sup>177</sup> Orbán, Viktor. “Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s Response to Manfred Weber.” *AboutHungary*, 30 Dec 2020.



*jihad. And, my friends, words rarely help against jihad. Here we must show strength; so let our Reconquista begin!*"<sup>178</sup>

Orbán hopes, with these references to a "Central European identity" to compose a voting bloc of Central European states that can more permanently enshrine anti-LGBT+ politics in the region while simultaneously evading Western European scrutiny. This identity is, in effect, an evolution of his trauma narrative; where once he resisted the Soviet's efforts to drag Hungary into the Orient, he now resists Occidental forces.<sup>179</sup> By reinforcing this incompatibility, he also further enshrines the "Othering" of the queer Hungarian community. The more loudly the European Union protests for their rights, the more readily *Fidesz* can point to such defense as evidence of foreign collusion and imperialism. LGBT+ Hungarians cannot accept the EU's aid without further branding themselves as traitors and placing further targets on their backs. The conspiracies of the Polish government create a similar situation for the LGBT+ community. All resistance, or, as has been seen, simply and openly identifying as LGBT+, reinforces the trauma narrative and justifies harsher policies.

This is not the only method through which both parties utilize national trauma to excuse their human rights violations; the other major avenue is to portray restrictions on equal rights as a necessary evil for protecting their nations from future trauma. Unsurprisingly, both parties see LGBT+ norms as emasculating, borrowing from Great Replacement conspiracy theories that the introduction of the LGBT+ community weakens their country's defense capabilities. Orbán has repeatedly proclaimed tolerance for the LGBT+ community as an unaffordable weakness.<sup>180</sup>

If anything, appeals to maintaining the strength of Hungary have become frequent tools in *Fidesz*'s playbook: the current Foreign Secretary, Péter Szijjártó, argues that the European Union built on "strong states" with rigid family values.<sup>181</sup> Novák argues that Europe's strength is reliant on "strong families,"<sup>182</sup> and in commemorating the Trianon Treaty, *Fidesz*'s Deputy Prime Minister, Zsolt Semjén, proclaimed that the only means to "move on" from "the agony of the nation" is to "build a strong Hungary and a strong national identity."<sup>183</sup> Each of these leaders specifies LGBT+ rights as 'weakening' the country, providing an overarching threat that their acceptance could jeopardize the country when it faces its next, inevitable attack.

These arguments also color an occasional quality that distinctly appears in *Fidesz*'s rhetoric: pity. Whereas Law and Justice is far more unequivocal in their villainization of LGBT+ people, Orbán and his followers occasionally demonstrate brief lapses of compassion for the community, as some of the previous examples have alluded to. From a rhetorical perspective, *Fidesz* sees most queers as lost lambs who have ignorantly forsaken their national heritage for

<sup>178</sup> "Viktor Orbán's "State of the Nation" Address." *Fidesz*, 12 Feb 2022.

<sup>179</sup> Kakissis, Johanna. "Leaders of Hungary and Slovenia, Stout Trump Allies in EU, Say U.S. Vote Isn't Over." *NPR*, 7 Nov 2020.

<sup>180</sup> Orbán, 2020.

<sup>181</sup> "Minister Szijjártó: Europe is Built on Strong Nation States." *About Hungary*, 24 May 2019.

<sup>182</sup> "Europe Can Only Be Strong if it is Built on Strong Families, Family Minister Says." *About Hungary*, 23 Apr 2018.

<sup>183</sup> "Deputy PM Remembers Trianon: We are Building a Strong Hungary with a Strong National Identity." *About Hungary*, 4 Jun 2020.

perverse ideals fed to them by the party's enemies; in the tradition of these older homophobic views, these queers are irredeemable and can only be protected against. *Fidesz* is quite vocal about its belief that "LGBT ideology" harms its practitioners as much as the nation.

When the narrative is laid bare, however, one is surprised to find how well *PiS* and *Fidesz* have succeeded in transferring their increasingly risky game of human rights brinkmanship into the larger national trauma that has dominated their governance. This is most evident in their ability to heroize themselves for the relentless attacks on minorities, furthering the commemoration of past dissidents with comparisons to their "war on gender." One speech by Orbán deliberately paints his anti-immigrant and anti-LGBT+ policies as the climax in a long fought battle against Hungary's would-be oppressors.

*"Over the last 30 years we have fought many great battles, but our biggest battle is about to begin... There are national and democratic forces on the one side and international, anti-democratic forces on the other... [The Soros Empire] always takes aim at the heart, especially when it is red, white and green... The history of the defeated is written by others, and the youth of Western Europe will stand witness... If the dike collapses and the water flows in, the cultural conquest will become irreversible. The country cannot afford to lose this battle because we may not get another chance. Dear Hungarian youth, the homeland needs you, come and join us in our fight so that when you need the homeland you'll still have one... Go and fight for Hungary's freedom! Long live the homeland!"*<sup>184</sup>

*Fidesz* and *PiS* have deliberately utilized national trauma to proclaim victimhood as they victimize others. Arguments rooted in a traumatic worldview justify growing hostility to both nation's LGBT+ communities, and resistance to such hostility is then reframed by the narrative into a repeated trauma. In so doing, both parties have created soundproof moral defenses for relentlessly cruel policies that allow them to maintain popular support even as diplomatic crises unfold. As shall be demonstrated, these trauma-based defenses are also used by individuals; the government has created a political tool that can and is violently wielded against LGBT+ Poles and Hungarians.

