

PhD Thesis

**The production of parallel realities.
Interethnic relation shaping discursive
strategies in the Hungarian and Romanian-
Language Print Media from Szeklerland**

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I. Aim of the thesis, outline of the topic

The starting point of my doctoral thesis is that the Hungarians and Romanians from Romania live in parallel societies. Meaning that despite they are the citizens of the same country, they don't belong to the same nation, culture, social unit. My doctoral thesis examines the (re)production of these parallel societies, and within this dynamic, I focus specifically on the role of the Hungarian and Romanian-language print media from Szekler land.

I examine a case – namely the incident that happened in the Uz Valley military cemetery – in which the conflict between Hungarians and Romanians was represented by the Hungarian and Romanian language media in a very specific way. The Hungarian media represented a case in such a way that it immediately activated some symbolic components of the Hungarian identity from Szeklerland, components that in that particular case were defined in opposition to Romanians. So, the Hungarian media constructed the group identity of Romanians, a group that was necessary to define the

Hungarian identity as well. The same is true for the Romanian language media. According to my observation, in many conflictual situations the same symbolic components of the Hungarian identity from Szeklerland are instantly activated (and vice versa). The Hungarian media creates the category of Romanians, as an active actor, when it also seeks to create the identity of Hungarians, and creates the category of Romanians in such a way, compared to which, the Hungarian identity always seems the positive, the good one (and also, vice versa). Therefore, the clash between the Hungarians and Romanians, and the media representation of this clash – a specific Hungarian and a specific Romanian media representation – are essential for both ethnic groups to recreate their own group identity by also expressing the opposition between these two groups. Thus, I examine the interethnic dynamics of identity, ethnicity construction. Others have previously addressed the issue of parallel societies (for example, Bárdi et al. 2020; Brubaker 2011; Kiss 2015; Csata 2017, 2019; Papp Z. 2014; Papp Z. & Márton 2011; Biró A. 1996, 1998), and some have also investigated the role of the media in

constructing these parallel societies (Papp Z. 2001; Balázs & Schwartz 2017; Kiss et al. 2021; Szabó 2021). My work builds upon and contributes to these analyses.

I see the significance of my dissertation in its exploration of the close relationship between social structure and media discourse. More specifically, media discourse refers to the identity strengthening, building discourses (re)emerging in the Hungarian and Romanian-language print media from Szeklerland. And by social structure I mean the systemic interrelations of interethnic relations – that is the parallelism between Hungarians and Romanians. And I study parallelism through mutual interdependence, focusing on a paradoxical situation in which Hungarians and Romanians from Szeklerland (re)construct their own group identities through symbolic acts of distinction from the other (and vice versa). So, parallelism means boundary-setting in this thesis: the effort of Hungarians to live their lives in a Hungarian world delineated by Hungarian institutes from Romania, and the effort of Romanians to live their lives in a Romanian world building on a Romanian institutional structure, ignoring each other as much as possible.

Therefore, the parallelism described in this thesis is a paradoxical one: it implies on the one hand separation, boundary-setting, and, on the other hand conflict, reflection. So, in order to present the complexity of this paradoxical situation, I will analyze the parallelism between the realty constructions of Hungarians and Romanians, more specifically, the political, social, cultural, and institutional environments in which they express their identity-forming activities and experience their sense of group identity.

My aim, therefore, is to examine distinction and ethnic parallelism, which simultaneously signify asymmetry and inequality, as well as identity expression, identity reinforcement, and identity opposition. The key concept here is *opposition*. I would like to underline the fact that the two – Hungarian and Romanian – societies are interdependent: each can identify itself only in relation to, in opposition, distinction from the other. they are opposing communities, but they also, paradoxically, need each other in order to create their own identities. This opposition – distinction, parallelism – must be continuously (re)produced. My theses analyses the

institutional and historical background and the concrete realization of this boundary-setting.

II. The methods used

In order to accentuate how the Hungarian and Romanian print media outlets from Szeklerland contributes to the construction of interethnic relations outlined above, I have structured my dissertation on four levels: the theoretically oriented conceptual level, the historically oriented descriptive level of the broader social and political context, the practical level of media environment, and the concrete level of media discourses. Each level has several research methods.

The first level of my dissertation is based on the works of Pierre Bourdieu (1985, 1991, 2000, 2002), Rogers Brubaker (1996, 2001, 2006, 2016), Niklas Luhmann (2009) and Teun A. van Dijk (2001, 2015). The synthetization of the work of these authors – and synthetization is the applied methodology –, and the representation of these works constitutes the first level of my doctoral dissertation: that is the conceptual framework. This conceptual framework illustrates the

relationship between power, group formation, reality construction and discourses/media texts.

