Discursive Practices: Old Hatred or New Solidarity? An (Un)Expected Approach in the Socio-Political Construction of COVID-19 in Romania

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Abstract. Communication serves the symbolic exchange of common, shared meanings and has a captious role in shaping the Social Construction of Covid-19. Influencing behavior and attitudes and advocating for a proper position and an adequate behavior, health communication along with the political discourse in Romania during the Pandemic was circumscribed to a defensive strategy aiming to manage the crisis in a society defined by a polarized imaginary and catastrophe consumption. Diaspora was targeted as a potential enemy in the public discourse and Mass media was seduced by this approach multiplying the effect of the lack of any professional risk strategy and increasing the climate of fear and mistrust. As a methodological approach, I have used Qualitative methods in Content Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis, especially due to their merit, as non-reactive and non-intrusive methods, applied on public discourse in mainstream media and online. The segregation of the population by dividing Romanians into those who left and those who stayed, was observed as a vulnerable strategy unable in the long run to be a convincing approach and harming social solidarity. The collective imaginary and the public perception are seriously affected by ambivalence and de-rationalization of the manipulative public discourse when the social solidarity is redefined.

Keywords: *social construction; health communication; Covid-19 pandemic; public discourse; de-rationalization; solidarity; hate speech*

1. Introduction

Living in a world full of risks, makes our existence hardly predictable. Uncertainty as the main feature of risk (Sellnow et al., 2009) has a profound impact on our quality of life and increases our vulnerability and the COVID-19 pandemic put the world in an unprecedented situation, although many other crises, including sanitary ones had happened during the time. But uncertainty regarding health risk information affects people differently, takes different forms (Waters et al., 2014) and

implies different responses: some people respond with more trust towards information and awareness, others are mistrustful.

The communication phenomena as a bidirectional road, influencing the public opinion and being under the public impact, is one of interest in the present paper. Mass media plays a captious role within the crisis management and tackling media discourse as a focus of this research was made taking into account the typology of media roles in delivering urgent information and interpreting them, monitoring the authorities and the crisis management, educating the public, enabling and support networks that aid affected people. Classic media forms and more and more online news media have several unique characteristics, enabling them to "perform well in carrying out their social duties in a crisis" (Powers & Xiao, 2014: 71).

Not ultimately the way media delivers information is essential for improving public health in the effort of influencing social norms and to change attitudes, knowledge, creating role models, stimulating debates etc. (Singhal et al., 2004), strengthening the educational dimension of various types of media and inflicting a more pronounced responsibility for all social actors. Health risks communication is not only a media professionals' task, but one for organizations, politicians, health practitioners. However, the stakes riding on public understanding are high for the communicators and any pursuit of sensationalism of several media industries, making risk more severe, it's a disruptive factor that must be accounted for. The way crisis situation is perceived is relevant as long as "crises become crises only when they are perceived as such" (Conrad and McIntush, 2003: 412).

Highly visible events have been triggered perceptions on the existing crisis, leading to action and capturing the attention of the media and policymakers. A marked oriented sensationalism was detected even at the beginning of 2003' when SARS spread in Asia and SARS terminology became mainstream as a combination of scientists efforts, media pursuits of profit and audience, organizational ideology, socio-cultural ideas and personal feelings of different social actors involved in. (Chen, 2016) Epidemics have entered the common language through media agency and today there is no channel, person, organization who does not use technical terms that until recently were practically unknown for most of us. Public discourse suffers from a real inflation of COVID terminology.

In order to understand how a new social construction occurred, we examined the public discourse in Romania looking at the interaction between the

media and the political leaders and how their performance influenced people's expectations. Using the social construction perspective with respect to health communication means to "unpack the sociocultural sources of symbolic usage in health care" and to understand "how meanings emerge from contextual and political sources in ways that mold health beliefs and behaviors, clinical judgments, and organizational routines" (Sharf and Vanderford, 2003: 12).

One of the heaviest difficulties occurred in health communication on Covid-19 crisis was that one cannot perceive himself as an ill person, and the virtual exposure at the virus was perceived rather as a risk issue then as a health one. The topic accompanied by fake news and speculations started to invade the public space and the social imaginary.