### Government Enabling of Anti-LGBT+ Violence

Neither government has created a directly violent policy in regards to their LGBT+ communities; however, a consistent pattern of villainization has not only enabled a culture of violence against queer Poles and Hungarians, but expanded it. Data on anti-LGBT+ violence is difficult to acquire, in many cases because of deliberate government obstacles. However, I have tried my best to identify what kinds of violence have increased, which perpetrators are behind it, and where *Fidesz* and especially *PiS* are more thoroughly involved. In doing so, I hope to make clear both the scale and the cost of Poland and Hungary's anti-LGBT+, trauma-rooted narratives, and demonstrate how these narratives shape the views and behavior of everyday citizens.

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<sup>184</sup> Kovács, Zoltán. "PM Orbán Addresses Crowd of Unprecedented Numbers: 'Our Biggest Battle is About to Begin.'" *About Hungary*, 15 Mar 2018. While this speech was originally about immigration, the similar use of national trauma and interchangeability of its language makes its potency worth mention.

As mentioned before, LGBT+ populations globally are among the most vulnerable to structural violence. Even in progressive states, LGB and especially transgender citizens are 2-10 times more likely to experience some form of violence than their heterosexual or cisgender counterparts.<sup>185</sup> This scale of violence relativizes its growth in Poland and Hungary. In continent-wide surveys, such as those by the EU and ILGA, Polish and Hungarian queers report higher instances of violence, but only by single digit percentages; in fact, the United Kingdom had higher rates of violence than either country.<sup>186</sup> These surveys have largely been conducted *before* anti-LGBT+ politics were adopted by both governments, however, and are unlikely to be updated due to constraints placed by said governments. Hungary's Child Protection Act, for instance, prevents a child-inclusive LGBT+ survey from legally being conducted. These efforts mirror larger government efforts to dismantle enforcement against LGBT+ violence. Both governments have severely defunded the institutions used for monitoring and reporting hate crimes and employment and housing discrimination cases, leaving what little protections both countries afford to gender and sexual minorities largely unenforced.<sup>187</sup>

Both governments have, through their legislation, placed further obstacles on preventing and reporting LGBT+ violence. For instance, transgender Hungarians report serious difficulties interacting with government officials stemming from an inability to change legal documents.<sup>188</sup> Anti-bullying measures specifically for LGBT+ students have vanished with the Child Protection Act.<sup>189</sup> The government's rhetoric, in conjunction with both parties defunding state aid for domestic violence prevention, have led to a deeply troubling spike in parental assault on LGBT+ children. The US State Department estimates that approximately 30% of LGBT+ youth in Poland are homeless, with 10% being forced from their homes. These numbers are nearly triple comparable statistics in the US.<sup>190</sup> LGBT+ youth are, by far, the most vulnerable to violence, and their dependency on both the state and their families have made them bear the fiercest costs of their governments anti-LGBT+ policies.

Unofficial surveys run by groups that have run afoul of either government, like Campaign Against Homophobia, paint an incredibly bleak picture: 65% of LGB and 80% of transgender respondents reported experiencing violence over a two-year period. This was a substantial rise from previous years, and corresponded with a rise in depression symptoms (85%) and attempted suicide rates (55% overall, 74% for youth) across the entire population.<sup>191</sup> There is no formal

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<sup>185</sup> Stotzer, Rebecca L. "Violence Against Transgender People - A Review of US Data." *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, vol. 14, no. 3, 2009, pp.170-179.

<sup>186</sup> "Running Through Hurdles: Obstacles in the Access to Justice for Victims of LGBT+ Hate Crimes." *Come Forward*, edited by Piotr Godzisz and Giacomo Viggiani, 2018.

<sup>187</sup> "Hungary 2020 Human Rights Report." *US Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor*.

<sup>188</sup> Somerville, Hannah. "What's it like to be LGBT in Hungary Amidst Orban's Rights Crackdown?" *Euronews*, 10 Apr 2021.

<sup>189</sup> "Situation of LGTB+ Persons in Poland." *Campaign Against Homophobia*, edited by Magdalena Świder and Mikołaj Winiewski, 2016.

<sup>190</sup> "Poland 2020 Human Rights Report." *US Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor*.

<sup>191</sup> *Campaign Against Homophobia*, 2016.

way to track LGBT+ suicides in Poland and Hungary, though it is known that they compose a disproportionate amount in Western countries. The youth suicide rates in both countries have risen substantially since both governments have initiated anti-LGBT+ campaigns. In Poland's case, youth suicides have doubled since *PiS* took power, becoming the highest in Europe. If proportions are similar to those of the US, it can be conservatively estimated that hundreds of LGBT+ children in Poland and Hungary take their own lives every year. Campaign Against Homophobia, who found disproportionately high suicide rates in "Free Zones," blames this rise on the governments anti-LGBT+ campaign:

*"These increases cannot be explained simply by a pandemic that has affected everyone. It is clear that LGBT people are psychologically exhausted by the backlash. Participants in the study wrote outright: 'Parents and friends are becoming more radical, repeating nonsense about the LGBT ideology and how we are a threat.'"*<sup>192</sup>

*PiS* and *Fidesz* have legislated an immensely hostile environment for LGBT+ youth at school and in the home, despite forewarning from European Commission officials about such costs. Their trauma narratives have become weapons for students, teachers, and parents to bring against their peers, pupils, and children. They are continually encouraged to do so through government rhetoric that demonizes the LGBT+. Think, for a moment, from a parent's perspective. Raising an LGBT+ child not only brings immense costs from an unsupportive community, but is portrayed as treasonous through the government's expansive media machinery. The government's trauma narrative forces parents to choose between their child's identity and their collective belonging: solutions from conversion therapy, to mental institutionalization, to simple reactionary violence abound.