The second level of my doctoral thesis focuses on the description of the social, cultural, political and historical environment, the environment Hungarians and Romanians live in next to each other, parallel to each other. There are several concepts describing the position of Hungarians within the Romanian society used in the international and Hungarian literature from Romania. Some researchers use the term parallel society, minority society (Kiss 2015), some use pillarization based on the works of Arend Lijpharttól (1977), or the terms marginalization and (power) asymmetries (Kiss et al. 2018), social inequalities (Papp Z. – Márton 2011, Bárdi et al. 2020, Csata 2017, 2024) or nationality studies (Veres 2005, 2012, 2017, Veres – Papp Z. 2012). I will also present each of these term by synthesizing the Hungarian language literature from Romania – and synthesis refers to the applied methodology.

The third level of my doctoral dissertation is the representation of the environment of Hungarian and Romanian language (local print) media from Romania.

As part of the environment, I discussed: the factors, processes, actors influencing the functioning of the media system – such as economical background, ownership structures, media consumption habits, traditions from the communist era, but also the work habits, work conditions and traditions of journalists and journalism. So, I explored many things that impact the journalistic work and therefore the media discourse. In this representation I also relied on the relevant academic literature from Romania (Papp Z. 2001, 2004, 2005, Csinta–Maksay 2017, Magyari 2000, 2020, Lupu 2020, 2021), and as methodology I used synthetization.

The fourth level of my doctoral thesis is the critical analysis of media materials, and in this analysis, I applied the methodological viewpoints of Teun A. van Dijk's (2001, 2015) critical discourse analysis. To carry out the critical discourse analysis of the media, I examined a total of seven (daily) newspapers from the three counties of Szeklerland, including almost all (daily) newspapers from this region:

- *Observatorul de Covasna*, Romanian language daily from Covasna County;

- *Informația Harghitei*, Romanian newspaper, published multiple times a week from Harghita county;
- *Cuvântul Liber*, one of the Romanian language dailies from Mureș county;
- *Hargita Népe*, Hungarian daily from Harghita County;
- *Háromszék és Székely Hírmondó*, Hungarian dailies from Covasna County;
- *Népújság*, Hungarian daily from Mureș County.

In order to create a text corpus, I have used the search bars on the website of each newspaper, and I have added every single article from every single newspaper that included the keywords – typed in the search bar – Uz Valley and military cemetery. In total, 387 articles were included in my text corpus, 85 Romanian language articles and 302 Hungarian ones.

The nearly 400 articles, I have read and coded manually. Based on my reading, I first reconstructed the sequence of the most important events that had happened in the Uz Valley cemetery, then I have created the chronology of these events – a separate Hungarian and a

separate Romanian chronology. After this, I have manually selected those articles from the online platforms that I found suitable for qualitative analysis – so they contained the discursive strategies that I wanted to analyze following van Dijk’s methodology. Then I located these articles in the print version of the newspapers, and I analyzed the print version – even if there were no differences between the article published online and the print version. Only articles that were published in print were included in the qualitative analysis.

In the course of the analysis, following van Dijk’s framework, I first examined what actor categories were constructed by the Romanian and Hungarian-language media from Szeklerland. Then, I analyzed in detail five different discursive strategies: the strategy of polarization, the strategy of law and Order, the strategy of history, the strategy of victimization, and the strategy of threat. These discursive strategies served a single purpose: to amplify and emphasize the social distance between the various actor categories – that is, to build symbolic boundaries between Romanians and

Hungarians from Romania, and to reproduce and reinforce the parallel societies.

III. List of results in thesis form

The subject of my doctoral dissertation is the role of the Hungarian and Romanian-language print media from Szeklerland in the construction of parallel Hungarian and Romanian societies in Romania. The keyword of my dissertation is *ethnic parallelism*, a term I have given two connotations. First of all, I have used to capture the intermittent experience of ethnicity. Hungarians and Romanians from Romania live in separate Hungarian and Romanian “worlds” defined by/based on Hungarian and Romanian institutions, often completely ignoring each other in everyday life – thus, they live in parallel worlds. This means that they do not experience their ethnicity in daily life, nor do they look at world constantly as Romanians or Hungarians. On the other hand, I have used ethnic parallelism to capture the processes of boundary setting and separation, which are substantial in group formation. Thus, ethnic parallelism in my doctoral thesis is a paradoxical one: it allows passage between the

two worlds, it allows mutual reflection between the members of the two worlds. However, this passage and reflection is the key that leads to setting boundaries, separation between the two worlds and the construction of parallel Hungarian and Romanian worlds.

