

CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY
NATIONALISM STUDIES PROGRAM

REGIONAL IDENTITY IN ELITE DISCOURSE

THE CASE STUDY OF BANAT

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

BUDAPEST, HUNGARY
2007

Acknowledgments

First and foremost I would like to thank to my advisor, András Kovács for his support and for the comments and suggestions, which he gave me in the critical points of the research and the writing process. I am further grateful to Michael Lawrence Miller for finding the time to read and make useful comments on my writings. Finally, I want to thank to Vasile D. Țâra, the head of Eugen Todoran Library from Timisoara, for providing all the material that I needed, sometimes even with the price of violating the library's internal rules.

The financial support for the research was provided by Nationalism Studies Program's Student Research Grant.

Table of contents

I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. COLLECTIVE IDENTITY AND DISCOURSE ANALYSIS– THEORY AND METHODOLOGY	5
1. WHAT IS CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS?.....	5
2. COLLECTIVE IDENTITY.....	7
3. DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF COLLECTIVE IDENTITIES.....	11
III. THE REGION BANAT – HISTORICAL CONTEXT	15
IV. BANAT AND “BANATEAN” IDENTITY IN THE ACADEMIC LITERATURE	19
1. ROMANIAN NATIONALIZING AND HOMOGENIZING DISCOURSE	20
2. CONSTRUCTING THE REGIONAL IDENTITY – ALTERNATIVE ACADEMIC LITERATURE ON BANAT	23
3. CONTINUITIES AND DISCONTINUITIES IN THE HISTORICAL PRESENTATIONS.....	26
4. ‘BANATEANS’ AND THE ‘OTHERS’	29
5. COMMUNISM AND THE 1989 REVOLUTION.....	32
V. ESSAYISTS, EDITORIALISTS AND THEIR DISCOURSE.....	37
1. ALIN GAVRELIUC	39
2. DANIEL VIGHI	41
3. RADU PAVEL GHEO.....	44
VI. POLITICAL ELITES – USAGES OF THE REGIONAL DISCOURSE	52
1. BANATEAN IDENTITY, BANATEAN CONSCIOUSNESS	54
2. BANATEANS AND THE ‘OTHERS’	58
3. REFERENCES TO PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE	61
VII. CONCLUSIONS	66
APPENDIXES.....	71
1. ACADEMIC LITERATURE STUDIED IN PART IV	71
2. NEWSPAPER AND JOURNAL ARTICLES STUDIED IN PART V	72
3. ARTICLES STUDIED IN PART VI	75
BIBLIOGRAPHY	78

List of tables

TABLE 1 – STRATEGIES, ARGUMENTATIONS AND LINGUISTIC REALIZATIONS IN THE ACADEMIC LITERATURE	35
TABLE 2 – STRATEGIES, ARGUMENTATIONS AND LINGUISTIC REALIZATIONS IN THE WORK OF THE THREE ESSAY WRITERS AND EDITORIALISTS.....	51
TABLE 3 – STRATEGIES, ARGUMENTATIONS AND LINGUISTIC REALIZATIONS IN THE WORK OF THE POLITICAL ELITE	65

I. Introduction

The topic of my paper is to analyze and understand the discourse that different local academic, cultural and political elites use in order to construct a regional identity in Banat province from Romania, and to reveal the used discursive structures and peculiarities, which appear in this context. The paper can be included in the broader fields of regional studies and critical discourse analysis.

Banat is the western part of Romania and is one of the most interesting cases from a socio-historical perspective. In the 18th century the territory was annexed by the Habsburg Monarchy, and in the following years it became one of the most important immigration zones of Europe. Throughout the centuries emigrants came from a variety of cultural backgrounds, Bulgarians, Germans, French, Hungarians, Italians, Jews, Romanians, Serbs and many others arrived looking for a better life. After World War I the territory of Banat was divided between Hungary, Serbia and Romania, almost three quarters of its territory coming to be part of the latter country. In the contemporary Banat, similarly to other post-socialist regions, academic, cultural and political elites take advantage of the newly found liberties, engaging in new political and cultural projects, even initializing debates on regional/national and other types of collective identity.

As my very first study on the regional ‘Banatean’ identity, I conducted a small research with high school students. I tried to find some objective and subjective elements of this identity. Naturally, this is not possible. However, I observed some patterns, which appeared not only in the students’ self-identification, but in academic texts, newspaper articles

or political speeches and declarations as well. Getting in touch with critical discourse analysis, I found the right methodology in order to deconstruct how, when and why these patterns appear.

One of the central assumptions of critical discourse analysis is that group beliefs are discursively constructed and reinforced. In other words, through discourse – a basic social interaction – actors formulate and interiorize the most important social norms, values and goals of the different groups that they are part of, constructing their collective identities. Thus, by using critical discourse analysis one can understand how the different mechanisms that constitute any collective identity work.

My main question is why reference to regional identity appears in a specific form in the discourse of different regional academic, cultural and political elites. Therefore, the main objective of the paper is to identify the different strategies that are involved in the construction of the Banatean identity. The term collective identity is used in the constructivist approach, as a concept that is socially constructed and which guides the group formation processes. This process varies according to the context in which the person finds him or herself, crystallizing the feeling of belonging to one or another group. Furthermore, I am interested in the existing discursive structures, more exactly whether there is a single discursive structure in which the discourses from the three different levels can be included.

Therefore, I started the research from the constructivist assumption that groups are mental constructs, which can be built, reinforced and dismissed discursively. In this analytical framework my main hypothesis is that the different social actors choose the discursive strategies in function of the goals they pursue, the context in which they appear and the target groups to whom they speak to. Similar discursive strategies can be used in different contexts, generating different meanings and outcomes. Social actors make references to the past in order to achieve the goals which they pursue or to accomplish the requirements of the role

they fill in. Moreover, I argue that there is no single homogenous discursive structure that includes all the three – academic, cultural and political – levels. What is more, these discursive levels are heterogeneous as well. The boundaries of the different sub-discourses do not fit to the ones of the social levels, in many cases they are crosscutting these.

Within the critical discourse analysis methods, I have chosen to use the ‘discourse-historical’ approach, developed by Ruth Wodak and her colleagues from the Vienna School of Discourse. This method was used by the authors in a major study on Austrian identity. As data of my analysis, I have selected case studies from the three social fields that I focus on. 1. From the academic sphere, the scholarly literature on Banat region which was published after 1990, and can be found in the library of the West University from Timisoara. 2. From the cultural field the writing of three essay writers, who publish(ed) in three different newspapers or cultural journals. 3. From the political sphere, the editorials written by the Mayor of Timisoara and his colleagues – Gheorghe Ciuhandu, Dorel Borza and Adrian Orza – in the Gazette of the Mayor’s office, interviews with regional political leaders – Viorel Coifan, Toro Tibor and others – published in daily and weekly newspapers. The selected data do not represent the totality of the academic literature, or of the writings and opinions of every social actor from the cultural and political sphere, which make references to the regional identity. However, the structures that are present in these discourses, in correlation with the contexts and situations when they are used can describe a general pattern.