Even among the larger LGBT+ population, a surge in hate crimes has become a growing concern. Most of these crimes occur in public spaces: on the street, while using public transportation, in public parks, where multiple witnesses and even recorded footage are easy to collect.<sup>193</sup> Particularly vicious crimes have also increased. Multiple surveys report pastors harassing queer congregation members during sermons, and surveys indicate that incidences of "corrective rape" against non-heterosexual women have risen by up to 50%. Violence emerging from medical workers is pernicious and concerning. Surveys report doctors giving harassing comments, making excessive sexual contact with non-heterosexual women, forcing transgender patients to take higher doses of hormone replacement therapy than are safe, or simply refusing to treat patients upon learning their identity.<sup>194</sup> This, in turn, leads to dramatically lower medical turnout among queer Poles and Hungarians, and the obvious costs this incurs on quality of life. Less than half of LGBT+ victims of physical assault, for example, seek medical attention.<sup>195</sup>

Regardless of evidence or severity, these hate crimes largely go unrecorded and uninvestigated. Widespread distrust towards law enforcement prompt many Hungarian and

<sup>192</sup> Kościński, Paweł. "'Five Years of Hate' – Being LGBTQ in Poland Has Gotten Worse." *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 20 Dec 2021.

<sup>193</sup> "Violence Against LGBT People in Poland, 2013 Report." *Campaign Against Homophobia*, 2014.

<sup>194</sup> *Campaign Against Homophobia*, 2016.

<sup>195</sup> *Campaign Against Homophobia*, 2016.

Polish queers to keep quiet. Surveys demonstrated that only around 10% and 13% of Polish and Hungarian hate crime victims, respectively, reported the incident to police forces.<sup>196</sup> When such crimes *are* reported, they are usually dismissed; respondents frequently report incidents of further harassment or mockery by the police themselves. In several particularly jarring examples, transgender women reported being forced to strip and have their genitals inspected by police officers, before being forced from the building after their trans status was “certified.” To provide an indicator of underreporting by police, the Polish authorities found 12 of its 874 official hate crime cases to demonstrate homophobic or transphobic bias; Campaign Against Homophobia found more victims of anti-LGBT+ violent crime among the respondents of their survey.<sup>197</sup> In Hungary, several police officers were sued after witnessing homophobic hate crimes take place and doing nothing to intervene.

Put mildly, neither nation’s police forces have made efforts towards creating a positive relationship with the LGBT+ community, or have implemented policies that worsen it. In Poland, the Justice Ministry recently reclassified LGBT+ identities as “social pathologies” in all new police materials, thus arguing that it indicated future criminality. The police have, likewise, perpetrated anti-LGBT+ violence themselves. During the protests surrounding Margot’s arrest, Warsaw’s police violently targeted visibly queer protestors and passersby and placed them in what the country’s human rights ombudsman described as “degrading and at times inhumane conditions.” A US State Department investigation reported that detainees were refused attorneys, as well as access to food and water, and “excessive use of force” which *Stop Bzduram* later claimed was beatings. Such police brutality was avidly defended by Ziobro, who argued such measures were “defensive,” and mirrored similarly flaccid excuses for a growing wave of police arrests without proper legal justification.<sup>198</sup>

The growing hostility towards LGBT+ people not only from government officials, but local and regional governmental institutions, has escalated into a major vector of violence in Poland that *PiS* only barely avoids accountability for through its control of the courts.

### Government Endorsement of Anti-LGBT+ Violence

As has become evident, *PiS* and *Fidesz*’ trauma narratives have enabled and sometimes inspired “patriotic” Poles and Hungarians to more directly fight their nation’s “civilizational threat.” By far, the greatest perpetrators of LGBT+ hate violence emerge from paramilitary organizations and political militants. These organizations, many relics of the interwar years permitted by a nostalgic government, have become major far-right nexuses with tens of thousands of members. In Poland, these groups include the *Młodzież Wszechpolska* (The All-Polish Youth), which organizes attacks against self-titled “militant homosexuality”; *Ruch Narodny* (The National Movement), which has advocated for “public combat against the LGBT

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<sup>196</sup> *Come Forward*, 2018

<sup>197</sup> *Campaign Against Homophobia*, 2016.

<sup>198</sup> “Poland 2020 Human Rights Report.” *US Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor*.

ideology,” and *Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski* (National Revival of Poland) which led a “Faggotry Forbidden” campaign with the slogan “a baton for every queer face.”<sup>199</sup> In Hungary, *Jobbik* had close ties to the Magyar Gárda Hagymányörző és Kulturális Egyesület (Hungarian Guard for Preservation of Traditions and Culture) for years, which recently split into a number of groups reattached by *Mi Hazánk Mozgalom* (Our Homeland Movement) as *Jobbik* cracked down on radical elements. *Mi Hazánk Mozgalom* made headlines after one of its deputies, Dóra Dúró, organized a press conference around throwing children’s books declared “homosexual propaganda” in a paper shredder.<sup>200</sup> These groups, and their history of attacking Equality Marches with stones, Molotov cocktails, and violent threats have been mentioned several times in this paper.