In my doctoral thesis I focused on the role of the Hungarian and Romanian-language print media from Szeklerland in accentuating this reflection. More precisely, I analyzed texts that appeared in these media outlets, following the aspects of Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis, while I tried to find an answer to the following question: How do the discourses of the Hungarian and Romanian print media outlets from Szeklerland construct a Romanian and a Hungarian interpretation of reality – two parallel realities – in order to reinforce Romanian and Hungarian group identities through symbolic strategies of boundary-setting that simultaneously differentiate and refer to one another? I investigated this research question through the lens of five hypotheses.

1. hypothesis: „*the parallel society arise through the deliberate formation of boundaries (Bourdieu 1985), the way, method of this formation is that both sides offer, parallel to each other a representation, interpretation of reality*”

I verified this hypothesis by applying two methodological approaches. First, I relied on Bourdieu's theory, which he uses to analyze classification struggles related to regional identities. The essence of this theory is that performative acts can contribute to the creation of groups, to reinforce group identities, or to disrupt existing group relations. The keyword of this theory is *recognition*: the more widely the truth value of performative acts is acknowledged, the easier it becomes to create – postulate, and then institutionalize – that which the performative acts aim to bring about. Based on this, I assumed that when the media offers a presentation of reality, it also offers a surface for identification, therefore, when it offers a representation of reality it also strengthens a possible group identity. I tested this hypothesis while doing the critical discourse analysis of the discourses that appeared in the Hungarian and

Romanian-language media from Szeklerland and were related to the incident from the Uz Valley military cemetery.

In the concrete analysis, I demonstrated that both the Romanian and the Hungarian-language media outlets from Szeklerland constructed group categories. The Hungarian-language media created both its own group and that of the Romanians as the enemy group – on two levels. And vice versa. According to van Dijk’s critical discourse analysis, these group constructions were associated with ideologies, attitudes, values, interests, goals, and norms. The purpose of attaching all these elements to the respective groups was to offer as broad a surface for identification as possible. After all, the more points at which individuals can connect with and identify with the media’s portrayal of reality, the easier it becomes to anchor that portrayal in reality.

2. hypothesis: *„the institutional system functions as a resource that is unequally distributed between the two parallel societies”*

In order to verify this hypothesis, I applied the methodology of presenting and synthesizing both Hungarian-language from Romania and international literature. First, based on the van Dijk's theory of critical discourse analysis, I have demonstrated that institutions – more specifically access to and control of various institutions – can be perceived as resources. According to van Dijk, such institutions can be politics, school system, science, church, media, economic institutions etc. To control these institutions, and to control who has access to these institutions is power itself. The more resources an individual or group possesses or has access to, the greater their power. However, these resources are not only the keys to power; they are also the keys to manipulation, influence, and thus the legitimization of power.

In relation with this, by synthesizing some relevant Hungarian language literature from Romania, I pointed out that these resources are distributed unequally between Romanians and Hungarians in Romania. And by resources, I mean the institutional system that is the foundation of the Hungarian and Romanian parallel

societies. Based on the literature, I discussed that there are inequalities between Hungarians and Romanians in the areas of education, economy, politics, and these inequalities are specifically produced through access. In some cases, Hungarians are simply excluded from certain institutions – i.e., resources – or they lack the type of competencies that would allow them access to these institutions. Both are examples of inequality and an asymmetrical structure.

3. hypothesis: *„ethnicity, as embedded in the parallel institutional system, is a modality of social experience. It is a way of seeing, acting, and speaking—a specific mode of social perception and action that is not continuous, but intermittent, tied to particular situations and moments”*

In order to verify this hypothesis, I have chosen van Dijk’s methodology on critical discourse analysis, and I tested it with the critical examination of media materials that were published in the Hungarian and Romanian language print media from Szeklerland and were related to the Uz Valley incident. Through this analysis, I

demonstrated that the perception and representation of the world through an ethnic lens, is not continuous but intermittent. And this is one of the most important findings, conclusions of my doctoral dissertation: that the experience of ethnicity is generally latent and only becomes significant in specific situations.

I have accentuated this in the analysis of the of the Romanian-language media. The Romanian language media and the Romanian public sphere did not engage in the events that happened in the military cemetery until a group of unidentified individuals covered the monument and concrete crosses with garbage bags. Romanians perceived this as an act of violence, as a desecration of a cemetery, and the media has changed its perspective: until this moment it presented the events with objectivity, but due to this perceived act of aggression, the place of objective reporting was taken over by the display of ethnicity, by group-formation – the construction of “Romanians” as the victim-group – and by group distinction and boundary setting between the “Romanian victims” and the “threatening Hungarians”. After this provocation, the Romanian-language media no longer

focused solely on informing the public, but also on interpreting and representing the world “as Romanians”. Thus, the perception and representation of the world as parallel societies emerged from latency.