Before presenting the structure of the paper, it is important to highlight again that in this paper I have chosen to do research on the discursive structures presented in the texts and speeches of the regional academic, cultural and political elites. The paper does not search to answer how the target groups react on the different elements of the regional identity, if they interiorize them, reproduce them in the every day life or dismiss them. In order to deliver answers for these questions another study needs to be conducted possibly with different

methods. Moreover, I did not plan to criticize the content or messages of one or other author or spokesperson, I was not looking at the verification in social reality of what they are saying, my aim is to analyze and understand what are the strategies that they use, and why they are using these.

Having said this, the structure of the paper is the following. 1. The first part presents the theoretical and methodological aspects of critical discourse analysis emphasizing on the peculiarities of the ‘discourse-historical’ approach. Moreover, I describe the concept of identity, referring both to its theoretical and methodological aspects. 2. The second delivers a brief historical overview of Banat region, through which I set the context of the research, attracting attention to the key events and relevant demographic data that characterize the region. 3. In the third part I analyze the regional literature, by identifying the main discursive strategies that are used. Furthermore, I emphasize on how the position of the author influences the argument and the choices on strategic level as well. 4. The fourth part studies the writings of the three essay writers, presenting their discourses both separately and from a comparative perspective. 5. In the last part I examine the political discourses, highlighting the differences between the chosen discursive strategies in relationship with the political actors’ position goals and target groups that they speak to. In addition to the analysis, I included tables at the end of every chapter, in order to highlight even more the relationships between discursive strategies, arguments, contexts and audition.

II. Collective identity and discourse analysis– theory and methodology

As mentioned earlier, one of the objectives of this paper is to explore why the different local academic, cultural and political elites engage in the construction of a viable regional identity. In order to achieve this, I analyze the discourses of these elites, on different forums and occasions. However, before describing the findings, there is a need to set the theoretical and methodological lines along which the analysis was done. In the next paragraphs I deal with three issues. 1. I briefly present the chosen method, namely critical discourse analysis, with some adjustments and comments to the researched case. 2. I define an important theoretical concepts that I use in the analysis, namely identity. 3. the final part deals with the presentation of the used techniques themselves, namely the discursive construction of social identity.

1. What is critical discourse analysis?

As its name implies, critical discourse analysis (CDA) analyzes discourses – which can take multiple forms such as text, speech, or even visual elements – as social interaction.¹ Moreover, as Blommaert and Bulcaen point out, “discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned.”² In other words discourse both shapes and is shaped by social reality. Thus, discourses are means of production and reproduction of an existing social order for

¹ Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak, “Critical Discourse Analysis” in *Discourse as Social Interaction. Discourse Studies: A Multidisciplinary Introduction*, volume 2, ed. Teun A. van Dijk (London: Sage, 1997): 259

² Jan Blommaert and Chris Bulcaen, “Critical Discourse Analysis” *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 29 (2000): 447

those who have the resources needed to use it. As Ruth Wodak points out, language is used to “(re)produce structural relationship of dominance, discrimination, power and control.”³ Complementing Wodak’s argument, Teun van Dijk argues that dominant groups use discourse to reproduce power relations, while inferior groups use it to challenge dominance.⁴ Therefore, discourse can be considered as an important group formation element, when members of different elites influence the minds of others, legitimating control, and ‘naturalizing’/building the social order.⁵

Another important element of CDA is its critical characteristic. Most of the authors argue that CDA not only reveal the different power relations in discourse, but also takes a “political stance”⁶ against the studied domination structures. This becomes important when dealing with harmful social processes such as discrimination, sexism, racism or anti-Semitism. Thus, when the sexist, racist or anti-Semitic strategies are revealed in the different social or political discourses (ex. education or Parliamentary debates), their exposure implicitly becomes a political opinion as well. This does not mean that CDA is an ideology which acts against other harmful ideologies, but rather a method, through which one can deconstruct the different discourses pointing out the sexist, racist or anti-Semitic strategies that lie beneath.

However, in many situations the political stance is not that obvious. For example, regionalism in the discourse of regional elites can be considered on one hand a challenge against the hegemony of different national elites and centralizing power relations, and on the other hand can be considered as a (re)production of the dominance of regional elites in their fight for local resources. In this perspective, the exposure of the strategies adopted by regional elites has higher stake in understanding the social reality than in changing the existing power

³ Ruth Wodak, “What CDA is about – a summary of its history, important concepts and its developments” in *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, eds. Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer (London: Sage, 2001): 2

⁴ Teun A. van Dijk, “Principles of critical discourse analysis” *Discourse & Society*, 4 no. 2 (1993) 249

⁵ van Dijk, 254

⁶ Wodak, 9; van Dijk, 252

relations. Therefore, the critical feature of this kind of analysis is the deconstruction of these elite discourses.

A third important focus point of CDA is the problem of access. Following Foucault, discourse analysts tend to consider discourse and communication as resource, to which some people and groups have privileged access.⁷ This limitation is produced by the introduction of some exclusionary methods.⁸ Continuing this idea, van Dijk argues that people can be active and passive participants in a discourse. Active participants are those, who are directly involved in the discursive production, while passive participants are the target groups for whom the discourses are made. Thus, the power and dominance of one group is proportionate with the manifested control over the discourse.⁹

2. Collective identity

Discourses understood as social interaction can generate a sense of collectivity, which creates a social identity in every individual. These identities connect him or her to the perceived groups. In the following paragraphs I present some important aspects of collective identity, reviewing a vast literature on this topic.¹⁰

Geertz looks at ethnicity as a “personal identity collectively ratified and publicly expressed.”¹¹ Moreover, he argues that at personal level, every individual perceives ethnic and national ties as something real, that are embedded in our culture, represented by “the

⁷ van Dijk, 255

⁸ For the enumeration and elaboration of these methods see Michel Foucault, “*A diskurzus rendje*” [The order of discourse] in *A fantasztikus könyvtár* (Budapest: Pallas Stúdió Attraktor, 1998): 51–62

⁹ van Dijk, 256–7

¹⁰ The most important theoretical aspects of collective identity come from the fields of ethnicity and nationalism. However, as Richard Jenkins points out in a rather influential study, the findings in the field of nationalism and ethnicity can be extrapolated to other collective identities such as local, regional or racial identity (see: Richard Jenkins, “Ethnicity etcetera: social anthropological point of view” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 19 no. 4 (1996): 818). In addition to these, I use some important social-psychological approaches as well.

¹¹ Jenkins, 810

actualities of blood, race, language, locality, religion or tradition.”¹² Thus, from this perspective, the individual perceives his/her ethnic, national and other thick, collective identity as something real and at the same time inevitable. Anthony D. Smith also argues that in first stages of socialization the individual learns his/her basic social identities (gender, national, ethnic, local etc.),¹³ and their contents. In the case of national and ethnic identity this can take the form of “memories of territories, heroes or golden ages.”¹⁴ Therefore, in Geertz's and Smith's idea, nations, ethnic groups or communities have “check-list of identity”¹⁵ which is internalized through socialization. Moreover, in their perception the question of social identities is a matter of ascription not self-ascription, because the cultural context into which somebody is born defines the outcome.