*Fidesz* does not support these organizations, but does little to stop them. Militant organizations and leaders like Dúró have long been given access to parliamentary seats.<sup>201</sup> Poland is worse; politicians with close ties to what are effectively paramilitaries have been granted high-ranking positions in Law and Justice governments. Roman Giertych, founder of the All-Polish Youth, was made Education Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, and several *Sambroona* cabinet ministers were removed after they were found to have ties to Belarus through militant organizations. The government has since ensured it does not maintain direct ties with political militant groups. However, it has encouraged the growth of state-endorsed paramilitaries as escalations between Russia and Ukraine intensified. Many of these paramilitaries have close ties and overlapping membership with militants.<sup>202</sup> During the pandemic, these groups were granted additional authority over COVID relief, despite opposition protests, and since the Ukrainian conflict erupted into full scale invasion, armed paramilitaries have exceeded 100,000 members. Many of these groups feed directly into the military and police forces and are well known for their “staunch conservative” values. *PiS* has argued that their expansion is necessary to counter the “anti-Polish reputation” allegedly incurred by the military during the state socialist era.<sup>203</sup> However, evidence from the *Strajk kobiet* (Women’s Strike) in 2020 show evidence of these groups also being used to fight *PiS*’ “war on gender.”

For brief context, the *Strajk kobiet* was a continuation of the feminist “Black Protests” that occurred shortly after *PiS* took power in 2015, under a campaign for abortion rights, secularisation of schools, protection from domestic and gender-based violence, and LGBT+ rights.<sup>204</sup> In 2020, at Ziobro’s insistence, the *PiS* controlled Supreme Court of Poland declared abortions due to malignant birth defects to be unconstitutional, creating a near total restriction on abortion. The largest protests in the history of democratic Poland quickly developed. They were

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<sup>199</sup> Hume, Tim, et al. “How the EU’s Most Homophobic Country Stoked a Culture War and Emboldened the Far-Right.” *VICE*, 30 Apr. 2021.

<sup>200</sup> Haynes, Suyin. “Hungarian PM Attacks Children’s Book for LGBT Fairytales.” *Time*, 8 Oct 2020.

<sup>201</sup> Renkin, 2015.

<sup>202</sup> Salzmann, Markus. “Poland Integrates Paramilitary Groups into the Army.” *World Socialist*, 31 Mar 2015.

<sup>203</sup> Spiewak, Jan. “Poland Mobilizes Controversial ‘Weekend Warriors’ for Pandemic Response.” *Balkan Insight*, 5 Nov 2020.

<sup>204</sup> Hall, 2019.

spurred on by calls to ban Przemysław Czarnek, Minister of Education, an acknowledged fascist and supporter of such policies as legalizing corporal punishment in schools and banning Equality Marchs, after he fervently demanded the mass arrest of protestors.<sup>205</sup> Protestors quickly took to the churches, which were widely considered complicit in the ban after it received open endorsement by Pope Francis, and barraged masses with slogans, sit-ins, and signs. Infuriated, many far-right militants declared themselves “defenders of the Church” and began harassing, beating, and dragging protestors out of church halls. One leader, Robert Bąkiewicz, attacked the protestors as “Neo-Bolshevists and anti-civilizationists” and proclaimed that he and a new far-right union,

*“Will defend every town, every church, every district, every village... I can say that a sword of justice is hanging upon [the gender ideologues], and, if necessary, we will turn them into dust and destroy this revolution.”*<sup>206</sup>

Law and Justice did little to stem the growth of extrajudicial violence. Instead, they endorsed it: one *PiS* MP, Tomasz Rzymkowski, commended the militants for “defending the Church and all of Latin civilization against [these] barbarians.” Jarosław Kaczyński encouraged more to mobilize on state television. The far-right duly obliged; even after the protests, militants continue to hold massive rallies on national holidays, often co-opting city celebrations and clashing with local police forces. One such demonstration in Warsaw, hosted by Bąkiewicz under the slogan “Our Civilization, Our Rules,” featured posters depicting a winged hussar trampling a rainbow flag from horseback, and homes that bore Pride flags were target with flares and Molotov cocktails (see Appendix, Figure O).<sup>207</sup> This was, again, encouraged by the Polish government. Poland’s Minister of Culture and National Heritage, Piotr Gliński, gave Bąkiewicz’ group grants amounting to 3,000,000 zloty (\$700,000) from the state’s “Patriotic Fund,” claiming that these groups “serve to build patriotic attitudes” and “demonstrate a passion for history.”<sup>208</sup>

*PiS*’ active encouragement of anti-LGBT+ militants is by far its most brazen and indefensible act against the community, but with violence remaining the purview of these “unaffiliated” organizations, the party can escape external accountability. To what extent, however, can a government argue it has not started fires when it actively distributes kindling and flint? The decision of Poland’s Defense Ministry to arm militant organizations is further amplified as Poland receives large arm shipments from other NATO members. It has resulted in an armed, trained, and extensive semi-official force with known ties to political extremists and a particular hatred for queer people emerging in tandem with hostility from the government.

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<sup>205</sup> Walker, Shaun. “Polish President Scales Down Homophobic Rhetoric as Election Nears.” *The Guardian*, 19 Jun 2020.

<sup>206</sup> Hume, 2020.

<sup>207</sup> Hume, Tim, et al. “How the EU’s Most Homophobic Country Stoked a Culture War and Emboldened the Far-Right.” *VICE*, 30 Apr. 2021.

<sup>208</sup> Wądołowska, Agnieszka. “‘Stop Financing Fascism’: Public Figures Appeal to Polish Government After Grants to Far-Right Groups.” *Notes from Poland*, 30 Jun, 2021.