4. hypothesis: *„when parallelism emerges from latency, it is also expressed in the media, and the media associates well-established discourses, solutions, and techniques with the expression of this parallelism.”.*

In order to verify this hypothesis, I applied two methods. First of all, by synthesizing Van Dijk’s work, I have demonstrated that discourses work like iceberg: only a fraction of them is visible – written, spoken –, the majority is invisible, relies on individuals’ knowledge. Therefore, while analyzing discourses, it is important to examine not only the parts visible above the surface – the part that is explicitly written or spoken –, but also the parts below the surface, the invisible parts, that are not directly expressed in the discourses, but are necessary to interpret them and are based on the recipient’s knowledge.

Secondly, I have chosen van Dijk methodology on critical discourse analysis, and I tested it with the critical examination of media materials that were published in the Hungarian and Romanian language print media from Szeklerland and were related to the Uz Valley incident. As already demonstrated in the verification of the previous hypothesis, when ethnicity becomes important – as when it surfaces – it is also represented in the media. In the case study, I also argued that there are well-established discourses and strategies for the media display of ethnicity. By “well-established,” I mean that as soon as the expression of parallelism became relevant, the media was immediately able to activate discourses that journalists knew would resonate with their target audience. That is, the audience immediately understands who “We” are and who “They” are – those who threaten us. These discourses, that are suitable to express parallelism, to strengthen, express group identity, were not created from scratch in that moment, they have emerged, formed, accumulated as social semantics previously, in previous situations. So, the journalist simply retrieves these discourses, slightly updates them,

adapts them to the specific situation, and begins using them to express boundary-setting, without the need for further explanation or introduction.

5. hypothesis: *„the well-established discourses that express parallelism has specific and already well-established discursive strategies that reinforce and reproduce separation. These are discursive strategies that sharpen and amplify the opposition between groups, thereby strengthening the identity of their own group”*

To verify this hypothesis, I have applied van Dijk’s methodology on critical discourse analysis, and I tested it with the critical examination of media materials that were published in the Hungarian and Romanian language print media from Szeklerland and were related to the Uz Valley incident. As already demonstrated in the verification of the previous hypothesis (1) the experience of ethnicity is intermittent, (2) when ethnicity becomes important, it is also represented in the media, and (3) this representation follows well-established discourses. I added a fourth element to this: these discourses contain discursive strategies that reinforce boundary-making.

Furthermore, I demonstrated that both the Romanian and Hungarian-language media from Szeklerland use the same discursive strategies to construct their own group and the opposing group, as well as to express and intensify the opposition between them. Both media, emerged and reconstructed their own stereotypical actor categories – that could be matched to one another –, it also started to amplify the difference between these categories. And in this amplification both media used the same discursive strategies: the polarization of stereotypical actor categories, the strategy of law and order, the strategy of history, the strategy of victimization and the strategy of threat. The only difference between these strategies was the framing: these strategies were used by both media in a way that it would demonstrate their own perception and interpretation of reality. So, in the Romanian language media these strategies accentuated why Romanians are the good and the Hungarian the threat in this situation, and in the Hungarian language media these strategies accentuated why Hungarians are the good and the Romanians the threat in this situation. Demonstrating this is also a

significant contribution of my doctoral dissertation – one of its key findings.

In my doctoral dissertation I demonstrated that the media contributes to the (re)construction of parallel societies by the parallel interpretation and representation of the reality. I also demonstrated, that the parallel interpretation and representation of reality is not continuous, but intermittent. Media present in parallel ways the reality only when displaying ethnicity becomes relevant. For example, in the case of a – real or perceived – provocation. The expression of ethnicity relies on well-established media discourses that typically remain latent. These are media discourses that can be used at any time to express parallelism. After any – real or perceived – provocation, these discourses can be brought out, dusted off, adapted to the current situation, and used to reconstruct parallel societies. To make the differences between these parallel societies even more perceptible, the media also employs discursive strategies to articulate these differences. Furthermore, the media incorporates the parallel institutional system into these parallel interpretations of reality as a resource. It uses the

institutional systems to institutionalize the relationships that are manifested through performative expressions.

IV. Bibliography

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Candidate: Orsolya Bukovinszky-Csáki
Doctoral School: Doctoral School of Human Sciences
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List of publications related to the dissertation

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1. **Bukovinszky-Csáki, O.:** Tudás, hatalom és diskurzusok Teun A. Van Dijk kritikai diskurzuselemzésében.
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The Candidate's publication data submitted to the Tudóstér have been validated by DEENK on the basis of the Journal Citation Report (Impact Factor) database.

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