2. Hypotheses and Methods

2.1 Hypothesis 1: Social Construction of Covid-19 Crisis in Romania is shaped on a polarized imaginary

There is a Social Construction of Covid 19 in Romania mediated by the public discourse, drafted onto the social culture, nourished by the appetite for disaster consumption and substantiate by the polarization of the collective imaginary. The social construction of reality (Berger and Luckmann, 1991) makes possible an overlapping of worlds, representations, way of understanding reality. Language, as the most important sign system of human society, plays a prominent role in the process of construction.

In Romania, beginning with February-March 2020, the public discourse on Covid-19 was shaping reality on several levels: offering information and data, creating a semiotic of crisis, struggling to manage the crisis even by manipulating audience. Seeing that communication, it is conceived as intersubjective mediation by signs and sign system and it's covering the uncertainty by an institutional interpretation of facts, legitimating actions and nonactions, the public space was flooded by references to Covid-19. Scanning the quality of health communication in this respect, knowing that the irrational behavior is sometime a consequence of poor communication (Scherer and Juanillo, 2003) was a method of having a perspective on the very construction of Covid-19 Social Construction in Romania. Analyzing public discourse, we applied a paradigm of studying a phenomenon in accordance with the idea that a discourse is part of a discursive situation, able to generate a

process of co-construction of reality. This paradigm ofers a perspective on social reality which is not a fact that language translate, copy, convey, but a reality that is constructed (maintained or renewed) through the semantic transactions that people update in their social interactions. Discourse does not reproduce a (unique) world, but one of the possible worlds, where the basic postulate is summarized as follows: every word has a persuasive intention (Dorna, 1989). We also took into account the public appetite for disasters and the context of a dramatized world we are living in, "a precarious one" (Berger and Luckmann, 1991).

The analysis grid applied comprises: "what" happened, "when", to "whom" and "were"" targeting the temporal, social and special relevance of the phenomenon (Berger and Luckmann, 1991, Endress, 2019). Communicating about catastrophes we are interpreting and legitimate events, valuing and judging, constructing expectations, settling out criteria, structuring the world, creating an order even in such a disruptive event as a catastrophe is. Baudrillard launched the very intuitive expression: "the consumed vertigo of catastrophe" (Baudrillard, 1996).

2.2 Hypothesis 2: Reason won't be enough! The political discourse's dynamic rational-emotional it is exploited in order to increase risk message efficiency.

De-rationalizing the discourse, putting an emotional emphasis, the public and politic narrative changes the framework, deflecting attention from the Government actions to external factors. This situation could be lectured as a strategy of hiding administrative mistakes and inability to manage the crisis. Political discourse involves a series of specific features, often reflecting the atomization of the social reality, generated and related by it, demanding a specific and critical approach. Romanian contemporary political discourse analysis reveals a dual profile of the imaginary, a mythical dimension of the representation, a strange pairing between pre-modern and post-modern (Goudenhooft 2013).

2.3 Hypothesis 3: Shaming and blaming – a strategy for pointing out sources and shifting responsibility.

Shaming and blaming it is part of a strategy of finding an explanation and to point out someone in the very climate of uncertainty under the appearance of empowering people, returning on some sensitive category, as diaspora is, and saying *They spread the virus coming back in Romania!*

The research is based on a content analysis of two types of discourses: political, official discourse and a media one. The main objectives are exploration, description and understanding: exploring the discursive space of the Covid-19 social construction; description of the type of speech, subjects, topics and strategies in risk and health communication and discovering patterns of understanding phenomena and intentions beyond and through journalistic discourse. As a methodological approach, we have used Qualitative methods in Content Analysis and Discourse Analysis. In this study, my attempt is to rethink certain concepts and give their nuances, so it is also a conceptual approach.

Content analysis is based on the hypothesis that media content will influence audience's beliefs, attitudes, intentions, values or behaviors (Manganello & Fishbein, 2008) to a certain degree. According to George Gerbner's and Larry Gross' cultivation theory, people, being media users and being regularly exposed to media messages, are probably seeing, perceiving the world, the events and social realities in a way consistent with media representations. Cultivation, as an ongoing process of interaction among messages and contexts is able to strengthen the conviction of those who believe and to indoctrinate the "deviants" in a process called *mainstreaming* (Gerbner et al., 1986).

