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Interrogating the Historical Revisionism of the Hungarian Right: The Queer Case of Cécile Tormay

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Abstract

The article examines the historical processes and the motivations of contemporary Hungarian politicians to officially rehabilitate the memory of Cécile Tormay, the internationally acclaimed writer and founder of Hungary’s conservative women’s movement. Through tracing the politics of remembering Tormay since World War II it demonstrates how Tormay’s recent reemergence as a new national icon was intimately tied to a decisive shift in the direction of Hungarian politics from a pro-Western stance to one that is openly hostile towards Western liberalism. Tormay, part of the ruling elite in the authoritarian interwar Horthy regime, was a fierce anticommunist, antisemite, and staunch nationalist who rallied Hungarians to reclaim territories lost after World War I. Already a national icon, Tormay became a central protagonist of one of the largest interwar political scandals in which she was accused of homosexuality and sleeping with the wives of high aristocrats. Yet, stunningly, neither during the interwar years nor since 1989 has the scandal around her alleged homosexuality stopped centre-right and increasingly right wing (Fidesz) and far right (Jobbik) politicians from embracing her as Hungary’s ideal patriotic female figure of the past century. Such a paradox the article contends can be explained by these regimes’ different approaches to public and private sexuality. By making Tormay’s private sexuality irrelevant both the interwar and post-socialist conservative governments could hold up Tormay’s public vision of anticommunism, antisemitism, nationalism, and traditional gender norms as their own.

Introduction

The study of collective memory and changing national memory cultures in post-socialist East-Central Europe is a thriving field. The vigour with which national governments across the former Eastern block have engaged in reevaluating and recreating their respective histories since 1989 have provided a fertile interdisciplinary research area. In general, scholars have identified trends that point to the restructuring of public memory along the lines of condemning the communist past while reviving and recreating national traditions.¹ Having to invent useable pasts East-Central European governments along with civil and private organizations created and at times recreated national anniversaries, museums and monuments. One of the most visible aspects of “correcting state-socialist interpretations” of history has been the replacement of public figures commemorated under socialism with new national patriotic historical luminaries, whom Communists parties had deemed unsuitable. This article turns to an individual, whose

recent lustration by an increasingly right wing Fidesz led Hungarian government and the far right party Jobbik, is a perfect example of such a pattern, at least on the surface. Certainly, as a writer and the president of Hungary's interwar conservative women's movement, Cécile Tormay serves as an ideal representative of the formerly condemned Christian conservative interwar era. In the eyes of many, Tormay's ardent nationalism, antisemitism and conservative gender views would inevitably make her the embodiment of Hungarian national honour and greatness. Yet, once we consider Tormay's personal life, which fell conspicuously far from both her contemporary conservative as well as current right and far right visions, Tormay's unreserved rehabilitation becomes all the more surprising. For the purpose of this article *conservative(s)* refers to the governing parties of interwar Hungary between 1922 and 1938 (Egységes Párt (Unity Party) 1922- 1931 and Nemzeti Egység (National Unity Party) 1932- 1930. In the post 89 context *conservative* denotes those generally on right who identify with the legacy of interwar conservatism, and prioritize furthering the interest of *national* (middle class) in terms of politics, culture and economics over political, cultural and economic liberalism. The term *centre-right* is used to define Fidesz prior to 2008. Finally, the term *far right* is used to denote Hungarian parties following 1989 that believe in the fundamental restructuring of political and economic organization of the Hungarian state along radical anti-Communist, antisemitic, and nationalist lines.² So, why would conservative regimes in the interwar past and post 1989 parties on the right embrace a female figure whose personal life was smeared by one of Hungary's largest (homo)sexual scandals? How could conservatives and the far right commemorate a single woman who never married, did not have children, and was allegedly a lesbian as "one of the greatest Hungarians"? And finally, what does looking at drama that unfolded over Tormay's reinstatement reveal about the relationship between interwar Hungarian history and

contemporary politics? It is these questions that the article aims to address by analysing historical records, including court documents and newspaper articles from the interwar era, along with the examination of media representations of Tormay since 1989.

Cécile Tormay: A Conservative Sappho?

Perhaps there is no other prominent author in twentieth-century Hungarian literature who has been so unfairly plagued with forgetfulness as Cécile Tormay, all as the result of a very "successful" cultural policy. Indeed, she should be placed among the greatest of our writers since until fairly recently she was the closest to being worthy of the Nobel Prize for Literature, which was not attained only due to her early death.³

Indeed, in the eyes of many Hungarian people in the 1920s and 1930s, Cécile Tormay represented the "Great Saving Soul" of "Mutilated Hungary."⁴ For most Hungarians as well as foreigners she was known as the writer of "*Bujdosó könyv*," or *An Outlaw's Diary*, an internationally recognised book about the evils of communism.⁵ The work was an account of Tormay's alleged personal experience of the horrors of the so-called Aster Revolution following WWI and the subsequent short-lived Soviet Republic of Hungary. Having being part of the Habsburg Monarchy, in October 1918 Hungary became independent and in November 1918 formed a Democratic Republic with a new social-democratic government. Amidst the increasing difficulties faced by the government, the communists rapidly mobilized under the leadership of Béla Kun and in March of 1919 proclaimed Hungary a Soviet Republic.⁶ While writing in first person, Tormay's book spoke on behalf the Hungarian gentry and privileged classes whose former existence and power was wiped away by the Communists.⁷ And considering the prevailing fears of the ruling classes across Europe about the spread of the "Communist Menace," we can understand why Tormay's book was well received not only in Hungary but also abroad.⁸

Tormay, who had been recognized as an important literary figure through such works as *People Between the Stones* and *The Old House* changed genre and became overtly political with *An Outlaw's Diary*.⁹ Similarly to her male counterparts and perhaps even more so than most of them, in *An Outlaw's Diary* (1921) Tormay openly expressed her political views. The book begins with the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the establishment of independent Hungary. The following is a short excerpt in which Tormay describes her feelings, as she was standing in front of the Hungarian Parliament when the establishment of the Hungarian Democratic Republic was announced publicly on November 16, 1918:

It is to our everlasting shame that no single Hungarian rose to choke these words. In the Hall of Hungary's parliament Lenin's agent could unfurl at his ease the flag of Bolshevism, could blow the clarion of social revolution and announce the advent of a world revolution, while outside, in Parliament Square, Lovászi and Bokányi, accompanied by Jászi, informed the people that the National Council had proclaimed the Republic. On the staircase Károlyi made another oration. Down in the square, Landler, Weltler, Preusz and other Jews glorified the Republic- there was not a single Hungarian among them. That was the secret of the whole revolution. Above: the mask, Michael Károlyi; below: the foreign race has proclaimed its mastery.¹⁰

As the excerpt reveals Tormay despised both the Social Democratic government and especially the subsequent Communist rule as alien to Hungary and to “true” Hungarians. In fact, no excerpt can sufficiently reflect the extent to which the two volumes of *An Outlaw's Diary* expressed blatantly antisemitic, anti-liberal, and anticommunist views. Tormay rants against Jews and Communists and provides detailed descriptions of their horrible misdeeds. In stark contrast, she narrates the emerging Hungarian resistance in a glorious light. The diary describes the sacrifices made to reclaim Hungary for *real* Christian Hungarians.

Throughout the book Tormay portrays herself as one of the many heroes who were destined to fight the Judeo-Communist menace. Not shy about highlighting her own role in aiding the resistance Tormay depicts herself as a spiritual leader who with her faith provided

support in the direst moments. “I am only a wandering flame, please take from my fire, carry it into the darkness, and use it to lighten up the homes, so we can wait for the dawn, when once again the morning will be Hungarian and Christian. Because I swear to God, our morning will come.”¹¹ Thus, having disparaged the “enemies” an *Outlaw’s Diary* also portrays the force of steadfast Christian, ethnic Hungarians as redemptive. The story of counter-revolutionary forces (herself included) as the true representatives and heroic saviours of the nation, assured that once Admiral Miklós Horthy and the conservative forces secured control over the country, the book would gain literary success and its writer cultural and political prominence.¹² Tormay was one of the people who welcomed “the Admiral on horseback” and their alliance proved beneficial for both.¹³

With the restoration of conservative power in Hungary in 1920, Tormay became one of the most visible faces of what would be known as the Horthy era (1920-44).¹⁴ Admiral Horthy (Regent of Hungary during the interwar period) held Tormay in the highest regard and supported her professional and political pursuits, some of which –like becoming the first female editor in chief of the most prestigious conservative literary journal of the time, *Napkelet* (Eastern Sunrise) –had been previously unimaginable for women.¹⁵ In turn, Tormay worked tirelessly for the Horthy led conservative Hungarian state. As the celebrated writer of the *An Outlaw’s Diary* and as president of the National Association of Hungarian Women (NAHW), Tormay propagated the official Christian nationalist conservative doctrine.¹⁶