As the moral deflections used by both parties evidence, national trauma has become a tool through which both the Polish and Hungarian governments and their citizens target their LGBT+ populations, at times violently. The demonstrable consequences of both government's anti-LGBT+ measures allow for direct comparisons to trauma-based campaigns of ethnic violence and genocide observed in other instances, while making clear how dire the human rights crisis has become. National trauma has torn apart communities, congregations, and especially families as it is utilized against structurally vulnerable populations. In defending these costs as necessary for the creation of "strong states" capable of overcoming imagined, trauma-induced threats, both *PiS* and *Fidesz* demonstrate how sickeningly entrenched they and their voters have become in the paranoia and violent traumatic flight inherent to the concept. Little else can be reiterated beyond stressing that trauma narratives have real impacts on the perspective of the collective, and that their utilization for demagoguery can escalate to catastrophic results.

### **Conclusion: Looking Forward by Looking Back**

*"The American political elite has become too stupid to face the truth... Simply put, the leadership of the country hates the American people. But Viktor Orbán is defending democracy against unaccountable billionaires, the non-governmental organizations, and certain Western governments. He is fighting for democracy against those forces which would bury it."*

- Tucker Carlson, host of *Tucker Carlson Tonight*, the highest-rated television program in the United States, on his visit to Hungary, August 21st, 2021.

*"This is a witch hunt, where we are the victims. We are second-class citizens. It has never happened before - we were simply never a subject. Now we are the subject, now we are the public enemy. They are all against us."*

- Bartosz Staszewski, LGBT+ Rights Activist from Lublin, an "LGBT-Ideology Free Zone," October, 2020.

*"HOMO HOMINI HOMO EST"*

- Sign displayed at the 2017 Kraków Equality March

National trauma is the politicization, and often weaponization, of victimhood. It is the phrase "Others hurt me, so I can hurt others" brought to a national scale. It is a powerful political concoction, toying with citizens's strongest emotions - grief, fear, belonging - and transforming them into a policy of blind obedience and xenophobic exclusion. All humans, and the groups they compose, experience trauma, and each must find their way to process both the pain itself and how it shapes them. When a nation is locked in its trauma, however, it can only stagnate. Through its culture, its politics, and its people, it keeps its eyes forever on its past, and desperately fights against any force which might dare to move them beyond. National trauma is the desperate plea of a beleaguered people that its hurt be recognized, and the horrid narcissism that leads them to think their pain is exclusive in the world. National trauma, in any form, offers no solution but deeper hatred, paranoia, ignorance, and isolation.



At the beginning of this paper, I defined national trauma as a constructed interpretation of past experiences that is then incorporated into the group and the present experiences it finds itself in, bolstered by insecurities over one's finances, one's life, and one's identity. Once incorporated, the politics of the group becomes overwhelmed by a desire to enshrine its own victimhood and avoid any future traumatic pain, at all costs. This normally requires a massive crackdown of the state against both outsiders and those who would challenge the trauma narrative. Almost inevitably, this obsession with security and victimhood lead one to violence that the trauma narrative then provides exoneration for.

I have argued that *PiS* and *Fidesz* represent clear examples of national trauma in practice. Both parties emerged from betrayal, both by a revolution that never materialized and by supposed Western allies who seemed content with their permanent inequality. Within that context, both parties began crafting trauma narratives: centuries of pain, backstabbing, cultural suppression and unending humiliation. They began to see themselves in the light of the martyrs that had inspired them, and they cried this narrative forward: "We have been hurt. We continue to hurt, and those we put our faith in hurt us again. Our revolution and our freedom is incomplete. Only through our party can the pain stop."

They found an amicable crowd, one that had been continually decimated by decades of economic mismanagement, corrupt and out-of-touch leaders, and a near collapse of many societal structures that had once provided aid and community. It was furthered, accidentally, by a mass opening of new social norms, including an increasingly visible LGBT+ community, free at last from decades of terror. Europeanization and its effects left national identity *deeply insecure*. And in insecurity, the appeal of past traumas tantalized voters to action.

Now that *PiS* and *Fidesz* had taken power, and their visions of their countries had become mainstream, they began to "act out." Both parties enveloped their countries in their trauma narrative. This was not only done through hundreds of memorials, museums, and artistic institutions, but by grinding down on any alternative voice that might resist their professed victimhood. In this environment, NGOs, artists, activists, educators and the media suffered the hardest. They were either driven out, forced into submission and co-optation, or replaced with party men who fervently reminded Poland and Hungary that they were, first and foremost, vulnerable.

How to remove that vulnerability? How to stop the pain of invasion, of oppression, of betrayal from returning? It was here that LGBT+ people, and the alternative, "foreign" vision their visibility represented for Poland and Hungary, came into the crossfire. Both governments first villainized queer people as imports, accusing them of being unwitting foreign agents of destruction, quiet daggers crafted to plunge Hungary and Poland into extinction. Now regarded as a threat, LGBT+ people needed to be forced away from the nation, excised through policies that denied them the right to national belonging, kept them materially and socially marginalized, or simply banned them from spaces where their "ideology" could "infect" others.

If national trauma demanded this securitization, and the rigid control over group identity that precipitated it, it also provided means through which both governments could avoid blame.

Both parties refueled external criticism into further evidence of their trauma narrative, proof that more securitization was required. Though neither government was willing to resort to violence, their political narratives helped inspire countless others to do so. The results of this brutal anti-LGBT+ campaign, rooted in national trauma, are evident to those willing to look. For the first time in at least a generation, queer communities in Europe are at risk of a social cleansing of national proportions.