We applied Cultivation theory for showing media's role in social control, building consensus/agreement on diverse positions through shared values, priorities and discourse's terms' signification (Shanahan, J. and Morgan, 2004).

Critical discourse analysis (CDA), offers a practical *three-dimensional framework* enabling the study of language text, discourse practice and socio-cultural practice. Ruth Wodak (2002), Norman Fairclough (1995) and Teun van Dijk (2008) developed the approach and interpretation as of discourse, conceiving it an interaction between text and society, expanding thence the virtues of text analysis. The analysis of political discourse and media discourse during this research is primarily concerned with the identification of the different indicators used by the authors or by the characters of the narratives in their communicative acts. Using the indexicality, reflexivity and documentary levels of the analytic method for the authoritative political discourse, some questions arise: What is the context? How is the appeal occasioned? What actions are they part of? (Potter, 2004).

3. Results

3.1. Responsibility versus expectancies

Narrative sense-making is an ambivalent process which frequently involves assigning responsibility and sometimes attributing blame (Powers and Xiao, 2008). One of the strongest narratives since the beginning of the pandemic in Romania was the one delivered by Romanian President Klaus Iohannis. Oscillating between reason and emotions, while the frightened people did not understand very well what was happening, locked in their houses, exchanging bread recipes on social networks and imagining how good they would all become after the pandemic experience, the message of a president who did not usually appear in public and do not communicate easily, occurred in a context of ambiguity, insecurity and loss of normal meaning of life.

3.1.1. Health Belief Model – It's time to scare people about Covid

According to Janz & Becker (1984), a person must believe that a risk of acquiring a serious disease is imminent in order to perform a recommended health behavior and it must be represented a trustworthy cost-effective balance. So, the political decision to assign so Romanian President to transmitt public and official messages in a systematic, organized way, almost daily at the beginning of the pandemic, was likely to make people aware of how serious the situation is. Also it was about the Romanian Constitutional establishment on the *state of emergency* and about the presidentian attributions regarding the official declaration in extraordinary situations and the legal framework that involves the presidential legal acts – the decrees. The Romanian president role was to increase exposure, being an influent, credible and attractive official.

In theory there are several dimensions/criteria in selecting the source/the messenger: expertise and trustworthiness (which are the primary components of messenger credibility), authoritativeness but also familiarity, likability, and similarity to the target audience (which are facets of attractiveness). The messenger power dimension (control over rewards and punishments) that is central to interpersonal persuasion is not directly pertinent to the mass media situation (Morgan et al., 2002, Hofstede, 2010).

Nevertheless, in the case of the Romanian President, Klaus Iohannis, we have to consider that institutions tend to be less attractive than individual

spokespersons, so using the same message on Presidency website people will perceive it as an institutional one, meanwhile broadcasting the message, it was made more personally and appealing. Also, selecting appropriate channels and formats on TV, radio, newspapers, online media, president Iohannis managed to increase message's impact significantly, possibly affecting his public trust.

Klaus Iohannis public interventions during the first semester of Covid-29 crisis were unsettling becouse he was popularly perceived as a rather self-restrained public figure, reticent and distantly. Howerver, using an authorized language, by virtue of the position of power occupied, Iohannis' discourse was a legite one, but its performance and persuasiveness depended not only on linguistic features, but also on its symbolic and ritual nature, subsumed by the general purpose of the political system of generating and maintain the belief that existing political institutions are the most appropriate for society. (Lipset, 1960, Goudenhooft 2014).

The presence of topics such as safety, illness, death, solidarity in President Iohannis' speech is not accidental at all. This is a situation illustrating Ulrich Beck's (1992) theory of crossing from the solidarity of need to solidarity motivated by anxiety, where the society dynamic is negative and defensive, being "no longer concerned with attaining something 'good', but rather with *preventing* the worst" (Hooke and Rogers, 2005: 9). The author query is that thus communities of danger are driving people to irrationalism. The invisible risks disempowered us and forced us to challenge the very notion of life worth flawing perceptions of reality.