Tormay’s celebrity was unsurpassed despite the fact that in the mid 1920s she was involved in the largest political scandal of the Horthy regime. The scandal involved Countess Eduardina Pallavicini Zichy, her friend and co-founder of the conservative women’s organization, who along with Tormay, was part of Admiral Horthy’s closest political and cultural

circle. Pallavicini's husband, Count Rafael Zichy, who came from one of the noblest and politically empowered Hungarian families, filed for divorce based on charges of *természetellenes*, an "unnatural" relationship between his wife and Cécile Tormay. And while news of bickering aristocrats and serious power struggles among the political elite was not a novelty for Hungarians, filing for divorce because of a wife's lesbianism was unprecedented and ensured the divorce's immediate notoriety and its scandalous place in the public eye for years to come. After four years and having been tried in three different courts the trial ended with denying the Count's appeal for divorce and sentencing him for libel.¹⁷

From the damning accounts given during testimony to the conflicting experts' opinions the decision could have gone either way however, it was in the greatest interest of the interwar political leadership to clear Cécile Tormay's name. In addition to Horthy's personal loyalty to Tormay, by the mid 1920s Tormay had come to represent the conservative authoritarian regime. Her works were considered to capture the experience and greatness of Hungary and Tormay herself was celebrated as a national icon. Therefore, in the eyes of the political leadership an attack on an individual seen as the public face of the Horthy regime, even if it was about her personal life, was construed as an attack on the regime itself. There are indications that it was the admiral himself who personally intervened into the judicial process to make sure that Tormay's reputation remained untarnished. The diary of Péter Zadravecz, who was the Bishop of the Hungarian Military between 1920 and 1928 and a close friend of Admiral Miklós Horthy provides the most explicit and direct evidence of Horthy's maneuverings. In *Secret Diary of Father Zadravecz*, the former bishop recalls the time when Horthy told him that he "put pressure on" the judges of the trial to arrive to the desirable outcome.¹⁸ At the end, the final rulings of the trial were a testament that an attack on Tormay was not to be tolerated. The courts discredited

Count Zichy and sentenced him to prison while they went on to redeem the respectability of Hungary's two most important female patriots, Cécile Tormay and Countess Zichy. In the words of the judges in the criminal trial,

On one hand, there stands a person [the Count] driven by an irresistible passion, who would not even hesitate or feel remorse for a committing crime and living an utterly selfish life. While, on the other hand, there are two intellectually and ethically high standing people who have been making important contributions to the betterment of the public, whose ethical purity has not been the tiniest bit overshadowed by this case.¹⁹

In their verdict the judges made it unmistakably clear how people should remember the scandalous legal suit. Thereby, not only was the outcome of the trial secured but so too was its legacy.²⁰

Consequently, despite her alleged love affairs with women and the fact that she never married and only lived with women did not seem to tarnish Tormay's charisma. During the interwar era she endured as one of the most visible and intellectually recognized Hungarian female figures and also achieved considerable international attention. She was nominated for the Nobel Prize in literature twice (1936, 1937) and following the death of Marie Curie in 1935, was selected into the Committee of Intellectual Cooperation of the League of Nations. For the Hungarian political leadership Tormay remained the most visible female representative of Christian Hungary even following her death in 1937.

Tormay's Reemergence and Ascent to Prominence

Following World War II and the establishment of Communist Dictatorship in 1948, Tormay's works were banned for their "fascist and anti-communist" content. Her Christian conservative world view aside, at the time when countries in the Eastern Block were supposed to be one happy family under Soviet paternalism, her irredentist views demanding territorial

revisions were unpalatable at best. During the four decades of Communism, Tormay's name remained taboo and her works were only printed in émigré communities outside of Hungary.²¹ The initial climate following 1989 and the end of the Cold War were similarly unreceptive to Tormay. During the 1990s the public and politicians alike were interested in recovering Hungary's democratic traditions. New histories were needed that would show how despite Hungary's historically rocky road, experiencing both left and right wing extremism and subjugation by Great Powers (whether the Ottoman, the Habsburg, or the Soviet Empire), Hungary was destined to be a democratic country. Like elsewhere in the former Eastern Block, Hungarian officials had to (re)create historical traditions and usable pasts that were acceptable for a newfound democracy.²² Amidst the regional desire to join Western Europe, where according to the new national histories "they always belonged," they also needed national role models from the past who embodied a new democratic spirit. Concomitant to countries of the former Soviet block racing each other to gain membership in the European Union, was these countries' desire to demonstrate their "Europeanism." As part of this undertaking, communist narratives, written and visual, were replaced by carefully selected pro-European histories and historical figures.²³ Most visibly apparent, was how across East-Central Europe statues of democratic statesmen replaced formerly larger than life socialist statues.²⁴ In this climate, the memories of Cécile Tormay and the interwar era she represented remained latent in mainstream politics.

Political changes brought an end to the six-decade long silencing of Tormay's memory. Tormay, whose *Bujdosó könyv* had become a seminal work for members of the former national socialist émigrés living in the West, from the late 1990s was also becoming a household name within the incipient radical right in Hungary.²⁵ However, it was not until following the political

realignment in 2004 and the global financial crisis of 2008 that her name would enter mainstream Hungarian discourse. When it became clear that democracy could not fulfil the hopes and dreams of great segments of the population and in fact, that many fared worse under democracy than during Goulash Communism, Hungary went through a political realignment. By Hungary's entry to the European Union in 2004 politics had become polarized around two parties. On one side stood the socialist (MSzP) while on the other was the centre-right Fidesz.²⁶ 2006 saw the onset of radicalisation and realignment of Hungarian politics. Soon after the re-election of the socialist led government, the leaking of socialist Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány's private party speech – where he admitted that the socialists had been lying in order to be re-elected – led to mass protests and calls for the resignation of Gyurcsány and his government.²⁷ Gyurcsány's admission of systematic dishonesty to the public about the country's economic prospects and the subsequent announcement of necessary austerity measures resulted not simply in the loss of credibility of MSzP but also in the meteoric rise of the Hungarian far right party Jobbik.²⁸

By 2008 the euphoric days of celebrating liberal capitalism and democracy were gone. At the same time, amidst growing financial problems and widening socio-economic inequalities, radical nationalist and anti-EU sentiments begin to gain serious traction for the first time since 1989. In an atmosphere of wide spread disillusionment the largest opposition party, Fidesz, and the rapidly rising radical far right party, Jobbik, expressed radical nationalistic and anti-EU sentiments²⁹ Concomitant with a shift to populist nationalism there was a conspicuous change in the language of politics. Along with ardent nationalism, anticommunism, and antisemitism, conservative gender norms came to dominate even mainstream political discourse. The time was ripe for Tormay's reemergence.³⁰

Bújdosó Könyv was initially rediscovered at a time when anti-communist and antisemitic remarks were still considered to have no place in mainstream public discourse. In the eyes of members of the far right and soon many on the right the book could express and vindicate their views about the ills of Hungarian politics and society. And with the turn of political tides they discovered that the book's writer, Tormay, had much more to offer. In contrast to her more "modern" female contemporaries, like Margit Schlachta, Catholic social activist, writer, and first female member of the Hungarian parliament who supported women's advancement and opposed anti-Jewish legislation, Tormay was a much more palatable figure. As a successful conservative female writer and proponent of traditional gender norms, the ideologue of the formerly despised Horthy era could offer a new historical icon not only for the far right but also to the new right.³¹

Tormay's reappearance came in 2010 when following its landslide victory the Fidesz led government made the reestablishment of Christian nationalism a central goal.³² Aside from flexing its muscles vis-à-vis the European Union and the IMF the leadership's aim to protect national interests also brought about a sea change in the assessment of Hungary's interwar history. Although since 1989 there had been an apparent diversification of points of views in considering Hungary's history between the wars, official interpretations saw the interwar years in a critical light. They tended to stress the era's antisemitic and undemocratic policies and the increasingly authoritarian and fascist nature of governments that ultimately culminated in the Holocaust and murder of 600'000 Hungarian Jews.³³ This was all about to change as the new government, fuelled by the far right and its Christian Democratic coalition partner, set out to introduce major reinterpretations of the history of the interwar era.³⁴ Aided by government friendly conservative and populist critics and historians such as Mária Schmidt or László Tökéczki, both democratic and communist revolutions of 1918-9 were portrayed in a purely

negative light.³⁵ In addition, they also stressed the historical responsibility of the Arrow Cross Party and the Hungarian far right more generally in the Holocaust.³⁶ Making the far left and far right responsible for all historical ills there could be a comprehensive effort to reclaim the Horthy regime as a popular and effective one with successful social and economic policies.³⁷ Cécile Tormay's works would lend themselves to all of these efforts.