This primordial aspect of social identities is severely criticized by those social scientists who take a constructivist approach. They argue that group boundaries are not as stable as people tend to think. As Barth points it out, ethnic groups are not something real, they are rather “categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves and have the characteristic of organizing interaction between people.”¹⁶ Moreover, ethnic identity is not something primordial, it is constructed by the individual itself. Rogers Brubaker emphasizes an analytical reconstruction of the term as such. In his point of view, identity can be replaced by three different clusters of terms – 1. identification and categorization, 2. self-understanding and social location and 3. commonality, connectedness, groupness, – each of them describing different aspects of identity.¹⁷ The first two terms describe the social aspects of identity, and the human tendency to divide peoples into groups and categories with different cultural

¹² Anthony D. Smith, *The Nation in History* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2000): 21

¹³ Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin Books, 1991): 4

¹⁴ Smith, “The nation in history”, 68

¹⁵ Anne-Marie Thiesse, *Crearea identităților naționale în Europa. Secolele XVIII-XX* [Creation of national identities in Europe. 18th-20th century] (Iasi: Polirom, 2000): 9

¹⁶ Frederik Barth, “Introduction” in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969): 10

¹⁷ Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004) 41–48

characteristics. The second pair covers the personal projections of identity, and the different self characterization of every individual. The last cluster of terms illustrates the interactional level of identity.

Although the primordial and the constructivist schools seem incompatible, there are several attempts at reconciliation. Richard Jenkins for example, pulls the two theories closer by emphasizing on the role of culture. He stresses that the primordialists never neglect the cultural variation from individual to individual or historical context to historical context, and also recognize that the primordial reality of social identities exist only in the imagination of individuals. The constructivist on the other hand, never neglects the power and stability of ethnic affiliations.¹⁸

Acknowledging the permeability and social constructedness of collective identities opens the way for multiple identifications. The most important scholarly questions asked in this topic are the relationship, hierarchy and simultaneity of these identifications. Most social scientists agree that social identities are simultaneous and situational. Jose Miguel Salazar argues that the relationship between the different social identities acquired is similar to concentric circles.¹⁹ Although the example introduced by Salazar is illustrative, it needs some refinements. First of all, the position of the social identities included is not stable, the hierarchy is determined by the situational context. For example, one can be a woman, Romanian, European and from Moldova at the same time, but the exact situation defines which of these social identities will be the most salient. Similarly, Donald Horowitz argues that the perception of boundaries and the salience of identities can change in different contexts. For example, when a supra-ethnic 'other' is perceived, ethnic differences on local level tend to become blurred and sometimes disappear. However, when the influence of this 'other'

¹⁸ Jenkins, 812

¹⁹ Jose Miguel Salazar, "Social identity and National identity" in *Social Identity*, eds. S. Worchel, J.F. Morales, D. Paez, J.C. Deschamps (London: Sage Publications, 1998):121

vanishes, the local boundaries are revalorized.²⁰ Although this argument seems logical, its plausibility has been proved only in some situations. One can ask whether a regional identity that is in conflict with the national identity promoted by the state can overcome the competing national and minority identities present on that territory.

From the theories mentioned above one could conclude that although people see themselves and others as members of groups and categorizing everyone in the prism of their membership, these groups are not real palpable social entities. Thus, in analyzing these social phenomena, one should shift from researching the group itself as an objective existing category to the analysis of the boundary construction and group-making as processes. This can be achieved, as Barth points out, by researching discontinuities observable in the continuous variation of culture. In other words, due to the fact that culture “is in flux”, continuous variation, boundary maintenance is possible only when this variation is countered. Therefore, “we need to search for processes that sustain relative discontinuities in the flux.”²¹

Similar methodological guidelines are proposed by Rogers Brubaker in his article “Ethnicity without groups”. Similarly to Barth, Brubaker argues against the conception of ethnic, national, racial groups or communities as real “substances or things.”²² Instead he introduces several analytical terms, through which the process of group-formation can be understood without reassertion of the group itself. He emphasizes the reconstruction and substitution of ethnicity, by several other comprehensive terms, such as groupness as event or category, group-making as a process, the importance of the ethnic organizations, contexts, framings and interpretations of the events, and ethnicity as cognition, as a worldview of individuals.²³

²⁰ Donald Horowitz, “Ethnic identity” in *Ethnicity*, ed. Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan (Cambridge: Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965): 130–132

²¹ Frederik Barth, “Enduring and emerging issues in the analysis of ethnicity” in *The anthropology of ethnicity. Beyond ethnic groups and boundaries*, ed. Hans Vermeulen and Cora Govers (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 1994): 12

²² Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without groups* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004): 11

²³ Brubaker, 11–18

Another influential social identity theory is proposed by Bar-Tal. In the so called group belief theory he argues that social identity is not based merely on the categorization process, but also on beliefs which provide the rationale for group existence. Bar-Tal defines these group beliefs as “convictions that group members are aware that they share, and consider as defining their “groupness”.”²⁴ Moreover, he identifies several categories of group beliefs – group norms, group values, group goals and group ideology –, which all have different functions in the group formation process.²⁵

An essential aspect of the group theory is that Bar-Tal looks at the group beliefs, as the central motor of the group. On one hand, he argues that people tend to look at reality through them. On other hand, “group beliefs are often accessible in group members repertoire and that they are relevant for consideration” in decision-makings, judgments or in social action.²⁶

Therefore, group beliefs control all the social interactions of one individual, consequently discourse as well. Moreover, as Bar-Tal points out, group beliefs need to be maintained on high level of confidence, in order to keep the cohesion of the group.²⁷ Thus, from this perspective, discourses can become group belief reinforcing mechanisms.

3. Discursive construction of collective identities

In order to understand how one collective identity can be analyzed through discourse, one needs to understand how identity appears in discourse and how this relationship can be operationalized within the framework of critical discourse analysis. Ruth Wodak argues that “through discourses, social actors constitute objects of knowledge, situations and social roles,

²⁴ Daniel Bar-Tal, “Group beliefs as an expression of social identity” in *Social identity* eds. S. Worchel, J.F. Morales, D. Paez, J.C. Deschamps (London: Sage Publications, 1998): 94

²⁵ Bar-Tal, 96–101

²⁶ Bar-Tal, 101–102

²⁷ Bar-Tal, 101

[...] identities and interpersonal relations between different social groups”²⁸ This argument is in concordance with the ‘discontinuity in the continuous variation of culture as boundary making process’ argument presented by Barth, and the importance of organizations and elites in the group formation process emphasized by Brubaker. Nevertheless this is true but it is important to mention that discourse constitutes only one type of process that contributes to group formation, in many cases elites reach to other ‘material’ strategies as well.