Regarding the role of President Iohannis as transmitter of essential and dramatic communiqués and in explaining some measures to stop the disastrous effects of the pandemic, it was a really difficult one and the chosen approach was one shaped on the specific mentality and social culture of Romanians. Presidency website exhibited the following principle: "Every citizen of our country must benefit from a transparent, clear and correct communication from the state institutions". The political discourse we focused on is invested with classic characteristics described in the literature (Chomsky 2017; Fairclough, 1989; Van Dijk, 2002; Chilton, 2004; Blackledge, 2005): the discourse is an image of the author; is part of a paradigm of social influence and persuasion; tries to create a 'common-sense 'reality; is a key element in reproducing ideologies; contains a stake; uses persuasive strategic and logical patterns which are articulated by a logic of plausibility and situational-temporal communication contracts etc. Given this theoretical context, a significant element to consider is that the discourse we focus on was posted as

institutional message on the website of the presidency and broadcasted on all relevant TV and Radio channels, printed and distributed in newspapers, spread on the internet, blogs and social networks with a very large audience for both Romanians living in Romania or those living abroad.

Studying president Iohannis message delivered as press release in 3'th of April 2020, the risk communication strategy with all the theoretical features set out above is validated. At first reading, the message sent prior to the day of the Orthodox Easter, was an exhortation to caution and wisdom, in order to take all necessary precautions, such physical distance, avoiding crowds, for protecting from Covid-19 and for slowing the spread. The tradition of celebrating Easter, very popular in Romanian culture, where family members meet and spend time together is completed by the usual borders crowd of many Romanians coming from abroad home.

Figure 1. Model of influencing health behavior
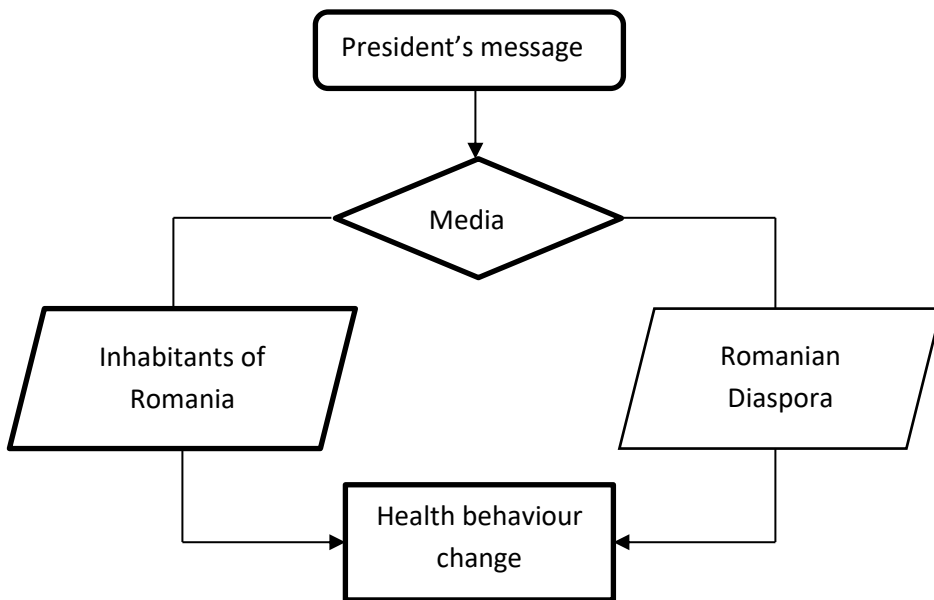
Romania has one of the largest diasporas among EU member states, with more than 5 million people living abroad and is constantly growing. According to an OECD (2019) report on migration, in 2015 and 2016, Romania was identified as the second country with the highest population growth in the diaspora (7.3% per year),

after Syria. Another report from the World Bank (2018) shows that Romania has the largest increase in emigration between EU countries from 1990 to 2017. The largest host countries for Romania's emigrant population are Italy and Spain, the hardest hit by the COVID-19 outbreak. Given these data, the president's appeal seems reasonable and is fitting the model of influencing health behavior (see Figure 1).

3.2 Presidential discourse and sensemaking

Applying Karl Weick (2009) theory about the nature of organized sensemaking, we detected indicators for a strategy of organizing narrative around the meaning of a new type of solidarity, the suggestion of finding another way of being together: "This year we will be with our loved ones, but from a distance". According to this message one can distinguish a timeline and solidarity before and after 2020 (Figure 2).