As part of a 2010 government sponsored public campaign there were no less than fourteen different books of Tormay's published, most of them seeing print for the first time since the 1930s. Along with her books, Tormay's literary and political significance increasingly occupied pro-government, right leaning media pundits. The reprinting of Tormay's *An Outlaw's Diary* in 2010 could not have been timelier. In its book review titled, the "Forgotten Genius" about "one of the greatest and most successful female writers" the largest centre-right paper announced, "Every Hungarian should read this book; it will help them understand the philosophy and demonic power of treasonous international bolshevism."³⁸ The reemergence of Tormay aligned with the reconstruction of Hungarian history around one of its most contentious periods—that of 1918-9. As evidenced by articles and op-eds in the pro-Fidesz conservative daily *Magyar Nemzet* and also on the far right's web-based publications such as Kuruc.info in the eyes of rightist and far right critics, the complete erasure of Tormay's history following the establishment of Communist regime in 1948 was symbolic of the Communist distortion of Hungarian national history.³⁹ They pointed out how throughout Communism (1948-1989) the democratic and communist revolutions of 1918 and 1919 were presented in a favourable light. This was particularly the case with the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic, which was presented as a precursor of post World War II Communism. Since 1989 this historiographical portrayal shifted and new histories stressed the disastrous and violent nature of the short-lived

Hungarian Soviet Republic.⁴⁰ However, in their attack conservatives no longer wished to see even the democratic (Aster) revolution of 1918 as the precursor of democracy. Now it was seen as the precursor to extreme far left violence and chaos and commentators relied on Tormay's supposedly first hand accounts to confirm their view.

The reprinting of Tormay's *An Outlaw's Diary* was a well-orchestrated event that provided a wide platform for attacking liberal and socialist opposition and also underscored an unmistakable conservative shift in the historical interpretation of Hungarian political history.

Magyar Nemzet commented on the occasion of the (re)publication of Tormay's works:

The undeservedly forgotten Cécile Tormay became the target of left-wing liberalism, which even in the Horthy era conveyed a powerful influence, because in her two-part novel, "*Bujdosó könyv*," [An Outlaw's Diary], Tormay unveiled the treason of Mihály Károlyi, the Aster Revolution's anti-Hungarian, anti-nationalist nature, and the horrors of the Soviet Republic. The contemporary press of the left, with practices that were similar to the current media's, portrayed Tormay's personal life in a despicable humiliating way chasing the writer suffering from heart disease to her death. Few people are aware today, that Cécile Tormay was not only nominated for the Nobel Prize, but in fact was awarded this highest literary recognition in the world in 1937. It was only her death in April of 1937 and the strict rules of the Noble Prize [against posthumous awards] that stopped her from receiving it.⁴¹

As this paragraph attests, gone were the subtleties of the 1990s, now the right launched a frontal attack. They openly demanded not only the reexamination of Hungarian history but also its reinterpretation. Tormay in these accounts appears not simply as a writer who had been unjustly shelved because of her politics but a writer who was also a legitimate voice in interpreting the history of 1918 and 1919. Her new proponents, with the words of an article in *Magyar Nemzet*, believed that in Tormay a forgotten "authentic Hungarian voice" had been rediscovered.⁴² Most public media channels, which were now under government control celebrated the reemergence of Tormay and her works not just as the unearthing of a forgotten heroine but also cast her as someone whose life accomplishments and works had moral resonance for present and future

generations.⁴³ As one of the chief journalists in *Magyar Nemzet* suggested it was time to focus on the positive aspects of Hungarian history and create a usable past within which future generations could find positive ideas and role models.⁴⁴

What was conspicuously absent in these portrayals was any open or explicit discussion about Tormay's sexuality or private life. Commentaries on the right used a tactic in which they avoided providing details about the sexual scandal involving Tormay while simultaneously dismissing it as false history. The articles in *Magyar Nemzet* and on kuruc.info illustrate how even as they could not totally ignore it, publications of right and the far right managed to allude to the scandal in order to criticize media, which according to the right's reinterpretation "chased the writer to her death."⁴⁵ Like most media sources *Magyar Nemzet* refused to explicitly discuss or provide any details about what the media during the 1920s accused Tormay of, and what in the view of *Magyar Nemzet* consequently caused her health to deteriorate. Without any specific references to the nature of the scandal or questions about Tormay's sexuality critics on the right condemned (contemporary and historic) left and liberal media for their supposedly immoral ways of reporting.⁴⁶ According to this circular logic since socialist and liberal media sources were immoral in their reporting they also fabricated their stories and sensationalized their reporting. Hence, whatever Tormay was accused of was false. For that reason, there was no discussion necessary about Tormay's personal life. The result of such tactics was that Tormay's fame continued to rise.

The Hungarian Academy of Arts dedicated 2012 as the year of commemoration for Tormay. She was frequently in the national media, radio, television, and Internet. Tormay's first family novel *A régi ház* [The Old House] was published as one of the books inaugurating the establishment of a National Book series that aimed to be representative of "the love of

Hungarians and of the Hungarian nation.”⁴⁷ Reflecting their growing populism the increasingly right wing government made frequent references to Greater Hungary not only to court their own and far right constituencies but also, having granted preferential citizenship rights to ethnic Hungarians living outside of Hungary, to ensure a new and grateful voting block.⁴⁸ Thus, the words “love of Hungarians and the Hungarian nation” embodied the populist’s nationalist platform that envisioned the cultural community of Hungary encompassing *all* ethnic Hungarians living in the pre-Trianon borders.⁴⁹ The target audience was all Hungarians including Hungarian speaking minorities abroad; the aim was to “strengthen national self-esteem.”⁵⁰ Accordingly, in order to restore Hungarian self-esteem it was important to identify and resurrect “appropriate” historical heroes who would reinvigorate national pride. In the words of Imre Kerényi, the Prime-ministerial Commissioner for the series “the heroes” were selected to be representative of “those who not simply *wrote* lyrical poetries, but also actually *did something* in order to raise the nation after Trianon.”⁵¹ These true heroes, like Cécile Tormay, were to symbolize defiant strength and the patriotic resilience of Hungarians.

From 2010 onwards, the atmosphere was ripe for looking for new villains and rehabilitating historical figures from the interwar conservative era that during the pro-European Union times had been too controversial to touch. The Fidesz led government became the first Hungarian government that openly expressed hostility against the EU (in terms of its economic austerity and minority policies) and put internal national concerns ahead of European integration. The right capitalized on, and by an aggressive media campaign further fuelled, anti-EU sentiments that had been steadily growing since 2008.⁵² Like most places in the former Eastern Block, people faced growing economic hardship, a shrinking social net, and a growing disillusionment with politics and the European Union. On the international scene, Prime

Minister Viktor Orbán was aggressively working on “reinstating Hungary’s autonomy” vis-à-vis the powerful decision makers of the EU and encouraged other small member states to do the same.⁵³ His efforts raised alarm on the international scene and commentators highlighted his arrogant personality along with his party’s (Fidesz) nationalistic, and undemocratic politics.⁵⁴ At home however, his fight, which was portrayed as one of “David vs. Goliath”, proved popular among Hungarians.

Sticking up for Hungary’s interest within the EU, on the national front the government continued to reframe and institutionalize their revisionist version of Hungarian history. The rewriting of the Hungarian Constitution in 2011 was only the most conspicuous example of the seriousness with which leading rightist elites took the fundamental restructuring of the history of the Horthy era. Utilizing print and visual media, the Fidesz led government became intent on making the interwar period exemplary of conservative Christian order and fierce patriotism.⁵⁵ This is most explicit in the new constitution or Basic Law. As the national avowal of the Basic Law states, “[W]e date the restoration of our country’s self-determination, lost on the nineteenth day of March 1944, from the second day of May 1990, when the first freely elected organ of popular representation was formed.”⁵⁶ By bracketing the Horthy era as having ended either with Hungary’s entry into World War II in 1941 or alternatively with the German occupation in March 1944, the right could exonerate the interwar regime of the Holocaust and ethnic cleansing.⁵⁷ Having been vindicated, it was time to celebrate the accomplishments and legacy of the Horthy regime. Cultural events sprung up nationwide to reclaim the venerable place of interwar culture and society. Reflecting official policies these events with titles such as “Suspended and forgotten: The years of silence and silencing in Hungarian literature,” aimed to

restore conservative literary works and their authors, while making an overt stab at the socialist past.⁵⁸