Although there is a plausible link between the three concepts, there is a need to elaborate some methodological directives. Thus, I turned to Ruth Wodak’s discourse-historical approach, which was used in a grand scale analysis on Austrian identity as well. The method has five important elements, which I present below.

Similarly to other critical discourse analysis types, the discourse-historical method defines discourse as social interaction, “which manifests itself within and across the social fields of action as thematically interrelated semiotic, oral or written tokens, very often as ‘texts’”.²⁹ In other words, it is a system of social interaction, which evolves around a topic. In this system several “sub-topics” can be created, which are related only through the central topic mentioned above.³⁰

A second important element in the discourse-historical approach is the concept of “fields of action”. As mentioned above, a discourse manifests itself within and across social fields. In this perspective the fields of action are “segments of the [...] social ‘reality’, which contribute to constituting and shaping the ‘frame’ of discourse.”³¹ In other words, the same discourse can be found in different social institutions and actors, according to the aims and objectives they are pursuing. In my research I investigate three independent fields of action, the scientific sphere – by analyzing the scholarly literature –, the cultural sphere and the

²⁸ Ruth Wodak and colleagues, *The discursive construction of national identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999): 8

²⁹ Ruth Wodak, “The discourse-historical approach” in *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, eds. Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer (London: Sage, 2001): 66

³⁰ Wodak, “The discourse-historical approach”, 66

³¹ Wodak, “The discourse-historical approach”, 66

political sphere. Although the discourses in different fields seem independent, they are not isolated from one another. As Wodak points out, discourses tend to “cross between fields, overlap, refer to each other or [...] are linked with each other.”³²

The third aspect that I use from Wodak’s research on the discursive aspects of Austrian identity is her argument that every discourse is built on discursive strategies. Borrowing the concept from military theory, she defines it as “a more or less accurate plan adopted to achieve [...] objective”.³³ Moreover, she applies the concept of strategy to the investigated texts and speeches, keeping in mind that the “degree of consciousness” in these discursive products is variable.³⁴ After locating the different discursive strategies, she describes the different argumentations and linguistic means that are characteristic to each and every of them.

The forth methodological element that needs special attention is the question of context. Every statement – written and said – needs to be analyzed on four levels.³⁵

1. the semantic environment, the immediate internal co-text – the appropriate questions on this level are: “What has been said?” and “How has it been said?”
2. the extra-linguistic variables and the institutional settings – “Where has it been said?”, “Who is the speaker/author?”, “Who are the audience?”
3. the intertextual or interdiscursive references in the text – “What is the discourse related to?”
4. broader sociopolitical and historical context – theories or historical events that could be influential

The last element that needs to be included in this theoretical descriptive part is the increased attention that is paid to the usages of the personal pronoun ‘we’. As Wodak points

³² Wodak, “The discourse-historical approach”, 67

³³ Wodak and colleagues, 31

³⁴ Wodak and colleagues, 32

³⁵ Wodak, “The discourse-historical approach”, 67, or Wodak and colleagues, 9–10

out, this pronoun not only indicates sameness, but it automatically divides the imaginary audition into an in-group and an out-group (“us” vs. “them”).³⁶ Therefore, these usages are needed to be analyzed in every discursive product.

³⁶ Wodak and colleagues, 45–47

III. The region Banat – historical context

In the following paragraphs I present a brief history of the region Banat, underlining the most important facts and characteristics that are needed in the contextualization of the analysis.

Most of the historians agree that the modern history of Banat, as a political-administrative region, started in 1716, the year when the Habsburg Monarchy gained control over the region from the Ottoman Empire. However, evidence of human settlements can be found from the 2nd century.³⁷

The boundaries of the region are three rivers, on the North Mureș, Tisza on the West and the Danube on the South. The Eastern borders of the province are the western part of the South Charpatians and the Rusca Mountains.

After the Habsburgs gained control, the region became one of the main immigration zones of the Monarchy. The Crown organized three waves of colonization, consequently the population of the province grown – according to some calculations – with more than 100 thousand people.³⁸ Another important characteristic of the early colonization period was the religious restrictions of the immigrants. Early documents present that the dominant policy of the Monarchy was to favor the settlement of Catholic and in some cases Orthodox people.³⁹

³⁷ Borovszky Samu. *Magyarország vármegyéi és városai – Temes vármegye* [Cities and counties of Hungary – Temes county] (Budapest: Országos Monográfiai Társaság, 1912): 232–237 and Johan Jakob Ehrler, *Banatul de la origini până acum (1774)* [Banat from the beginning until now (1774)] (Timisoara: Facla, 1982): 24–26

³⁸ Otto Greffner, *Șvabii (germanii) din Banat (o scurtă istorie)* [The Germans from Banat (a short history)] (Arad, 1994): 27–51

³⁹ Borsi-Kálmán Béla, *Polgárosodott nemes avagy (meg)nemesedett polgár* [Bourgeoised noble or noble bourgeois] (Pécs: Jelenkor, 2002): 43

Demographic data in early historiographies support this theory as well.⁴⁰ The interdiction was cancelled in the 19th century, probably because of economic considerations.

From an economical perspective, Banat became one of the most dynamically developing provinces of the Empire. For example, the cities of this region were in a very favorable situation, compared to the ones from the neighboring regions, because the guilds could develop freely and all trades could be practiced.

In the 19th century the region was the target of a vast population from several ethnic and national groups, such as Germans, Romanians, Hungarians, Serbs, Jews, Bulgarians, French, Italians, Croatians, Czechs, Slovaks and others.⁴¹ Although, the villages were probably formed on ethnic bases, the communication was relatively high in the cities, most importantly in the capital of the region Timisoara.

An important event of the 19th century was the Revolution of 1848. The Revolution in Banat started on the night of March 17th, when the population of Timisoara decided to support the Hungarian revolutionaries. On March 19th the city elected a multiethnic committee of 30 people – however, mostly Hungarians –, and on 22nd the population participated on an ecumenical Catholic, Orthodox and Jewish ceremony. Despite this early cooperation, after a few weeks the committee broke up, most of the national leaders mobilizing for the national Revolutions.⁴² The Revolution of 1848 is crucial from the regional and the different national perspectives, presenting evidence on one hand for the peaceful ethnic co-habitation and on the other hand, for the national consciousness as well.

In the period of the dual monarchy the province is attached to the Hungarian part and it is restructured into several administrative zones: Temes, Torontál and Krassó-Szörény being the most important. In the 1867–1919 period the government from Budapest pursued a

⁴⁰ See Ehrler, 30 and Grisellini in Ehrler, 174

⁴¹ Despite the high variety of ethnic groups, as the demographic data from the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century show, the most important communities are the Romanian, German, Hungarian and Serbian one.