Solidarity and unity are one of the key combinations from the text. These appear as an assertive and non-assertive occurrence at the beginning, respectively at the end of the message:

1. "It is essential that we are all aware of this (critical situation – a.n.), because there will be moments with a great emotional burden, which will test our solidarity and unity" (Iohannis, 2020).

2. "Without solidarity, without the unity of the citizens, without the involvement of each of us, we will not succeed" (ibid.).

The meaning of social solidarity is mutual support and *cohesion* between individuals, between members of a society, a shared group membership, a type of interdependence, responsibility and is to take care "of the needs and interests of underprivileged" persons. Solidarity implies reciprocity (but not the same type of obligations) and commitment to action. (Mishra & Rath, 2020, Davies & Savulescu, 2019). In time of Covid-19 crise social distancing needs to be coupled with social solidarity in order to ensure an "effective tool for curbing the impact of the pandemic. Institutions, individuals, and communities have an indispensable role to play as a centripetal force of society to resist the centrifugal tendency of the novel coronavirus" (Mishra & Rath, 2020: 6).

The solidarity sense targeted by the message of Klaus Iohannis in his press release is rather one of obedience to the rules, a reasonable appeal, so is a normative insight of solidarity.

Figure 2. Timeline: solidarity's dynamic
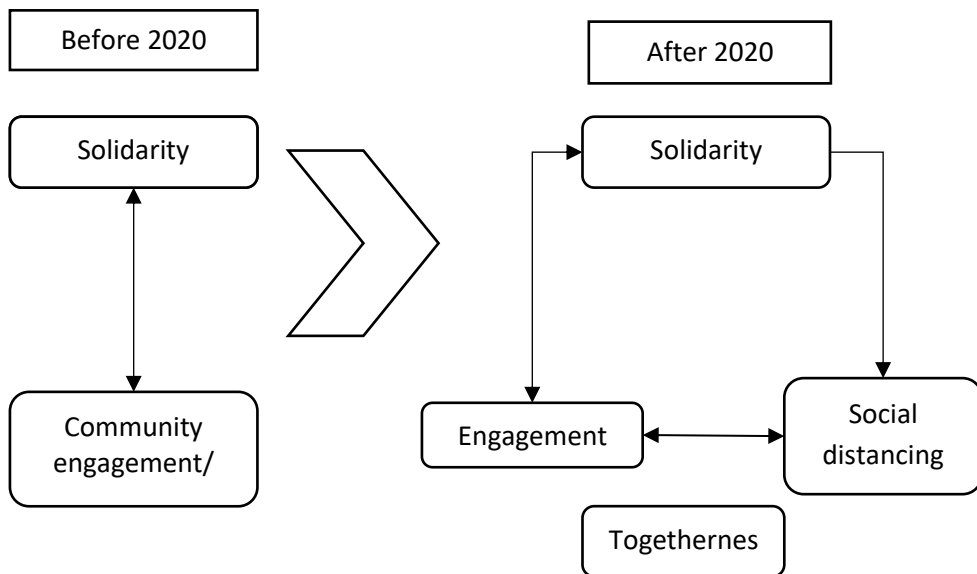
Contextualizing the discourse, one can see the discourse emerges in line with health policy government's vision and it is articulated mostly preventively. Articulated on the line of a social construction, the text combines contrasting perspectives, sometimes logically deficient shifting from rational to emotional based on cultural sensitivity plea. Social construction emphasizes the connectedness of context and significance.

The context of the speech is specified from the beginning of the message: "We have entered, for several days, the most difficult stage of this complicated period generated by the coronavirus epidemic" (Iohannis, 2020). Some contextual indicators are rhetorical-persuasive using a style laden with superlative adjectives or dramatic epithets: *the hardest stage*, *the complicated period*, *as long as possible*, *critical weeks*, *great emotional load*, *severe pandemic*, *the most important holiday* etc.

Rhetoric questions for increasing the dramatic effect like "How many more victims will the epidemic make?" and expressions with slight nuances of biblical topic "No one, *I tell you*, no one will be really safe until all of us shall be safe!" customize the message.