Remembering and Constructing Gender

Restoring honour into the Hungarian public consciousness notwithstanding, it was no accident that Tormay was so warmly embraced. Her conservative ideas about the specific responsibilities of men and women in serving their country also lent itself to Fidesz's goal of restoring "the sanctity" of Hungarian families. As the government was rewriting the Hungarian constitution to legally enshrine and define family as a heterosexual marriage with children, the resurrection of Tormay's interwar ideas about the preeminence of the collective over the individual could not have been timelier.⁵⁹ In Tormay's view, women in Hungary until World War I enjoyed a sheltered and fulfilling life in the home. During the upheavals of the war women were employed in unprecedented numbers in previously "male" occupations and contributed to the war efforts. However, according to Tormay it was time to return to their homes, as it was there, where Hungarian women would become members of the counter-revolution. Thus, ironically, very unlike Tormay herself who was unmarried and had a visible public profile, she believed that women should help to reclaim Christian Hungary only by providing moral support to their husbands at home. What Christian Hungary required from women, according to Tormay, was "the Holy Trinity for which we are meant to stand: a Christian and patriotic policy, the integrity of the country, and the sanctity of the family."⁶⁰ Similarly to right wing and conservative interwar women's movements across Europe the Tormay led National Association of Hungarian Women believed that women should "complete" their male counterparts within the private domestic sphere, give birth to many healthy children,

and live by patriotic and above all, Christian principles.⁶¹ Tormay's vision, which came to define the official conservative rhetoric on womanhood throughout the 1920s and 1930s, in the eyes of the governing twenty-first century political elite came to have renewed relevance in Hungarian social and cultural politics.⁶²

Considering a rapidly aging population, declining marriage and fertility rates along with a growing number of non-traditional family formations that the Fidesz government faced, such vision, albeit modified for the twenty-first century, was worthy of commemoration. Fidesz along with its coalition party the Christian Democrats made the restoration of the (heterosexual) family, composed with a minimum of two children, their highest priority. This goal was institutionalized by the New Constitution, which states the following,

- (1) 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. Family ties shall be based on marriage or the relationship between parents and children.
- (2) Hungary shall encourage the commitment to have children.
- (3) The protection of families shall be regulated by a cardinal Act.⁶³

In this context, Tormay's message, which prescribed deference to authority, devoutness to the church, the sanctity of marriage, and the importance of having children, proved as timely as ever. Thus, Tormay's twenty-first century renaissance was intimately tied to the institutionalization of a new and conservative perspective on gender and family. A further testament to this came as in March 2012 when a bust was erected in Budapest commemorating Tormay as one of the "Greatest Hungarian Women."⁶⁴ As Sándor Lezsák, Fidesz MP and vice president of the parliament who unveiled the bust noted, "while oeuvres can be silenced for decades, their values will always win new existence, as is happening with all of Tormay's works."⁶⁵ The commemoration received national media attention. The public media, which the governing party Fidesz controlled along with centre-right news sources, celebrated and praised the occasion.

Tormay's Critics and her Descent

The occasion of the unveiling of Tormay's bust also marked a pivotal moment in the opposition to Tormay's rehabilitation. Although there had been critical voices about the (re)emergence of Tormay prior, the physical memorialization galvanized the political left, liberal, civil, Jewish, and even lgbtq organizations who criticized the erecting of a public monument to a writer who was so virulently antisemitic and expressed concerns about the repercussions of such an act.⁶⁶ Antisemitism was only one of talking points that critics raised about Tormay. Her admiration of fascism was another one. Critics who opposed her official idolization, also frequently cited Tormay's statement, "I was a fascist before Mussolini ever appeared on the horizon."⁶⁷ They argued that even if Tormay did not live to see the catastrophic outcome of her fascist ideology that should not serve as an excuse for her views. Finally, across oppositionists, with the exception of the lgbtq organizations, people commented on Tormay's alleged homosexuality underscoring the irony of conservatives erecting a statue to a "known" homosexual woman.⁶⁸ All of these voices expressed concerns, akin to those in an article in the liberal weekly *Magyar Narancs*, that by commemorating Tormay as "one of the greatest Hungarians" without taking into consideration her personal and political views implied their dismissal as significant issues, or even worse, the legitimatization of Tormay's fascist, irredentist, and antisemitic views.⁶⁹

In the autumn of 2012, a month after her bust was erected Tormay once again became the centre of a nationwide controversy. This time however, the stakes were much higher. In its efforts to centralize power and (re)instill conservative nationalist values Fidesz appointed loyalists to major cultural organizations such as the National Theatre as well as to important

academic institutions and organizations.⁷⁰ As part of reorienting Hungary's cultural and scientific values, Fidesz embarked on a reformation of the national educational system, including the national core curriculum. During the preparation, conservatives and importantly Jobbik, the far right party both actively lobbied for the inclusion of previously neglected interwar writers, including Tormay.

They argued that with the words of one literary historian, “The new National Curriculum would be incomplete and distorted without writers of a Christian worldview who actually dealt with the question of national destiny.”⁷¹ For many people on the right and in particular on the far right, the incorporation of Tormay, along with Albert Wass and others were seen as a corrective to communist and post-communist histories—a pivotal recovery of Hungarian writers who spoke of a greater Christian Hungary. In their eyes, these previously silenced writers represented “true” Hungarianness and also offered a more genuine perspective, one that presented Hungarians not as people who quailed after World War I but rather as people who were willing to stand up for what had historically been theirs. Indeed, Tormay appealed to many who felt that because of the history of victorious neighbours who benefitted from the Treaty of Trianon, the oppressive communist era, and the post 89 so called, Holocaust “remembrance industry”, it was high time that public discourse focused on some positive and uniting aspects of Hungarianness.⁷²

The subsequent national debate over the inclusion of Tormay that played out on all media channels was representative of deep schisms about the historical memory of interwar Hungary. As a journalist in the *Népszabadság*, the largest socialist daily poignantly noted, “thinking in terms of the nation, the pain of Trianon and the possibility of revaluation of the Horthy era stirs emotional tides in many people. The Hungarian audience is looking for a stable national identity.”⁷³ Consequently, even critics of Fidesz and the far right recognized that the appeal of

Tormay and her works lay in offering a vision of a powerful Hungary with a clear moral and social order. For the right, reintroducing the works of interwar writers was a question of historical equity, a long overdue correction of the historical biases of previous political regimes.

Importantly, they also spoke of a need of reviving the previously silenced era of Hungarian history because it would build the *right kind* of national character.⁷⁴ But the exact kind of national character they were thinking of was rather unclear. Considering the blatantly antisemitic and irredentist militant views of the writers to be included, for liberal and socialist critics it was evident that the new curriculum was to endorse an exclusionary, chauvinistic, and anti-European worldview. Not entirely disagreeing with this interpretation, Jobbik and far right voices on kuruc.info argued that Tormay along with other interwar writers represented true patriotic Hungarianness and should be exalted as historical role models. For the far right then, the antisemitism and irredentist view of these writers were part of their appeal. That Tormay's personal life (her non-normative gender and sexual behaviour) was not the kind of Hungarian national character Jobbik was actively promoting was therefore seen as less important.

Members of Fidesz and critics close to the government took a more measured approach. For instance, while representatives of Fidesz acknowledged that Tormay could have held antisemitic views, at the same time they argued that her personal views should not justify the exclusion of her non-political novels from the National Curriculum.⁷⁵ At the same time, considering the systematic appointment of government friendly personnel as heads of national cultural institutions and the billing of plays and events celebrating real (meaning non-Jewish) patriotic, conservative Hungarian writers, the acknowledgment of Tormay's antisemitism seemed more like playing lip service to growing international criticism than a real acknowledgement of the problem of antisemitism.⁷⁶ Furthermore, conservative pro-Fidesz

experts such as Mihály Takaró emphasised that for future generations it would be essential that writers like Cécile Tormay, who were “true patriots and held a genuinely Christian worldview,” be included in the National Curriculum.”⁷⁷

Regardless of their political and ideological loyalties, most critics found it amusing (and helpful for generating readership) to draw attention to the absurdity of the far right and right’s idolization of a “homosexual.” Articles with headings such as “Jobbik is demanding a lesbian in the school texts” poked fun of the far right’s hypocrisy for using Tormay as a national icon despite of the fact that she was a “known lesbian.”⁷⁸ That everyone on the right remained strategically silent about the personal life of Tormay did not help to quell those observers who eagerly brought attention to the official idolization of an allegedly homosexual woman at time of blatantly hostile and discriminatory politics against Hungary’s lgbtq communities. Since Fidesz came into power in 2010, as part of its mission to save so called, traditional “normal” families, it instituted discriminatory policies against Hungarian homosexuals. By defining marriage between man and a woman it was the first government that aimed to halt progress on the path to sexual equality that the homosexual community had achieved since the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1961 and especially since 1989.⁷⁹ While civil partnership continues to exist the 2011 constitution and 2013 civil code were explicit in establishing a hierarchy between marriage and civil partnership.⁸⁰ Fidesz and especially its small coalition partner the Christian Democratic People’s Party (KDNP) were intent on institutionalizing protections for their ideal family, which were to be defined as a union between married heterosexual adults with their own children. Based on the Family Protection Act passed in 2011 same-sexual relationships (along with non-married heterosexual unions) were relegated to secondary status with less protection and fewer entitlements.⁸¹ While the Constitutional Court subsequently struck down some of the

discriminatory elements of the law, in its rhetoric the government remained clear about the mutually exclusive nature of family and same-sexual relationships.⁸² In the words of Pèter Harrach, the faction leader of the KDNP, family was “natural” while same-sex civil partnership was a “choice.”⁸³ Jobbik went even further, effectively declaring an open war against what they see as “homosexual lifestyle.” Inspired by Russia, in 2012 a Jobbik member of parliament proposed an amendment to the Constitution that would have made the “promotion of homosexual lifestyle” a criminal offense carrying a possible prison sentence of three years.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, despite their sanctification of heteronormativity and campaign against homosexuals Tormay’s sexuality posed no issue for either Jobbik or Fidesz.