The costs of “trauma politics” on Poland and Hungary’s nascent queer communities has already been detailed, but what of the costs endured by nations who have only so briefly known democratic rule? *PiS* and *Fidesz* have never had the full support of their countrymen, and their belligerence plunges a knife ever deeper into the fabrics of their state and society. Communities lose youthful minds fleeing in fear; families are torn apart over paranoid conspiracy theories; the human rights of all Hungarians and Poles are placed in greater danger as governments maniacally clamp down dissent. The very youth *Fidesz* and *PiS* claim to be saving have largely turned their backs on them: “Generation *Fidesz*” and “Generation *PiS*” have a disdain for their governments as deep as 1989.<sup>209</sup> The Polish Church is on a warpath to ruin. Young priests, disgusted by their elders, have revolted in a desperate effort to appeal to those they have alienated, and a glue that has held rural Poland together for decades slowly dwindles away, like the values it once claimed it upheld.<sup>210</sup> *Fidesz*’ obsession with control leads to an inevitable democratic decline. Even amidst unprecedented economic gains, fears of brain drain, cut foreign investment, and EU sanctions hang overhead. Trauma has paralyzed these countries’ politics, its cultures, and many of the minds of its people. Regardless of *PiS* and *Fidesz*’ real beliefs of the subject, their narratives strangle their nations.

### The “Chosen Traumas” in 2022

Unfortunately, Hungary and Poland’s hatred impacts more than its own borders. One day, as this paper was written, two major events dominated American newsstands. One was an invasion of Ukraine by Russia that upended European geopolitics; the other, an effort by the Governor of Texas, Greg Abbott, to charge parents of transgender children with child abuse for allowing them access to affirming medical care.<sup>211</sup> Both play a role in the future of Poland and Hungary’s anti-LGBT+ politics. The hatred spewing from *PiS* is forgiven by their Western adversaries over their ardent anti-Russian belligerism, and Poland has been given growing quantities of military aid that finds its way into militant hands. Orbán, on the other hand, has had his diplomatic maneuvering completely upended. Once Putin’s closest EU ally, the Prime Minister has desperately pivoted his media machine away from LGBT+ rights and towards damage control. Having only just secured reelection, it appears that the conflict has not only

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<sup>209</sup> Hall, 2019.

<sup>210</sup> Luxmoore, Jonathan. “Poland’s Embattled Bishops to Meet with Pope Francis.” *National Catholic Reporter*, 9 Jun 2021.

<sup>211</sup> Hartman, Eli. “Texas Governor Calls on Citizens to Report Parents of Transgender Kids for Abuse.” *NBC*, 23 Feb 2022.

halted his anti-LGBT+ advance, but has galvanized his alliance with *PiS*, whose own trauma narrative leads Poles belligerently against him.<sup>212</sup>

Orbán's game with the LGBT+ community, however, is not over. Rather, the Hungarian Model has become a key to his greatest source of foreign support: the Republican Party of the US, whose endorsement of the events in Texas signal a gross reflection of *Fidesz*' efforts to villainize the LGBT+ community. Donald Trump's defeat has sent the factionalized party into freefall, and Orbán is working to inherit Trump's mantle as the face of the populist right in the West. Major Republicans, as well as conservative pundits like Tucker Carlson, have visited Hungary with growing frequency in the last two years,<sup>213</sup> and this year's CPAC will be hosted in Budapest. The Republican's seemingly abrupt support for hundreds of anti-LGBT+ legislative bills is not accidental. They are emulating what they have seen succeed.

The Ukraine conflict will not end state homophobia and transphobia in these countries; even if their media stays silent, too many minds have been changed. This became evident during Poland's border crisis with Belarus in 2021, where Polish nationalist paramilitaries stationed around the border demonstrated their loyalty to Poland by burning Pride flags.<sup>214</sup> If the war in Ukraine reaches a swift conclusion, *Fidesz* and *PiS* will be desperate to regain control of their news feeds.

Whether or not the national trauma so diligently crafted by these parties survives, adapts to the Ukrainian conflict, or moves to a new target remains to be seen, but in no case does its culturation become healthy for the nation, its citizens, or its government. This is, perhaps, the most harrowing aspect of the concept: that so many people, already so haunted and their countries already so battered by the pasts of themselves, their parents and grandparents, would deny themselves the opportunity to grow by instead submerging themselves in historic tragedies. How much more pain is created by dwelling on past pain? A single question remains of this vicious cycle of hurt begetting hurt. How does one stop it, as a government and as a society?

Given its relative nascence conceptually, and the immense difficulties in any reconciliatory justice system, answers remain unclear. Electoral defeat of *Fidesz* and *PiS* still seems grim, but it has not disrupted the efforts of millions of activists and ordinary citizens who refuse to sacrifice truth and empathy for the altar of trauma their governments force on them. They continue to speak out by a thousand means, including, for a few, this paper, and demand recognition from their governments that being Hungarian or Polish does not require suffering and vengeance. If their efforts succeed, then the national trauma enveloping their countries will wither.

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<sup>212</sup> Coakley, Amanda. "Hungary's Orban Pivots Away from Putin as Elections Loom." *Foreign Policy*, 14 Mar 2022.

<sup>213</sup> Zerofsky, Elisabeth. "The Viktor Orban Effect: Why U.S. Conservatives Love Hungary." *The New York Times*, 19 Oct 2021.

<sup>214</sup> Higgins, Andrew. "As Poland Celebrates Its Independence Day, Far-Right Groups Stage Rallies Across the Country." *The New York Times*, 11 Nov 2021.