Analyzing the discursive social construction, we noticed the language used to shape a reality shared to the public where it is a sort of complicity of sufferance:

verbs are predominantly in the first-person plural: *we* (we entered, we managed, we mourn, we know, we don't know) so one can conclude: we are together in this crisis and we have to solve it together. The sense of solidarity is being constructed and the President uses several persuasive techniques, launching some incentives in order to ensure the reciprocity of obligations and shaping the social construction as a normative structure, targeting:

1. to change beliefs regarding the probability component, stressing the higher-than-expected probability "No one would be safe!";
2. to intensify the valence by emphasizing the severity of negative consequences: "the loss of human life will be more and more and serious cases, which require intensive medical treatment, will increase"
3. to highlights the positivity of the benefits: "The sacrifices that each of us makes help enormously in limiting the spread of the infection"
4. to raise the salience of those components of the expectancy-value equation that the audience already regards as advantageous (e.g., positively valued and likely consequences of a recommended practice) so that each of these components is weighted more heavily in the audience's decision making – "Through a responsible attitude, we take an important step toward the time when our lives will return to normal".

His communication strategy included also negative appeals (*is time to scare people!*): "I appeal to the Romanians living in the Diaspora, a necessary call, but one that fills me with sadness: my dear ones, do not come home this year for the Holidays!"

He is combining positive appeals and incentives with negative ones. But who's the story and what bad things could happen? "The loss of human life will increase more and more and serious illness cases, requiring intensive medical treatment, will multiply" (Iohannis, 2020).

Religious terms and topics were addressed in the context of forthcoming Easter: the tone has pastoral-care and religious nuances: *I tell you*, *my dear ones*, *beloved ones*, *your neighbors*, *our duty*, *your sacrifice;* abundance of religious terms and expressions: *the most important Christian Holidays, Holidays of light, communion, solidarity and goodness, Resurrection of the Lord, Holidays, sacred holidays, Church, faith, dedication, devotion, manifestation of Christian love and love of neighbor.*

The significance of using this inventory it is not just a circumstantial one. Under the pretext of approaching Orthodox Easter, the President uses a series of triggers that make sense in relation to the cultural and spiritual consciousness of the population. When a more effective exhortation to goodness, solidarity, humanity, community spirit, duty and sacrifice can be conveyed, than near the feast that celebrates God's highest sacrifice for man, the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, the Son of God?!

In Klaus Iohannis discourse we found answers like this: "through the restrictive measures taken in time, we managed to delay it as long as possible". There are more normative-prescriptive indicators regarding safety and responsibility, driving to the conclusion that in the realm of responsibility there is also solidarity: we cannot point out to government since we have our own responsibility in maintaining safety: "we know for sure that it is up to us to have as few (casualty) as possible!" and this is doable by "staying at home" and by "respecting as much as possible the rules of social distancing" (Ibid.). The periods of crises prove that there is a need of balance between the individual responsibility for their own health and the various types of institutional responsibility in ensuring the ethical and efficient medical services (Frunza, 2011: 169).

There is a double responsibility: 1. the authorities' duty to act and 2. the population's responsibility for inaction (to stay at home and keep social distance). Of course, the discourse on safety is somehow volatile, giving the pandemic dynamic and the question "How safe is safe enough?" (Okrent, 1986: 377) is one well-founded. There is no unique definition of *safe* and the President's promise of regaining the *normality* is hasty and ambiguous. However, to make his appeal even more convincing, the President makes an "innovation" in the logic of forms, launching a metaphor that violates Aristoteles logic and the square of oppositions. Let's examine the pathetic exclamation: "No one, I tell you, no one will be really safe until we all shall be safe!" (Iohannis, 2020) We have noticed that the logic infringement was intentionally produced in order to create an increased effect by denying the (real) possibility of some people to be safe without the entire community. This is also a strategy of making sense of the new solidarity disregarding discursive rationality and pretending that no individual would escape on his own way from the pandemic, but within a community choice aggregation, a path of new solidarity.