In the end, the final version of the National Core Curriculum that came into effect in January 2013 does not contain any reference to Tormay or her work. Amidst loud criticism from all corners, including some conservative academics, for FIDESZ strategically it was not worth making a crusade of including Tormay in the new curriculum.⁸⁵ Ultimately, for Fidesz and the far right, Tormay’s exclusion was a battle lost but it was by no means representative of a loss of the broader political culture war.

Following the national curriculum debacle, in May 2013 representatives of Fidesz, KDNP and Jobbik supported a petition to rename a district in Budapest after Tormay. Taking place just months after the removal of Tormay from the national core curriculum it seemed like naming a district after Tormay was going to be a consolation prize for Fidesz and especially her fiercest advocate Jobbik. Following a petition from the special envoy of the Prime Minister the Budapest City Council voted to name a square after Tormay. Instead of a smooth bureaucratic procedure however, the Fidesz backed mayor, encountered disapproval and fierce criticism from all corners. For instance, Ronald S. Lauder, the president of the World Jewish Congress

highlighted how the naming of public square after Tormay would fly in the face of Fidesz's promise to curb rising antisemitism, "This decision by the Budapest city government [...] puts into question the pledge given to the Jewish community that anti-Semitism will be fought vigorously by the Hungarian authorities."⁸⁶ Lauder's remarks underscored the three part political tight rope act of Hungarian politics whereby the far right party and its sympathizers were getting increasingly vocal in their antisemitic (and anti-Roma and homophobic) remarks, while the governing Fidesz party was attempting to not alienate its right wing voters by openly denouncing their racism, and at the same time not spur liberal and centrist national and international opposition. It was this balancing act that Lauder and critics more generally wanted Fidesz to stop. The naming of a public square after Tormay was sending a message that Fidesz had no genuine intention of doing so.

Sensing that public opinion was against it the City Council formally requested the Humanities Research Centre of the National Academy of Science to evaluate whether the City Council would be justified in renaming a square after Tormay. Taking place during the structural reorganization of the National Academy of Science, which many saw as Fidesz's next step in cementing its power, the eventual decision came as a surprise slap in the face to the increasingly right-wing government. Instead of toeing the line the resolution of the Academy of Science categorically rejected the legitimacy of representing Tormay as a venerable national icon. According to the resolution,

Both as a writer and a public figure Tormay was driven by racism and racist principles... As an ideologue and a propagator she played a large role in the establishment of the intellectual background and social embeddedness of the authoritarian regime... This is true despite the fact that she died in 1937, which means that she did not personally play a role in the totalitarian system [of the far right during World War II].⁸⁷

The resolution concluded that under no circumstances should any public space be named after Tormay. Citing the resolution, the mayor of Budapest conceded and the plan to name public spaces after Tormay was dropped.

Despite receiving national media attention the incident itself represented a relatively minor political blow to Fidesz and the Mayor of Budapest. To all those disappointed in the outcome on the right, Fidesz could point to (and blame) the Academy of Science for the decision. It was a two-fold win. In other words, the withdrawal of Tormay's name showed that despite international outcry to the contrary, cultural and scientific institutions were still independent and not under the thumb of the government. Simultaneously, Fidesz could demonstrate to its far right voters that it really did try to commemorate Tormay. The renaming saga was a much more significant event in terms of the ongoing cultural crusade to rehabilitate the interwar conservative Horthy regime. That the supreme scientific authority in the country made a clear statement describing Tormay as a figure who worked on the "establishment of an authoritarian system" was a clear message that the right's reinterpretation of Hungarian history would continue to face opposition. Despite this, having once again won the election by a landslide in April 2014, Fidesz has made it unmistakably clear that it has no intention of stopping rewriting of Hungarian history.⁸⁸ The glorification of the interwar Horthy era appears to march on.⁸⁹

Conclusion: "Quo Vadis Hungary?"

In the first two decades after the democratic changes in 1989 Hungarian politics both on the domestic and the international fronts were in favour of integrating Hungary into the European Union. During this time, historians, public intellectuals, and politicians alike could finally begin to more openly reassess Hungary's pre-Communist and Communist histories. In search for new,

more objective historical narratives there was a diversification of viewpoints. However, intellectuals as well as politicians refrained from offering a total revisionist account of interwar history, and the Horthy regime continued to be portrayed in a critical light. In 2010 after the landslide victory of Fidesz and after Jobbik became the third largest party in the Hungarian parliament, the Horthy era was praised and became framed in a positive light. Hence, the increasingly heated public debates about Cécile Tormay are representative of a broader renegotiation of the legacy of the interwar conservative regime she championed. The controversies around the erection of a statue commemorating her as one of the “Greatest Hungarian Women,” the debates over introducing her works into the national core curriculum, and the re-naming of a public square after Tormay, became heated because they reflected the on-going reevaluation of some of the most contentious periods in of Hungarian history.

Ultimately, what was perhaps most surprising about the rehabilitation of Tormay was not that conservatives and especially the far right found her (along with many other interwar figures’) antisemitic, irredentist, strong nationalist sentiments, and traditional gender views appealing and timely. Rather, what was surprising was that they did so without considering, or in fact in spite of, the details of Tormay’s personal life, which represented everything conservatives and the far right were advocating against. Namely, a strong independent woman, who never married or had children, worked in a male profession and (as all historical evidence points to), was also a woman who desired those of her own sex.⁹⁰ Thus, while Tormay’s writings and public work were well-suited to stand for advocating a family centred vision and traditional gender norms, her personal life fell noticeably short from the twenty-first century conservative and far right ideologies. Yet, despite a seeming discordancy between Tormay’s personal life and the political platform of her twenty-first century revivers, she was

unconditionally embraced. In part we can account for this by simply pointing out how both the right and the far right claimed ignorance or dismissed questions about Tormay's personal life as irrelevant or a smear campaign by political opposition. Focusing exclusively on her literary works and public persona moreover made both Tormay's gender as well as her sexuality irrelevant to their goals. It was in fact precisely *because* they ignored Tormay's sexuality and gender that Tormay was able to become a usable figure. By disregarding that she was a woman she could occupy male (literary and public) spheres whereas by ignoring her (non-normative) sexuality she could stand for all women and speak for patriarchal policies and views.

Placing these approaches in the history of gender and sexuality and in particular in the history of official approaches to non-normative sexuality reveals how these twenty-first century strategies are far from unique. Like their far right and conservative historical counterparts in Hungary and elsewhere, for Jobbik and Fidesz, an abstract conservative female figure could serve not only as a spokesperson for, but also as a representative of their ideal nation.⁹¹ Through her literary works that portray traditional and complementary norms for men and women Tormay has come to symbolize not only Hungarian women but also the Hungarian nation. Furthermore, upholding Tormay's *vision* of traditional gender norms as ideal and inspirational while at the same time deeming Tormay's *actual* personal life irrelevant has been a rule rather than an exception. In their approach to sexuality, twenty-first century Hungarian conservatives and far right politicians followed in the footsteps of their interwar and state-socialist counterparts. The imposition of silence around and lack of public engagement with issues of their own members and protégés non-normative sexuality cut across the various political systems. Consequently, each of these systems could rally around individuals whose personal and sexual life was outside of these regimes' espoused ideals of heteronormative, family centred social life. Thus, rather

than a novelty, the embrace of Tormay was representative of a long history of idealizing public individuals who privately led lives of non-normative sexual or gender conduct.