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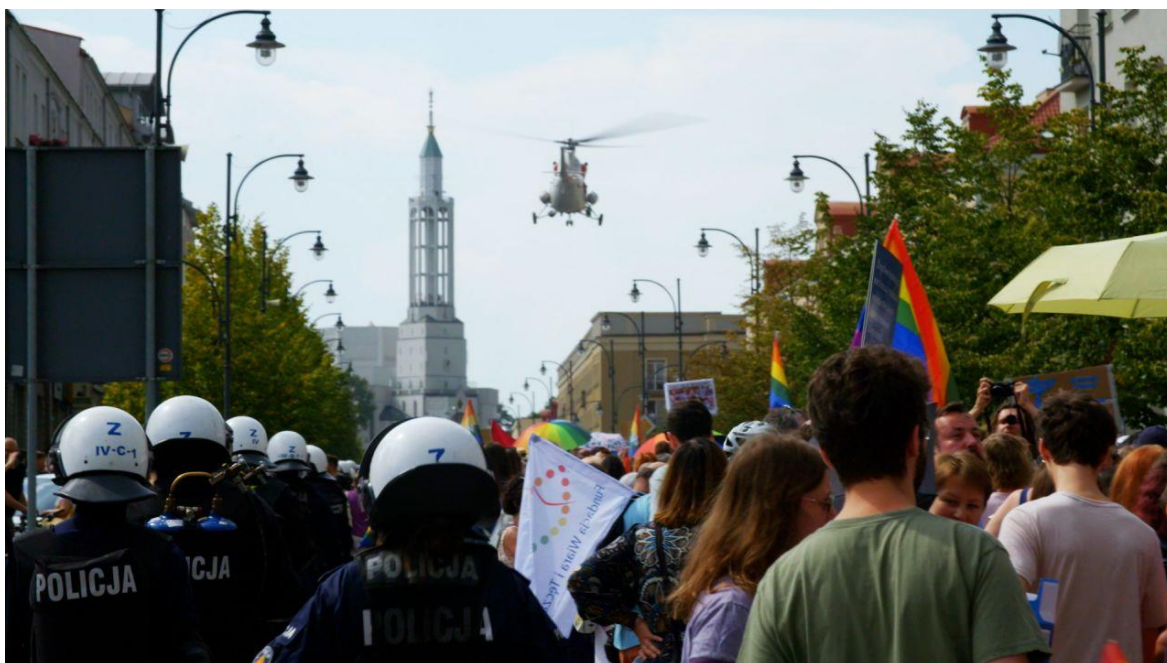
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**Miłość to miłość. Nie zostaniemy ponownie wymazani.  
A szerelem az szerelem. Nem leszünk többé törölve.  
Love is love. We will not be erased again.**

## Appendix



**Figure A:** Police, in full riot gear, form a protective ring around the attendees of the 2019 Białystok Equality March, July 20th, 2019. The police broke through lines of counter-protestors with the "March for Normalcy" with stun grenades and tear gas. (*Muhammed Darwish, CNN*)



**Figure B:** Viktor Orbán at the Commemoration of the Calvary of Sátoraljaújhely, June 6th 2020. The message on his podium translates to “No Hungarian is Alone - Trianon 100.” (*Hungary Today* <https://hungarytoday.hu/orban-at-trianon-100-event-hungary-is-winning-again/> )



**Figure C:** Viktor Orbán popularized his party, the Alliance of Young Democrats (*FiDeSz*) by challenging Soviet dominion publicly at the reburial of Imre Nagy, who ushered a short-lived,

independent social democracy in Hungary during the 1956 Revolution. Orbán was twenty-six years old. June 16th, 1989. (László Kövér, *Hungarian Spectrum*, <https://hungarianspectrum.org/2013/03/27/whom-should-viktor-orban-fear-not-his-former-self-but-the-rebellious-students/> )



**Figure D:** Deputy Prime Minister Jarosław Kaczyński, President Andrzej Duda, and Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki meet at the National Security Bureau to discuss the Russian Invasion of Ukraine, February 22nd, 2022. Coming to power after the resignation of many moderate *PiS* members, the three have heavily utilized anti-LGBT+ rhetoric in recent electoral campaigns (*onet Wiadomości*, <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/kraj/atak-rosji-na-ukraine-andrzej-duda-naradzil-sie-z-premierem-i-ministrami/2j0wl83> )





**Figure E:** Police investigate a truck broadcasting the *Stop Pedofilii* campaign organized by the Ultracatholic NGO *Fundacja Pro – Prawo do Życia* (Foundation Pro - Right to Life), August 26th, 2020. The truck displays messaging accusing LGBT+ people of pedophilia. These trucks were implicated in several legal issues in 2020: one truck was vandalized, and its driver allegedly assaulted, by the queer anarchist Margot, who was arrested for the incident. Activists filed a lawsuit against *Fundacja Pro* for libel, but the Polish courts deemed such messaging “informative and educational.” (*Daniel Tilles, Notes from Poland*).



**Figure F:** The House of Terror, constructed by *Fidesz* in 2002 under the direction of Orbán advisor Mária Schmidt out of the remnants of the KGB’s Budapest office. The Museum displays the brutalities inflicted on Hungarians during the German and Soviet occupations.