3.3. Diaspora, the hot potato and the new solidarity: Close by is staying away

Nations, imagined communities, as Benedict Anderson (2006) defined them, normally comprise transnational groups defined by a common identity and attachment to a real or imaginary homeland. The large Romanian diaspora developed a strange love-hate relation with homeland - painful and full of resentments. Public anti-diaspora discourse has been a constant of the last decade and the term *strawberry pickers* has become a common pejorative name for those who have left the country to work abroad, regardless of the fact that the diaspora is so atomized that it includes both elites, and simple seasonal workers. Accused in their own country of abandoning families in order to take care of others, blamed for not paying taxes, boosting the underground economy, not supporting the education system, health or pensions in Romania, but claiming the right to vote, coming back only for holidays, they are often stigmatized, the several million people "a country out of the country" and they constitute *the second Romania* from abroad.

Although Klaus Iohannis is not among those politicians who have had a conflicting relationship with the diaspora, as the left-wing politicians had, his speech from April 3, 2020 had considerable potential to escalate segregation between the two cathegories albeit his tone was quite restrained and almost humble.

He addressed the *Romanians from everywhere,* the mainstream administration's formula for diaspora, asking them, despite their desire of coming home to celebrate Easter, to stay away during the outbreak and to give up a tradition that in the pandemic context would endanger their families. He's plea was made "with deep sadness but also sincerely" but was an urge: "they should not return home this year for the holidays".

Words like *extremely dangerous* in the same sentence with *those you care about so much* are compelling and he elaborated on the topic of being with "our loved ones from the distance" as "the only way we can express our affection for those we love without endangering their lives and health" (Iohannis, 2020). The requested painful sacrifice was (discursively) compensated with a promise reward of being together again in an ambiguous future: "so that we can be together again later".

3.4. Shaming and blaming diaspora

The Covid-19 pandemic has created unrest and uncertainty, shaking human beings' existence all around the globe. Journalists were challenged by the task of gathering and sharing not only accurate information, but also, opinions, positions, perspective. The journalistic discourse has been assaulted not only with new topics of debate, but also with the appearance of new demons or the resurrection of the old ones; a visible enemy must be identified in addition to the invisible virus. Thus, the demonization of Other and the hate speech became inherent in the media landscape of 2020. Who is the enemy? The Government unable to protect us neither from virus nor of unemployment, getting rich from the crise's expenses? The Political Opposition fostering chaos and preventing Government from introducing necessary measures? The Diaspora going back home to infect people?

Narratives provide ways to make sense of the world. Reproducing narratives over and over on several media and online communities, the social construction around a phenomenon such as the Covid-19 pandemic is built concurrent with the processes through which people co-construct their understanding of the world using personal experience as a lens of perceiving the world, negotiating meanings, building identities. The anthropocentric perspective of Social Constructivism obsessed by conceiving the society as a "human product" is driving to the idea that the crises themselves are social constructions supported by language. The utterance of some powerful words as *death, virus* is influent in this perspective and we adhere to the idea that "language objectifies the world" transforming a dynamic experience into a cohesive order. "In the establishment of this order language *realizes* a world, in the double sense of apprehending and producing it" (Berger & Luckmann, 1991: 173).

An appealing journal article, providing an emotional narrative and a meaningful episode, with the title "*What have you done, Ion?" (a.t.),* and further circulated on social networks with great success in March 2020 (an online audience over 277.000 views). A fictive character, Ion, symbolizing diaspora or the Romanians from abroad, as a collective character is getting out with the Covid-19 Outbreak from Italy is guilty as charged for spreading the illness in Romania. The story is as follows: Ion returns from Italy (Covid-19 cluster, quarantined area). Together with four other Romanians he crossed the borders by car, declaring in customs they travelled from Germany (area not quarantined at that time). Ion and his friends brought the virus to Romania. Once arrived at home he embraced his mother, a vulnerable person, old and diabetic. A party was organized ad hoc with many relatives and neighbors

without any precautions! After that Ion went to see old friends and acquaintances and finally, he went clubbing for a change. The next day he starts feeling bad, first with his throat, then a small fever and shiver. But he wasn't worry not even then, lying to himself, pretending is just a negligible cold which can be cured with rest and tea. The situation worsens, he goes to the hospital where he lies declaring that he has not traveled abroad. Doctors were exposed to the virus. In the hospital, his health is deteriorating, Ion receives oxygen, he is tested, he is positive, but being so young and strong, he resists and after spending few days in the Intensive care and struggling to live, he recovers. Meanwhile, everyone with whom Ion have had contact gets sick, including the doctors from the hospital who closes. Ion's mother, seriously ill, is forced to find a hospital into another city where she dies alone. Ion finds out all this after he left the hospital, receiving information from Facebook. The story ends with the philippic: "What have you done, Ion?"