Finally, even those who criticized Tormay's commemoration did not choose to discuss or critically reflect on the issues around Tormay's sexual orientation. Using hearsay and one newspaper article from the early 2000s that actually described some of the details of the scandal in the 1920s, most commentators simply took it for granted that Tormay was a lesbian. From 2010 onwards as Tormay's name was increasingly circulating in the media, socialist and liberal politicians, journalists and bloggers alike referred to Tormay's lesbianism as "public knowledge." Such nonchalant and uncritical handling of historical sexuality and the scandal around Tormay confirmed that sexuality was still, just as it was during the 1920s, primarily a tool for political (and personal) purposes. The opposition's frequent references to Tormay's alleged lesbianism were not to further LGBTQ rights but to mock and undermine Fidesz and Jobbik and more generally conservatives' moral and political authority. Thus, those on the political left and liberal side were just as comfortable using sexual orientation for political purposes as those on the right. Serving political purposes aside, the treatment of Tormay's sexuality reflects the enduring homophobia and sexism of the mainstream press. An illustrative example of this is an opinion piece in the socialist daily, *Népszabadság* from 2012, where the author, a former high school teacher László Rab discusses why it would be counterproductive to insert a woman "who stole the wife of a man" into classroom discussions. How uncomfortable it would be Rab opines, "for the teachers to have to explain to 16 year olds that they are reading a book of a woman who desired her own sex and to explain details about how she pursued women!"⁹² Ultimately, considering Tormay's sexual history Rab questioned how society could realistically expect boys to pay attention to the literary qualities of Tormay. In other words, he assumed that discussing

an author who pursued love with her own sex would be too distracting. Rab's piece reveals how Tormay's assumed homosexuality could be problematic across the political spectrum.

As for Tormay's sexuality, the case's legacy as a part of the history of (homo)sexuality has yet to be claimed. On one hand, strict contemporary silencing by the Horthy regime along with the subsequent silencing of non-normative sexualities by the post World War II communist regime pose a considerable (although by no means impossible) burden to reconstruct and interpret the sexuality of Tormay. On the other hand, the fact that even the lgbtq community has not embraced Tormay is in no small part due to Tormay's politics. Tormay's antisemitic, fascist, and irredentist beliefs until recently made her too controversial to be commemorated as a foremother for Hungarian lesbians.

¹ For a succinct overview of the field see Susan C. Pearce's "Delete, Restart, or Rewind? Post-1989 Public Memory Work in East-Central Europe." *SOC4 Sociology Compass* 5, no. 4 (2011): 256–72.

² For an explanation of terminology in post 89 Hungary see Seán Hanley's "Getting the Right Right: Redefining the Centre-Right in Post-Communist Europe." *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 20, no. 3 (September 1, 2004): 9–27.

³ Back cover, Tormay, Cécile. *Aeterna Hungaria: örök magyarország* (Eternal Hungary). (Szeged: Lazi Könyvkiadó, 2006).

⁴ "Csonka" or mutilated has been used to refer to Hungary post World War I, when according to the Treaty of Trianon (1920) Hungary lost two thirds of its former territory.

⁵ Cécile Tormay, *Bujdosó könyv feljegyzések 1918-1919-ből* (An Outlaw's Diaries) (Budapest: Pallas irodalmi és nyomdai r.t. kiadása, 1920). Following the Hungarian edition the book was translated into English, German, and French. The most comprehensive contemporary account of Tormay is by János Hankiss, *Tormay Cécile* (Budapest: Singer & Wolfner, 1939). The latest current manuscript on her life is Krisztina Kollarits's *Egy bujdosó írónő--Tormay Cécile* (A fugitive writer: Cécile Tormay) (Vasszilvagy: Magyar Nyugat, 2010).

⁶ The Hungarian Communist government lasted 133 days.

⁷ Since 1989, historians have revealed that Tormay could not have been present at many of the events she recounts as an “eyewitness.”

⁸ Between 1920 and 1921 the book was translated into English, French and German and received international acclaim, especially within anti-Bolshevik and later on the pro-fascist circles.

⁹ Tormay began to write novellas in 1900 but only gained recognition with her first book *Emberek a kövek közt* (People Between the Stones) and truly became popular with her second book *Régi ház* (The Old House) in 1915.

¹⁰ Cécile Tormay, *An Outlaw's Diary* (London: P. Allan & Co., 1923), Volume I. 141. With the exception of Mihály Károlyi every single person Tormay mentions were Jewish members of the Hungarian National Council, the Károlyi led government that ruled between November 16, 1918 and March 20, 1920.

¹¹ *Ibid.* Volume 2. February 11, 205.

¹² It was actually Romanian forces who drove the Communists out. Horthy and the White forces arrived subsequently.

¹³ They were both outsiders to traditional Catholic Hungarian aristocracy. Horthy was a protestant and Tormay came from a gentry family and lived an unconventional life for a woman. Until Tormay's death in 1937 the two of them had a close relationship and supported one another.

¹⁴ Horthy became a Regent in 1920 and presided over Hungary until October 1944.

¹⁵ *East* emerged in 1923 as a direct Catholic-conservative counter to *Nyugat* (*West*), the most prominent literary journal/periodical in the first four decades of the twentieth century, with liberal political attitudes and readership. Neither before nor after would a woman lead a conservative journal in Hungary.

¹⁶ János Hankiss's biography *Tormay Cécile*. (Budapest: Singer & Wolfner, 1939) remains one of the most comprehensive books on Tormay's life, however it omitted any information that might portray her in a negative light.

¹⁷ For the detailed analysis of the scandal see Anita Kurimay, “*Sex in the “Pearl of the Danube”*: *The History of Queer Life, Love, and its Regulation in Budapest, 1873-1941*,” (Ph.D. Diss., Rutgers University, 2012), chapter 3.

¹⁸ According to Zadravecz Horthy told him that, “[T]his verdict comes only a result of my forceful personal intervention. The Minister of Interior himself questioned whether the court would even announce Zichy guilty.... But I put the pressure on.”Páter Zadravecz, *Páter Zadravecz titkos naplója*. Szerkesztette és a bevezetőt írta:

Borsányi György. (The secret diary of Father Zdravec: edited and introduction by Borsányi György). Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1967, 216-217.

¹⁹ Budapest City Archives VII. 5. c. Royal Criminal Court of Budapest 4516/1924. Criminal Suit, 86.

²⁰ The “disappearance” of all sensitive materials, including witness and expert testimonials, relating to the charges of homosexuality from the court records was no accident. Despite the colossal legal documentation of the case, the only materials that survived were the decisions and sentencing of the courts and the testimonials of the servants.

²¹ Anti-Communist Hungarian expats printed her works in the United States as well as in France.

²² Oliver Rathkolb and Günther Ogris, *Authoritarianism, History and Democratic Dispositions in Austria, Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic* (Innsbruck [Austria]; Piscataway, N.J.: Studien Verlag ; Distributed in North America by Transaction Publishers, 2010).

²³ For one the very early examples of new histories see Péter Bihari, *A 20. Század Története Fiataloknak* (The History of 20th Century Hungary) (Budapest: Művelt Nép Könyvterjesztő Vállalat-Holnap Kiadó, 1992).

²⁴ By and large, the revolution of 1956 received the most statues and commemorations. There were also statues and commemorative plaques for the victims of Nazism and for famous (largely Catholic) Hungarian aristocrats. For the comprehensive list of statues erected in Budapest see Catalogue of Statues in Budapest, http://www.budapest-foto.hu/Budapesti%20szobrok%20katalogusa_3.htm, accessed March 14, 2014.

²⁵ In 1998 Tormay’s *Bújdosó Könyv* was reprinted in Hungary for the first time since the end of the communist era. While it is possible that far right groups began to refer to Tormay sooner, existing evidence indicates that it was not until the mid 2000s that far right websites such as kuruc.info regularly featured her. On the history of the far right in Hungary post 1989 see Rudolf Paksa, *A magyar szélsőjobboldal története* (The history of Hungarian far right) (Budapest: Jaffa Kiadó, 2012), 182-243. For a detailed list of far right groups in Hungary see <http://www.athenaintezet.hu/gyuloletcsoportok/>.

²⁶ From 1998 onwards Hungarian politics have been dominated by the Socialist MSZP and Fidesz (Federation of Young Democrats-Hungarian Civic Alliance). For a brief explanation of Hungarian political alignment see Nick Sitter ‘s “Absolute Power? Hungary Twenty Years after the Fall of Communism.” In *20 Years since the Fall of the Berlin Wall: Transitions, State Break-Up and Democratic Politics in Central Europe and Germany*, edited by Elizabeth Bakke and Ingo Peters, 249–69. Berlin: BWV Verlag, 2011. Fidesz was originally founded in 1988 as a mostly student led liberal party, hence the name Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége or Alliance of Young Democrats. In

1994 the party made a distinct political turn and became conservative and increasingly populist. The other liberal party (SzDSz) lost power already in the 1990s. For a detailed analysis of Fidesz's transformation see, Brigid Fowler, "Concentrated Orange: Fidesz and the Remaking of the Hungarian Centre-Right, 1994-2002." *Journal of Communist Studies & Transition Politics* 20, no. 3 (September 2004): 80–114.