⁴² Vicze Károly, *“A visszacsatolástól a kiegyezésig (1779–1867)”* [From annexation to reconciliation (1779–1867)] *Heti Új Szó*, <http://www.hhrf.org/hetiujsoz/> (accessed on October 10, 2005)

strong assimilationist and “Magyarizing” politics, which was associated with bills that targeted the forced change of religious affiliation and ‘magyarization’ of the family names. As Karádi points out on a study on the Jewish-Christian mixed marriages, the counties from Banat score the highest in the Empire in name and confessional change, but in mixed marriages as well.⁴³

In 1920 after the Trianon peace agreement the territory of Banat is divided between Romania (~70%), Yugoslavia (~25%) and Hungary. The Romanian started the integration of the newly acquired territories, by bringing in administrative personal from the Old Kingdom in place of the old personal – those who were named by the Monarchy – that fled the country. Moreover, the Romanian government introduces several laws that are discriminatory for the minorities (ex. the Agricultural Reform, or the Entrepreneurial Law).

After 1945 Romania was integrated by the communist block, generating several socio-political changes in the Romanian part of Banat as well. First, the administrative zones were restructured again, the territory of Romanian Banat was divided in three countries: Timis, Caras Severin, and Arad. Second, as an industrialization project, the state brought into the Transilvanian and Banatean towns people from the other regions of the country. The number of people originated from other regions then Banat was increasing, consequently in 1966 24,7%, in 1977 27,3% and in 1992 31,2%.⁴⁴

Parallel to the settling, Romania encouraged a massive exodus of the German and Jewish population. In the German case, the Romanian and West German governments supported a family reunification program. However, the program had a secret arrangement, according to which the German Federal Republic gave economic concessions, after every emigrated member of the German minority. In other words, the GFR bought the Germans

⁴³ Karády Viktor, “Zsidó-magyar szimbiózis?” *Múlt és Jövő* 4 (2001)
http://www.multesjovo.hu/hu/content_one.asp?ContentID=151&PrintedID=9 (accessed on May 29, 2007)

⁴⁴ Varga E. Árpád, *Erdély etnikai és felekezeti statisztikája – Arad, Krassó-Szörény és Temes megye – Népszámlálási adatok 1869-1992* [Ethical and confessional statistics of Transylvania (1850-1992)]
<http://varga.adatbank.transindex.ro/> (accessed on May 10, 2007)

from the Romanian government for an average of 5000 German Marks.⁴⁵ Erwin Wickert, GFR ambassador in Romania affirms that reunification program covered an economic agreement, which meant that after every German who left Romania, GFR paid a head price. There were several categories of prices, between 1800 and 11000 DMs.⁴⁶ In the case of the Jewish communities from 1950, in exchange for economic goods delivered by Israel, Romania permitted the Jews who applied for emigration to leave.⁴⁷

Another change generated by the communist leadership was the centralization and homogenization of the Romanian national identity. For example, as Boia points out, the Communist party tried to abolish the Romanian regional differences, by banning the appearance of regional studies and forbidding the usage of the original names of the provinces.⁴⁸

The last important historical event from the perspective of this study is the 1989 Romanian revolution. On the 15th of December a protest broke out in Timișoara to proclaim solidarity with a Hungarian Reformed pastor, László Tőkés, who was persecuted by the government. In the following days the protests and the crowds grew and transformed into an anti-communist demonstration. Eventually, on the 21st, after Ceausescu's speech, which condemned the events in Timisoara, protest erupted in Bucharest and in other Romanian cities as well.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Greffner, 138

⁴⁶ *Comisia Prezidențială Pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România: Raport Final* [Final Report of the Presidential Commission for Analyzing the Romanian Communism and Dictatorship], (2006), http://www.presidency.ro/static/ordine/RAPORT_FINAL_CADCR.pdf (accessed on May 10, 2007)

⁴⁷ Final Report, 569–571

⁴⁸ For example the province Banat was renamed the 'South Western region', while Moldova the 'Eastern region' of Romania (Lucian Boia, *Istorie și mit în conștiința românească* [History and myth in the Romanian consciousness] (București: Humanitas, 1997): 162)

⁴⁹ For detailed information on the 1989 Revolution see Nestor Ratches, *Romania: The Entangled Revolution* (New York: Praeger, 1991)

IV. Banat and “Banatean” identity in the academic literature

One of the main pillars of the planned research is the discursive analysis of the scholarly literature on Banat and the Banatean identity. In the following paragraphs I present a critical analysis of the post-1989 scholarly literature on the region. The data I have chosen to work on are the books and articles that can be found in the Central Library of the West University of Timisoara and some important online sources. Timisoara, as mentioned in the previous historical presentation, is the biggest city in the region, and an important higher education center in Romania as well. Taking these into consideration, the scholarly works found in the Central Library of the University can be considered referential.

After analyzing the subject of the academic literature, two major perspectives can be outlined, a Romanian national perspective, and an independent regional one. Therefore this chapter is divided into two parts, conforming to this cleavage. First, I briefly present the discourses that treat the region from an exclusively national perspective. Second, I deal with the different regional discourses, which present an alternative to the hegemony of the nationalizing discourse. In this second perspective I focus on the discursive strategies and argumentations.

Before going into the details of the analysis it is important to mention the relationship between the homogenizing national discourse and the different regionalizing discourses in the academic literature. In order to understand their relation, one needs to get back to the policies of the Communist Party on the national question. In 1976 Ceausescu set the directives on historiography, to research the “real history” of the Romanians and Romania,

one of a national unitary state. Verdery names this new process “the production of culture”, and its main goal was to channel the nationalistic sentiments of the intelligentsia, using them to create the ideology needed for legitimization of the communist party. The entire field of cultural production was politicized; making the different cultural groups compete for the resources of ideology-making around the nation.⁵⁰ This idea is strengthened by Lucian Boia as well, by pointing out that from the 1970s in communism “was welcomed to be a nationalist, as it was free to be pro-Soviet in the 1950s”.⁵¹ In other words, in the pre-1989 period the academic discursive field on the Romanian national identity was an over-centralized, politicized homogenous one. Another aspect of the centralization of the academic discourse on the nation, which I mentioned in previous parts as well, was the endeavor of the Communist party to abolish the Romanian regional differences, by banning the appearance of regional studies and forbidding the usage of the original names of the provinces.

After the changes of 1989, the academic discursive field was more or less liberalized, alternative discourses appeared, which challenged the hegemony of the homogenous national discourse. However, the remnants of this former one could be found after 1989 as well.