The Antihero narrative and the complexity of the moral implications constitutes a response to the official narrative about social distancing, new solidarity, being accountable with fellows' health. In a text of 396 words, terms from the Covid-19 inventory have a low occurrence but the expressions of deceiving and fraudulent behavior are many: false statement in custom, negligence, disrespect of the isolation rules etc.

The article style is a narrative type of writing, strongly addressed. Written in the second person singular, in the style of an open letter, intended to be read by a wide audience, it targeted several purposes: to create a sort of intimacy with the character and a tie between the reader and the character; to drive readers into the story: they are told what to feel and what to think about facts and how to assess the consequences; to create a complicity between readers and author in blaming the character Ion/diaspora for spreading the virus in Romania by negligence and lack of values; to bring readers closer to the narrator and create distance towards the character, including readers in the team of accusers, respectively of innocent victims of Ion's actions.

The writing is very alert, verbs prevailing and especially action-words, dynamizing the narrative: *you return, you take, you travel, you arrive, you say, you come, you get out, you go clubbing* etc. Regarding prejudices in depicting diaspora, we found an image of the second Romania: the one of who left for a better life abroad and then who returned in time of crisis, negligent, virus (asymptomatic) carriers, endangering everyone. Words and expressions like: *you return with the*

virus, you declare exactly, what have you done – are indicators of responsibility and guilt.

Guiding the dynamic between the readers and the character, the narrative it is a making-sense process, it is controlling the meaning of the story, reinforcing the idea of responsibility, looking for culprits, igniting public opinion.

4. Conclusions and limitations

The COVID-19 pandemic has added a new crisis to the already existing ones, generating predictable but also less expected responses. The multitude of information on health risk has affected people in various ways and neither distrust of the quality and truth of information nor manipulation has been avoided.

During this period, the mass media manifested its function of communication and information, but also of forming public perception and partner in the social construction of Covid-19. The social construction of Covid-19 is closely linked to the interaction between the media and the public but also between politicians, government and the public through the media. We believe that their discursive performance decisively influenced the collective imaginary, people's beliefs, fears and behavior.

The first hypothesis, according to which the social construction of the Covid-19 crisis in Romania was shaped around a polarized imaginary was verified both by distrust and ambivalence of public perception on government, doctors, media, all of them being considered either heroes or antiheroes, or even potentially felons, as well as regarding the deepening of the cleavage between the existence of a second Romania: that of the Romanians from the diaspora who was conflicted even more during the pandemic.

The second hypothesis regarding the de-rationalization of public discourse was proved by the ambivalence of President Klaus Iohannis' speech analyzed in this paper, where we found that in addition to the inventory of rational arguments appropriate to guidelines and literature on risk communication and health communication accompanied by appeals to maturity, prudence and observance of the rules, there was a strong emotional component, with religious elements, role-playing games and even logical fractures, blaming and shaming those who are found to be guilty of spreading the virus.

The third hypothesis about diverting attention to possible culprits was

validated through the analysis of the article titled *What have you done, Ion,* an impressive attempt of manipulating public opinion. The images from Romania's western border with tens of thousands of Romanian migrants returning home from countries such as Spain, France and Italy, devastated by the pandemic, have sparked heated debates in the Romanian public space. According documented information only a small part of those who brought the virus to the country were migrants. Many were in fact Romanians who traveled abroad. The sociologist Remus Anghel underlined the unseen drama and the trap in which the Romanians from the diaspora found themselves: "It has dominated and still prevails an alarming tone, understandable in fact, in which there is a fear of Romanian migrants, putting in the background their difficulties or the fact that they have no choice and they have had to return" (Barbu, 2020).

We assume that the analysis of one or few article or public discourses does not allow for either empirical or theoretical generalizations beyond the borders of the specific analyzed discourse, but due the impact of the discourse as well as the selected narrative we can issue some patterns in perceiving the Coronavirus Crises by the Romanians and some models of political action and potential responses.

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