²⁷BBC published excerpts of Gyurcsány's speech in English, accessed May 13, 2015.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/5359546.stm>. In addition to peaceful protests, in Budapest the protests turned into violent clashes with the police. In addition to the parliamentary efforts to impeach Gyurcsány and his government, which ultimately failed, police brutality against protesters also drew criticism from the conservative and far right opposition.

²⁸ Jobbik Movement For the Betterment of Hungary (Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom) a far right political party was formed in 2003. The party "for true Hungarians" capitalized on the political crisis of 2006 along with the brutal murder of a local teacher in the small Hungarian village of Olaszliszka by Hungarian Romas. The crime received national media attention and contributed to Jobbik's appeal as an anti-Roma party. For a succinct analysis of the history and party platform of Jobbik see Marcus Stadelman's "The Rise of the Extreme Right-The Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik)" *National Social Science Journal* 39, no.2 (2013): 96 – 103.

²⁹ To contextualise Fidesz's programme within the East-Central European context see Milada Anna Vachudova, Milada Anna. "Centre—Right Parties and Political Outcomes in East Central Europe." *Party Politics* 14, no. 4 (July 1, 2008): 387–405.

³⁰ Lazi Könyvkiadó, a private conservative publishing house, published some of Tormay's main publications.

³¹ Bozóki, András. "Consolidation or Second Revolution? The Emergence of the New Right in Hungary." *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 24, no. 2 (June 1, 2008): 191–231.

³² Fidesz in coalition with the Független Kisgazda, Földmunkás és Polgári Párt (Independent Smallholders, Agrarian workers and Civic Party) and the Magyar Demokrata Forum (Hungarian Democratic Forum) was also in power 1998 -2002 but its politics were considerably less controversial. While it embraced and supported revision of Hungarian history it retained its pro-EU rhetoric. Following eight years of a socialist led government in 2010 Fidesz took the election by a landslide. With the Christian Democrats (a socially even more conservative party) Fidesz won over two-thirds of the parliamentary seats.

³³ Two representative works are András Gerő, *A Magyar Történelem Vitatott Személyiségei* (Controversial Figures of Hungarian History) (Budapest: Kossuth, 2002) and Ignác Romsics, *Magyarország Története a XX. Században* (Hungarian History in the Twentieth Century) (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2005).

³⁴ In fact, the emergence and development of Jobbik party was directly tied to historical revisionism. The founding members of the party met during studying history at the Eötvös Loránd University and from its establishment Jobbik was at the forefront in revising Hungarian history.

³⁵ The most conspicuous manifestation of this reinterpretation was the removal of the president of the first Hungarian Democratic Republic, Mihály Károlyi's statue from outside of the parliament. Two of the most prominent historians who portray the democratic revolution of 1919 in a purely negative light are Mária Schmidt and László Tökéczki.

³⁶ The Arrow Cross Party (Nyilaskeresztes Párt – Hungarista Mozgalom) was a Hungarian national socialist party that ruled between October 15, 1944 and March 28, 1945.

³⁷ One prime example is Levente Püski, *A Horthy-Korszak 1920-1941* (The Horthy Era 1920 – 1941) (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 2013). On the right's historical revisionism see Krisztián Ungváry, *Tettesek vagy áldozatok?: feltáratlan fejezetek a XX. század történelméből* (Victims or perpetrators?: unexplored chapters of the twentieth century history) (Budapest: Jaffa Kiadó, 2014)

³⁸ Zoltán Pósa, "Egy elfeledett magyar zseni," *Magyar Nemzet*, December 4, 2010.

³⁹ See for instance Szeszták Szeszták Á. "Dugovics Titusz, az antihős, Történelmünk csupa hazugság, ami jó lenne benne, az kitaláció?" *Magyar Nemzet*, [accessed September 20, 2013](#).

http://mno.hu/migr_1834/dugovics_titusz_az_antihos-249128. Kuruc.info since its launch in 2006 has become one of the most popular online news forum for the Hungarian far right. Tormay has been featured on it regularly.

⁴⁰ See for instance Kondrád Salamon, *Nemzeti Önpusztítás 1918-1920: Forradalom, Proletárdiktatúra, Ellenforradalom* (National Self-destruction, 1918-1920: Revolution, Dictatorship of the Proletariat, Counterrevolution) (Budapest: Korona, 2001).

⁴¹ Máté Kutassy, "Klebsberg–Tormay–Dohnányi-emléknapok Pesthidegkúton," *Magyar Nemzet*, November 14, 2010.

⁴² Pósa Zoltán, (2010) "Egy elfeledett magyar zseni." *Magyar Nemzet*. [accessed September 21, 2013](#). http://mno.hu/migr_1834/egy_elfeledett_magyar_zseni-201840.

⁴³ In 2010, soon after Fidesz came into power it introduced new media legislation. According to the law, which went into effect in 2011 all media outlets must register with the state, essentially making them accountable to a newly established Media Council. Members of the Council are appointed by parliament. However, since Fidesz enjoys a two-thirds majority it basically can pick the appointees and therefore limit voices that might be critical of Fidesz and its allies. In addition to weakening the protection of freedom of speech the new media law also imposed fines, suspensions and the possibility of closure to organizations who do not comply by presenting “balanced” representations and respecting “human dignity.” For an overview see, Márton Dunai, “How Hungary’s Government Shaped Public Media to Its Mould.” *Reuters*. February 19, 2014. For a more thorough analysis is on the circumstances and outcomes of Fidesz’s control of the media see Péter Bajomi-Lázár, “The Party Colonisation of the Media The Case of Hungary.” *East European Politics & Societies* 27, no. 1 (February 1, 2013): 69–89.

⁴⁴ Ágnes Szeszták, “Dugovics Titusz, az antihős, Történelmünk csupa hazugság, ami jó lenne benne, az kitaláció?” *Magyar Nemzet*, February 2, 2010.

⁴⁵ Kutassy Mátè, “Klebensberg–Tormay–Dohnányi-emléknapok Pesthidegkúton.” *Magyar Nemzet*, accessed September 20, 2013. <http://mno.hu/migr/klebensberg-tormay-dohnanyi-emleknepok-pesthidegkuton-203579>.

⁴⁶ By 2010 there had been a few online essays and blogs that touched on the scandal around Tormay’s sexuality, mostly from a sensationalist perspective or simply to suggest that Tormay was a lesbian. See for instance, Onagy Zoltán, „Tormay Cécile,” accessed January 6, 2015. <http://www.irodalmijelen.hu/05242013-0953/tormay-cecile>.

⁴⁷ Gábor Tölgyesi, “Nemzeti Könyvtár: Tormay Cécile műve az első kötet,” *Magyar Nemzet*, October 3, 2012.

⁴⁸ In 2010, the Fidesz led government amended its Citizenship Act in order to pave the way for preferential naturalisation of Hungarians living abroad, without proof of permanent residency or assured livelihood in Hungary. By 2014 close to 500’000 people living outside of Hungary applied for citizenship adding potentially 150’000 votes to the electorate. “Hungary seeks new voters abroad to shape elections at home.” *The Christian Science Monitor*. September 3, 2013, accessed, January 2, 2015. <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2013/0903/Hungary-seeks-new-voters-abroad-to-shape-elections-at-home>.

⁴⁹ Realpolitik reasons aside the recreation of Greater Hungarian discourse could also underscored the failure of the EU (and more generally of the West) to protect Hungarian minorities outside of Hungary.

⁵⁰ According to the mission statement the website of the National Library series, “[T]he first aspect of the selection is readability, the second is diversity, and the third is to strengthen national self-esteem. Accessed May 31, 2014.

<http://www.nemzetikonyvtar.hu>.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² For the rise of anti-EU sentiments along with antisemitism see András Kovács, *Antisemitic Prejudices in Post-Communist Hungary* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2011).

⁵³ “Orbán and the Wind from the East.” *The Economist*. November 14, 2011.

⁵⁴ For a succinct overview see “Viktor’s Justice.” *The Economist*. March 14, 2013.

⁵⁵ In addition to funding book projects that were aimed at a more specialized audience there were growing number of books and television programmes that were intended to educate a more general audience about the so-called Horthy era. See for instance Gábor Gyáni’s *Magánélet Horthy Miklós Korába* (Privacy during the times of Miklós Horthy), Budapest: Corvina, 2011.