1. Romanian nationalizing and homogenizing discourse

The most important academic works in the University’s database that deal with the region’s history from the national perspective are those studies that were written at the turn of the 20th century or between the two World Wars. These are referential works on Banat by

⁵⁰ Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism. Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceausescu’s Romania*. (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University California Press, 1991): 125–132

⁵¹ Lucian Boia, *România țară de frontieră a Europei* [Romania, border country of Europe] (București: Humanitas, 2005): 122

Romanian authors, which were re-published after 1989.⁵² Although the works themselves do not integrate in the focus of my analysis – I am interested in the post-1989 discourse – all of these books have introductions written by important Romanian scholars – such as Nicolae Bocsan, historian and the rector of the Babes–Bolyai University from Cluj, the historian Valeriu Achim, or the philosopher Mihai Șora – who along with their personal opinions on the question, present original point of views on the question, how the works themselves need to be read. Other works that I placed in this first category are historical studies on the Romanian national movement from 1918, or the evolution of social sciences in Romania.⁵³

These works analyze the region’s history from an exclusively national perspective. There is no reference to the peculiarities of the region, or to differences that can be observed between Banat and the other provinces from Romania. The main discursive strategies used by these authors are the justifying and integrating strategies, in order to place the Romanian movement from Banat in a general Romanian historical narrative. These strategies have two major arguments, the first presents the continuity of the Romanian dominance in Banat, setting the basis for the “historic-ethnic rights” of the Romanians over the territory.⁵⁴ The other argument presents the Romanian national, political or scientific movements from Banat as an integrating part of the Romanian movement for national unity.⁵⁵ The most important stylistic characteristic of the two strategies are the reference to ‘historical truth’ and ‘historical right’ in the cause of the claimed historical narrative.⁵⁶ As an exemplification of the latter argument, in some cases personifications are used. The Romanians of the different regions are presented as

⁵² Silviu Dragomir, *Banatul românesc* [The Romanian Banat]. (Timisoara: Augusta, 1999), Avram Imbroane, *Testament politic* [Political testimony] (Timisoara: Marineasa, 2003), Ștefan Manciulea, *Granita de vest* [The western border] (Baia Mare: Gutinul, 1994)

⁵³ Radu Păiușan, *Participanți bănățeni la lupta pentru independență și unitate națională 1830–1918* [Banatean participants at the battle for independence and national unity 1830–1918] (Timisoara: Vest, 2003) and Andrei Negru, *Din istoria cercetării sociale românești* [From the history of the Romanian social research] (Cluj Napoca: Argonaut, 1999)

⁵⁴ Valeriu Achim, foreword for *Granita de vest*, by Manciulea, 8,12

⁵⁵ For example: Mihai Șora, foreword for *Testament politic*, by Imbroane, 11; Păiușan, 6, 183; Negru 14

⁵⁶ Păiușan, 5 or Achim, 8,12

“brothers”, who naturally join the national movement.⁵⁷ Moreover, in many cases the authors use crystallized national groups as competing entities for the supremacy of Banat. In this context the peaceful cohabitation between ethnic groups, multiculturality and tolerance does not appear.

Another important discursive strategy used in the analyzed works is inclusion/exclusion. On one hand the authors use the personal references, such as the pronoun “we” to trace the boundaries of the group they speak of:

The study is published [...] in 1936, at the end of the interwar period, one of the most troubled period of *our history*, when the borders of Romania were severely contested by the fascist-revisionist forces of the beaten Europe [...].⁵⁸

or

The interwar period represented a stage of profound and multiple transformations for *our country* [...] the sociology of the interwar period [...] has become a militant instrument of *our national development*.⁵⁹

The first person phrasing in these examples has several functions. On one hand frames the perspective from which the author speaks, which is a general national one, and on the other hand, it includes those readers who think similarly, alienating those who disagree.

Another strategy of inclusion/exclusion is the way how the term “Banatean” is used. In most of the cases it is used in its most general form “Bănăţenii” [Banateans] – similarly to the usages of the national groups such as ‘the Romanians’, ‘the Hungarians’ –, and it delimits the totality of the population of the region Banat. Moreover, it has a strong homogenizing connotation, setting a clear boundary between the in-group and the out-group and setting the pretext of homogeneous behavioral patterns. The context of the usage of such forms in many cases is the integrating strategy mentioned above.

The Banateans subscribed to this process [...] of development of political education of the people and of contribution to the awaking and consolidation of the Romanian nation consciousness.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Păiuşan, 6

⁵⁸ Achim, 7 (my emphasizes)

⁵⁹ Negru, 10 (my emphasizes)

⁶⁰ Păiuşan, 6

The example above illustrates how the inclusive term Banateans, set up in a specific context, is bestowed with a strong exclusive characteristic: it replaces the territorial definition with an ethnic one, excluding those inhabitants of the territory from the created group, who do not qualify. Furthermore it becomes an active linguistic solution for the justifying strategy as well, by emphasizing on the Romanian continuity in the region.

Therefore, the main strategies used by the national perspective are justification and integration, which are used to highlight the region's position in a wider national narrative, on one hand by emphasizing on the Romanian continuity in the region, and on the other hand by creating the boundaries of the Romanian nation, in which the Banateans are included as well. Although the analyzed studies are just a segment of the national perspective – many academic works are written on other events and regions as well –, it gives a basis for comparison for the regional discourses.

2. Constructing the regional identity – alternative academic literature on Banat

The alternative academic literature on Banat deals mostly with historical perspectives, and tries to prove the existence of a regional identity and a regional distinctness in Banat. Many works build up continuities, as present regional specificities that are considered as important aspects of the regions cultural memory, thus a basis for a collective identity. In the following paragraphs I present the used strategies, and their characteristics.

There is a consensus among historians that the most important data in the region's history was 1716, when the Habsburg Monarchy conquered the territory from the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, it represents the birth of the region as a politico-administrative unit, since this was the period when the name “Banat” or “Banatus Temesvariensis” was used for the

territory.⁶¹ However, many of the scholars use the name retrospectively, delimiting the territory in older historical times as well.⁶² This usage creates the illusion of the conscious existence of the region as a politico-administrative historical fact.

Other common statements that can be found in the academic literature are the introduction of typical ‘Banatean characteristics’.⁶³ Most of the enlisted characteristics take the form of positive representations,⁶⁴ which have the mission to fill the ‘Banatean’ identity. In many cases the characteristics of Timisoara is extrapolated to the whole Banat. The identificational taxonomies are introduced with phrasings such as “typical [characteristic]”, “have always been” (Muntean), “[characteristics that are] frequently mentioned by” (Gaga), “from the beginning of its constitution [has been]”, “it presents itself continuously” (Jianu), “durable tradition” (Vultur), “have always been” (Buzarnescu), “in consens with the tradition”, “some testimonies of the past world have survived”, “common heritage of the population” (Neumann) or “permanently existed”. Therefore, these linguistic patterns construct not only a sense of sameness, but a sense of continuity as well.