([https://www.budapest.com/city\\_guide/culture/museums/house\\_of\\_terror\\_museum.en.html](https://www.budapest.com/city_guide/culture/museums/house_of_terror_museum.en.html) )





**Figure G:** Monument to the Victims of the German Occupation, constructed by *Fidesz* in Budapest's Liberty Square in 2013. Hungary, represented by the Archangel Gabriel, is torn apart by an eagle, representing the German Reich. The monument was fiercely criticized for its depiction of an innocent, Christlike Hungary, despite the country's long collaboration with the Nazis in World War II. (Wikimedia Commons, user Szilas, [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/d/d9/Monument\\_to\\_the\\_victims\\_of\\_the\\_German\\_occupation\\_%282%29.jpg/1280px-Monument\\_to\\_the\\_victims\\_of\\_the\\_German\\_occupation\\_%282%29.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/d/d9/Monument_to_the_victims_of_the_German_occupation_%282%29.jpg/1280px-Monument_to_the_victims_of_the_German_occupation_%282%29.jpg) )



**Figure H:** *Tęczowa Madonna*, by Elżbieta Podleśna, 2019. *The Black Madonna of Częstochowa* is a national icon in Poland, demonstrating the Catholic Church's importance to the survival of Polish culture amidst (in this case, German) occupation. Podleśna's depiction of the icon with rainbow halos prompted Poland's Ministry of Justice, led by Zbigniew Ziobro, to arrest her for "violating religious feelings," a violation of Poland's Blasphemy Law. (Wikimedia Commons, <https://bit.ly/3ynSR1T>)

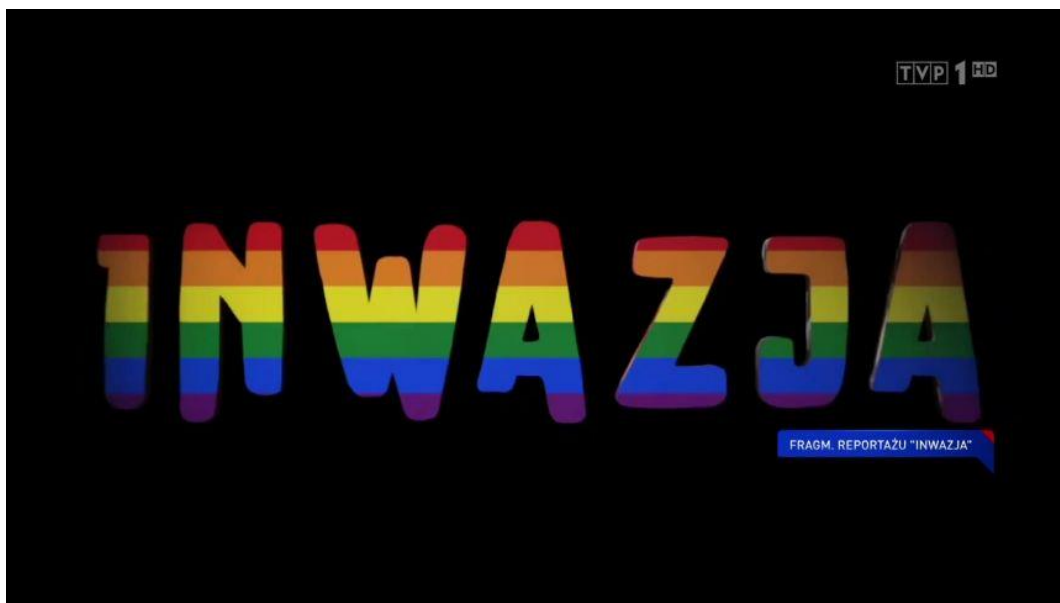




**Figure I:** *The National Theater*, by Gábor Atlasz, 2011. Atlasz was one of several artists contracted by the Hungarian Academy of Arts to create pro-government artworks for display in prominent art galleries. This painting depicts a heavily romanticized police officer striking down an angelic *Fidesz* supporter during the 2006 riots after the leaked Gyurcsány speech. St. Stephen, Imre Nagy, Lajos Kossuth, and other Hungarian “martyrs” look on in horror. (<https://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2011/11/08/horror-fourteen-pictures-to-accompany-the-new-hungarian-basic-laws>)



**Figure J:** Woodcuts carved in the shape of Hungary's pre-Trianon borders on display at a local festival, with writing in ancient Magyar runes and other national symbols apparent. These crafts have been subsidized heavily by *Fidesz* through the National Cultural Fund (István Povedák, 2013).



**Figure K:** The title card of “*Inwazja*,” a thirty-minute documentary broadcast on Polish state TV, 2020. The film claims to follow an undercover reporter investigating alleged foreign ties between prominent LGBT+ rights NGOs and the European Union. Likely sponsored by PiS, the documentary was eventually taken offline after the NGO Campaign Against Homophobia successfully filed a libel suit against the filmmakers. (Juliette Bretan, *Notes from Poland*, <https://notesfrompoland.com/2020/06/08/court-orders-polish-state-broadcaster-tvp-to-take-down-online-anti-lgbt-film> )



**Figure L:** One of the hundreds of billboards *Fidesz* has placed in Budapest in the months leading up to the 2022 Parliamentary elections specifically appealing to anti-LGBT+ sentiment. The billboard roughly translates to “Are you afraid of child sexual propaganda? Complete the National Consultation!” a reference to the recently passed Anti-Pedophile Act. (This photo was sent to me by a friend living in Budapest.)





**Figure M:** Stickers labeled “LGBT Free Zone,” distributed to subscribers of the conservative magazine *Gazeta Polska*. The magazine, like many local media outlets, is heavily funded by Law and Justice. (Jaap Ariens, NBC, <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/conservative-polish-magazine-issues-lgbt-free-zone-stickers-n1033471> )



**Figure N:** Far-right nationalists attempt to light an apartment with an LGBT+ Pride Flag and *Strajk Kobiet* banner on fire, Warsaw, November 11th, 2020. The nationalists, rallying around celebrations of Poland’s Independence Day, marched under the slogan “Our Civilization, Our Rules,” and had multiple clashes with the police. The apartment building depicted was eventually set alight. Like other far-right demonstrations, the Polish government has done little to prevent violence, and several leaders have even encouraged it. (*Daniel Tilles, Notes from Poland*).