⁵⁶ National Avowal of the Hungarian Basic Law (Constitution) of 2011.

⁵⁷ The procedure of drafting as well as the content of Basic Law raised criticism from even centre right legal experts. For a comprehensive view of the issues see László Sólyom, Benedek Molnár et al (eds.) *Mérlegen az alaptörvény: interjúkötet hazánk új alkotmányáról* (Balance sheet of the Basic Law: A volume of interviews on our nation’s new constitution) (Budapest: HVG Lap- és Könyvkiadó Kft.; Stádium Intézet, 2013). Western observers were fiercely critical of the constitutional process, most notably, professor Kim Lane Sheppelle.

<http://lapa.princeton.edu/content/lapa-director-kim-lane-scheppele-analyzes-present-situation-hungary>.

⁵⁸ This was the theme of the 40th Tokaj Writing Camp “Eltiltva és elfelejtve, A hallgatás és elhallgatás évei a magyar irodalomban,” 2012. Zsigmond Papp Sándor, “Ajánlott olvasmányok” *Népszabadság*, August 18, 2012, pg. 3.

⁵⁹ The Hungarian Constitution went into affect January 2012.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁶¹ On conservative feminism in Europe see. Kevin Passmore ed., *Women, gender, and fascism in Europe, 1919-45* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2003). For the history of feminism and women’s movements in Hungary see Andrea Pető, “Minden tekintetben derék nők: A nők politikai szerepei és a nőegyesületek a két világháború közötti Magyarországon” (Right women by all accounts: Women's roles and women’s associations in

interwar Hungary), in *Szerep és alkotás : női szerepek a társadalomban és az alkotóművészetben* (Debrecen: Csokonai Kiadó, 1997), 268-279 and Mária M. Kovács, “Hungary,” in *Women, gender, and fascism in Europe, 1919-45*, 79-91.

⁶² In actuality, many women, especially in the lower classes as well as the young educated continued to defy the rhetoric.

⁶³ Article L of the Fundamental Law of Hungary. Translation of the consolidated version of the Fundamental law, effective as of 1 April 2013, accessed May 31, 2014.

<http://www.kormany.hu/download/e/2a/d0000/THE%20FUNDAMENTAL%20LAW%20OF%20HUNGARY.pdf>

⁶⁴ Tormay’s book was picked as one of seven that the newly established *National Book* series published.

⁶⁵ “Újra Józsefvárosban: Felavatták Tormay Cécile szobrát (+fotók),” April 2 2012, accessed June 4, 2015.

http://jozsefvaros.hu/hir/817/felavattak_tormay_cecile_szobrat_fotok/

⁶⁶ Critics ranged from the liberal political journal *Magyar Narancs* to the socialist paper *Népszabadság*.

⁶⁷ One of earlier times she was quoted was in 2011 by Gyula Varsányi in “Mándy, Tormay új utakon,” *Népszabadság*, August 30, 2011, pg. 15.

⁶⁸ “Vörös festékekkel öntötték le a leszbikus író nő emléktábláját,” *Index*, May 20, 2012, Accessed January 31, 2014, http://index.hu/belfold/2012/05/20/voros_festekkel_ontottek_le_a leszbikus_irono_emlektablajat/

⁶⁹ “Szobrot kap Tormay Cécile”, *Magyar Nemzet*, November 30, 2012, accessed January 31, 2014, <http://magyarnarancs.hu/belpol/szobrot-kap-tormay-cecile-77470/>.

⁷⁰ Since 2010 Fidesz undertook a systematic reorganization of national research centres and organizations. Resources were shifted to more applied sciences in the expense of humanities. Fidesz party loyalists were granted imported positions while academics who were seen as harbouring socialist or liberal political views were dismissed. For a brief explanation see, Paul Hockenos “A Scholar Is Back Home and Defiant in Hungary.” *The New York Times*, December 8, 2013.

⁷¹ Mihály Takaró, “Wass Alberték nélkül torz lenne az alaptanterv” *Lánchíd Rádió*, February 24, 2012.

⁷² For an example see Buncsik Marianna, “Politikai Inkorrekt?.” *Független Újságírók Szövetsége*, May 13, 2014, accessed January 31, 2014. <http://www.fusz.hu/fuszdrupal/?q=content/politikai-inkorrekt>.

⁷³ Gyula Varsányi, “Tünékeny törekvések?” *Népszabadság*, October 30, 2012, pg. 16.

⁷⁴ Emphasis is mine.

⁷⁵ Nelli rKiss, “Tormay Cécile-ről higgadtan”, October 7, 2012. Accessed, January 31, 2014,

<http://mno.hu/grund/tormay-cecile-rol-higgadtan-1110025>,

⁷⁶ There was clearly a different message to the international community, where the governing Fidesz distanced itself from antisemitic and far right claims. Within Hungary however, Fidesz upheld a nationalistic tone claiming to “demand respect from the international community.”

⁷⁷ MTI Hungarian Telegraphic Office, February 23, 2012. Cited by galamus. Accessed January 6, 2015.

http://www.galamus.hu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=120834

⁷⁸ “Leszbikust követel a Jobbik a tankönyvbe”, Index, April 24, 2012, accessed January 31, 2014,

http://index.hu/belfold/2012/04/24/leszbikust_kovetel_a_jobbik_a_tankonyvbe/

⁷⁹ Following the decriminalization of same-sex sexual acts between adult men in 1961, between 2002 and 2010 the LGBT community achieved important gains, most notably the legalization of equal age of consent and civil partnership. In terms of the wording of the Constitution, Fidesz’s coalition partner the Christian Democrats were even more adamant in including a constitutional ban on same-sex marriage.

⁸⁰ The new civil code went into effect in March 15, 2014.

⁸¹ In addition to the prohibition of adoption, same-sex couples in civil union were not entitled to each other’s inheritance.

⁸² In 2012 the Constitutional Court found the Family Protection Act’s definition of family and some of its provisions, including its inheritance provision, discriminatory towards unmarried couples and non-blood related children. Consequently, it ruled parts of the Act unconstitutional. Nevertheless, KDNP vowed to continue to fight to protect the family against “antisocial forces.”

⁸³ “Alkotmányellenes a család fogalma.” *Origo*. December 17, 2012, accessed May 15, 2015.

<http://www.origo.hu/itthon/20121217-alkotmanyellenes-a-csaladok-vedelmerol-szolo-torveny-nehany-resze.html>

⁸⁴ The amendment did not pass and even Fidesz distanced itself from such openly homophobic statements.

“Börtönnel büntetné a homoszexualitás „népszerűsítését” a Jobbik”, *Mandiner*, April 11, 2012, accessed, March 3, 2014.

http://mandiner.hu/cikk/20120411_bortonnel_buntetne_a_homoszexualitas_nepszerusiteset_a_jobbik

⁸⁵ Overall, the majority of academic community was not supportive of Tormay’s inclusion. For reflections on the debate around Tormay’s place in the National Curriculum see <http://megmondjukatutit.blogspot.hu/2013/06/a->

[kulturkampf-sztalingradja-tormay.html](#) and

http://mandiner.hu/cikk/20130626_aristo_a_kulturkampf_purrhoszi_gyozelme_tormay_cecile.

⁸⁶ “Budapest decision puts Hungarian government’s pledge to act against anti-Semitism into doubt” *World Jewish Congress*, May 30, 2013, accessed February 22, 2014,

http://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/news/13550/lauder_budapest_decision_puts_hungarian_government_s_pledge_to_act_against_anti_semitism_into_doubt_

⁸⁷ Mandiner, “[Állásfoglalás Tormay Cécile-ről](#)”, September 4, 2013, accessed January 31, 2014,

http://mandiner.hu/cikk/20130904_bolcseszettudomanyi_kutatokozpont_allasfoglalas_tormay_cecile_rol.

⁸⁸ In April 2014, FIDESZ won the Hungarian parliamentary election by a large margin. The Fidesz-KDNP coalition secured 133 of the 199 parliamentary seats. Jobbik, with over twenty percent of the popular vote came third.

⁸⁹ The recently established Veritas Historical Research Institute is only the most conspicuous example of the ways in which Fidesz is actively supporting the rewriting of Hungarian history.

⁹⁰ While questions about Tormay’s homosexuality might never be resolved, her non-normative gender performance is beyond question. For a discussion of her non-normative lifestyle see Kurimay “*Sex in the “Pearl of the Danube,”*” chapter 3.

⁹¹ On using female figures as representations of the nation see for example, Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation* (London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1997) and Mrinalini Sinha, *Gender and Nation* (Washington, DC: American Historical Association, 2006).

⁹² Rab László, „Az utókor fintora.” *Népszabadság*, June 4, 2012, pg 11.