One of the main elements of the ‘Banatean’ (self)-image is related to the economic prosperity of the region. On one hand there is the image of the hard-working individual, the ‘Banatean’ peasant considered to be on the “fruncea”⁶⁵ of Romania. On the other hand, appears the image of the achievements of the region: first city with electrical lighting in Romania⁶⁶ or the economic development indexes of the region. The sense of the leading role

⁶¹ There is a long debate on the etymology of the word Banat. Historians argue that the term exists since the 13th century, meaning a territory lead by a “Ban”. Nonetheless this is true, but in the case of the historical Banat, the name for that specific territory was first used by the Habsburg historiography. (Stefan Buzarnescu, *Un model de interculturalitate activă: Banatul românesc* [A model of active interculturality: the Romanian Banat] (Timisoara: Editura de Vest, 2004): 42)

⁶² See: Otto Greffner, *Șvabii (germanii) din Banat (o scurtă istorie)* [The Germans from Banat (a short history)]. (Arad:?, 1994); Vasile V. Muntean, *Contribuții la istoria Banatului* [Contributions to the History of Banat]. (Timisoara: Editura mitropolitană, 1990)

⁶³ Wodak calls this kind of discursive strategies ‘(self)-stereotyping’. (Wodak and colleagues, 54–55)

⁶⁴ (Self)-stereotyping can be found at Buzarnescu, Muntean, Greffner, Jianu, Gaga, Neumann, Vultur

⁶⁵ ‘Fruncea’ is the regional version of ‘fruntea’ meaning the foremost (Muntean, 237)

⁶⁶ Cristina Jianu, *Imaginea minorităților reflectată în presa timișoreană* [The image of minorities reflected in the press from Timisoara]. (Timisoara: Waldpress, 2002), 25

is fostered on socio-political level as well, by stressing that “Timisoara [was] the first city liberated under communism”,⁶⁷ which is related to a leading civic consciousness and a predisposition to plurality in the region.⁶⁸

Another important characteristic that is presented as an identifying element is the multiculturalism – or interculturalism as some of the authors call it – of the region. Many studies focus on providing evidence for the survival and continuity of the multicultural tradition, both in day-to-day reality and in the collective memory. Moreover, this characteristic constitutes the uniqueness of Banat not only in Romania but the whole Europe.⁶⁹ Most of the arguments center their attention on the education system – there is parallel education on four languages: Romanian, Hungarian, German and Serbian –, the cultural life of minorities, religious diversity, the symbolic construction of the city of Timisoara, and the trilingual national theater.⁷⁰ Other scholars try to reconstruct the multicultural characteristic of the region by analyzing the realms of collective memory.⁷¹

Similar elements of identification are tolerance and the peaceful cohabitation. According to these characteristics, “the Romanians, Hungarians, Serbs and Gypsies lived and still live in an atmosphere of tolerance and mutual respect”,⁷² and “the ‘Banateni’ have never been nationalists or [very] religious. Within the neighborly cohabitation and friendship the inhabitants became bilingual or trilingual”.⁷³ Other authors argue that “the harmonious cohabitation and collaboration between the different nationalities in Banat has become

⁶⁷ Jianu, 29

⁶⁸ Victor Neumann, *Ideologie și fantasmagorie* [Ideology and phantasmagoria] (Iasi: Polirom, 2001), 151–168

⁶⁹ Victor Neumann, *Identități multiple în Europa regiunilor* [Multiple identities in the Europe of regions] (Timisoara: Hestia, 1997), 5; Buzarnescu, 66

⁷⁰ Victor Neumann, “Multikulturális identitás a régiók Európájában – a Bánát mintája” [Multicultural identity in the Europe of regions – the model of Banat] *Regio – kisebbség, politika, társadalom* 8 no. 3-4 (1997), <http://www.regiofolyoirat.hu/> (accessed on May 12th, 2007); Neumann, “Identități multiple în Europa regiunilor”; Smaranda Vultur, *Scene de viață* [Stages of life] (Iasi: Polirom, 2001)

⁷¹ In this perspective see the works of Smaranda Vultur.

⁷² Jianu, 28

⁷³ Lidia Maria Gaga, “Norme sociale și atitudini individuale în obiceiurile vieții de familie din Banat – rezumat” [Social norms and individual attitudes in the customs of family life in Banat – summary]. (PhD Diss., University of Bucuresti, 1997), 5

proverbial and can constitute a good example for the other parts of the country”.⁷⁴ In other words, according to a significant part of the scholarly literature, tolerance and cohabitation symbolize(d) the specificity of the region. The argumentations beneath these statements are based on the statistical data on interethnic marriages, ethnic distance barometers, or the trilingual services in one of the main Catholic churches.⁷⁵ In some cases even trivial examples like the multiethnic composition of the football teams appear.⁷⁶ Despite these examples, in many cases there is no argumentation behind the statement at all (Gaga, Muntean).

The identifications mentioned above have dual function. First, they describe the most important characteristics of the in-group, in most of the cases by generalizing and homogenizing its members. Second, they appoint these elements, which confirm the importance and differentiation of the regional specificity, by emphasizing on the leading role and uniqueness of the region both from Romanian and European perspective.

3. Continuities and discontinuities in the historical presentations

In order to understand the different approaches to the regional identity in Banat, I focused on the strategies of continuities used in the academic literature. In many cases, the scholars reach for historical evidence to underline their statements and find similarities between the social realities of different historical times. Moreover, these continuities are the major pillar in the (self)-stereotypes presented above. In the upcoming paragraphs I present two major continuities that partially explain the difference between the two almost identical elements of identification, multiculturalism and tolerance/peaceful cohabitation.

According to the first perspective, the history of the region is deeply embedded in the Romanian history. Similarly to the nationalizing discourse, these studies place the history of

⁷⁴ Greffner, 96

⁷⁵ Buzarnescu, 61–63

⁷⁶ Greffner, 96

Banat in the wider context of the Romanian history, but keep up the special status of the region. Therefore, many authors present historical evidence to show the Romanian link to the region (Buzarnescu, Cretan, Gaga, Muntean) These can be demographic data, quotations from documents or memoirs, or even etymological evidence.⁷⁷ In most of the cases, parallel to this strategy the authors emphasize on the identification elements such as economic prosperity and tolerance between the dominant Romanian population and the national minorities.

The second perspective approaches the question from a purely regional perspective. By placing the region's history in a Central European context, adepts of this perspective argue that Banat is a unique region in Europe, where the different historical and national influences resulted in a multicultural/intercultural environment, which survived the national homogenizing politics of the Romanian state socialism, and it "reconstituted and rearticulated"⁷⁸ after the fall of communism (Neumann, Vultur). Moreover, they point out that this local peculiarity has rewritten the social realities of the population generating an open civil society and predisposition for a "plural communitarian life"⁷⁹. An important aspect of this perspective its association with modernity, because it does not engage in the discussions of the pre-1716 status of the province, and is not linked exclusively to any – if it is linked at all –national histories that influenced the development of the region. The arguments brought up to sustain this perspective are the four – Romanian, Hungarian, German and Serbian – parallel educational systems, cultural, social and political institutions that coexisted for centuries, the liberal cultural and political movements that functioned under socialism and region's role in the events of December 1989, as an unification of the two. A distinct feature of the adepts of the intercultural model (ex. Victor Neumann) is that the concept is used in

⁷⁷ Muntean for example argues that the etymology of the word 'ban' can be found in the Dacian language, therefore, "the term 'banat' entered in the Serbo-Croatian language from the Romanian [...] and the creation of the Banat of Severin by the Hungarian Crown was done not after the South Slavic model, but in a way after the Romanian one."(Muntean, 17–18)

⁷⁸ Smaranda Vultur, *Germanii din Banat* [The Germans from Banat] (Bucuresti: Paideia, 2000), 5

⁷⁹ Neumann, "Ideologie...", 151

both as an analytical and normative term. In many cases the authors use conditional tenses when they refer to the Banatean model. This gives way for a double interpretation, on one it articulates the value of the model itself, and on the other hand, by using it in the same context with the abovementioned continuity, reifies the regional identity as well.

An interesting distinctiveness of the purely regional discourse – compared to those that keep the structures of the Romanian national perspective – is its relationship with the different national movements in the 19th and 20th century. On one hand, the national perspective emphasizes on these movements, in many cases completely disregarding the multicultural aspects of the region, keeping it for the sake of a few undemonstrated sentences on tolerance and peaceful cohabitation. On the other hand, however, the purely regional perspective does not focus on the national movements and their impact on the social reality at all. Therefore, both perspectives leave many unanswered questions. The former theories fail to answer, how the cohabitation was possible in a population that was strongly divided by ethnic and national consciousness, while the latter fails to answer how the different national movements found support in a strongly multicultural and plural society.

A third distinct academic discourse on the region was born as a result of the two regional perspectives mentioned above. Most of the authors that represent this perspective are members of the Hungarian minority from Banat, and emphasize on the discontinuities that can be observable in the region's history. Although, they do not deny the multicultural medium that existed on the term of the century – fitting into the dominant regional discourse in this perspective –, try to deconstruct its validity in the post-1989 social realities. The main arguments are related to the absence of the demographical premises, the communist industrializing politics that resulted in the turnover of the demographic equilibrium and the nationalizing strategies pursued by the local Romanian elites.⁸⁰ Moreover, they emphasize on

⁸⁰ See the works of Bodó Barna

the majoritarian characteristics of the tolerance discourse, arguing that a viable multicultural model presumes a dialog between equal partners – majority and minority – and the introduction of self-government and collective rights for the minority groups. Moreover, they argue that by emphasizing on the multicultural past and tolerant co-habitation of the region, the Romanian nationalists obstruct the debate about the real multiculturality. Although many aspects of the deconstructing strategy appears only toward the Hungarian in-group – it is published mostly in Hungarian –, the own multicultural model is presented to the general Banatean in-group, but a more moderate strategy is used, integrating it in the more general multicultural discussion. Thus, the Hungarian elites try to redefine the meaning of multiculturalism used by the Romanian elites, in order to legitimize their own claims of minority rights.

Therefore, the most accentuated segment of the academic literature on Banat does not position itself against the dominant nationalizing discourse, rather it uses its structures to strengthen its position. Positioned against the nationalizing discourses, some authors use a progressive Europe-centered discourse, which emphasizes on the distinctiveness and uniqueness of the region. Moreover, the minority discourse is positioned clearly in contradiction with the dominant nationalizing discourse, and partly against the Europe-centered multicultural one.

4. *'Banateans' and the 'others'*

As mentioned in the previous paragraphs, the two main themes of identification that appear in the scholarly literature are the leading role as a region and the uniqueness. Both types of characteristics generate a specific in-group–out-group relationship. The dichotomy is present in all three regional discourses, however with different intensity. Moreover, in every

case, it is placed in a Romanian context, the ‘othering’ is made in the detriment of Romanian provinces or the center, Bucharest.

The ‘leading role’ theme is achieved by the usage of strategies of singularization. By these the author places on a hierarchy both the in-group and the different out-groups according to some criteria. The most visible appearance of these strategies lays in the proverbial assumption that ‘Tot Banatu-i fruncea’ (Still Banat is the foremost).⁸¹ Although, it appeared as a Romanian proverb of the 18th century, it has become a consensual characteristic of the multicultural region, most of the ethnic groups interiorizing it. However, this statement is not only one of the important group beliefs, which strengthens the in-group cohesion, but it is a differentiation from the other regions and their inhabitants. In a more general sense, most of the ‘leading role’ type identifications have a comparative meaning. Statements such as

“the first city liberated from the communist regime”⁸² or “Timisoara becomes in 1884 the first city with electrical public lighting in Romania”⁸³

are a result of a permanent comparison with the ‘others’. Similarly to these examples, through its different achievements – the exemplary multicultural social reality, the liberal plural society and its role in the 1989 Revolution, or its prosperous economic development – the region is presented as a viable model for other regions, or in some cases even Europe.⁸⁴ However, this type of phrasing implies a negative, inferior connotation for the compared ‘other’.

The ‘other’-image is more transparent in the immigration topic. Many authors argue that as a result of the massive emigration of the locals and immigration of people from other regions, the multicultural character of the region and the liberal civic culture of Timisoara are

⁸¹ Bodó Barna. “A Bánság és az etnikai diskurzus,” [Banat and the ethnic discourse] *Korunk* 2 (1994): 112–118, <http://bodo.adatbank.transindex.ro/belso.php?k=16&p=929>; Muntean, 237

⁸² Jianu, 29

⁸³ Jianu, 25

⁸⁴ Buzarnescu, 65; Neumann, “Identitati multiple...”, 44 and “Multikulturális identitás...”, ¶3; Jianu, 29–30

partially dissolved.⁸⁵ Moreover, many authors point out that the disturbing events – such as nationalistic, xenophobic, discriminatory or anti-Semitic instigations – come from these newcomers, from the ‘others’ (Neumann, Bodo, Marosi). Moreover, a significant part of the literature differentiate between the native Romanian population (‘in-group’) and the newcomer Romanians (‘out-group’), who “do not have the same reference points on cultural and civilizational level”. However, in many cases they interiorize the “typologies of communication specific to the region”⁸⁶ (Neumann, Bodo, Sora). Other local social scholars research the social distance between the different ethnic groups, native and newcomer Romanians. In many cases they try to emphasize that there is a bigger gap between natives and newcomers than between the different ethnic groups.⁸⁷ Others link this differentiation to the multicultural character of the region, as well. Some authors argue that the plurality of the society and the intercultural openness “makes the Romanians from Banat to consider themselves not just ‘simple Romanians’.”⁸⁸

Another important projection of the ‘banateans–others’ relationship is the one between Banat and Bucharest, the center. Most of the regional academic literature presents the region and the city of Timisoara in opposition with Bucharest. This has a dual significance. First, it strengthens the ‘leading role’ identifying theme. By emphasizing on this bipolarity many authors assign Banat the role of the only possible challenger against the center, automatically disregarding the comparison and competition with the other regions. A good example of this kind is the presentation of the beginning of the 1989 Revolution, when Timisoara and

⁸⁵ Neumann, “Ideologii si fantasmagorie, 169–170 and “Multikulturális identitás...”, ¶1; Bodó, “Tolerancia, szabadság, modernitás”

⁸⁶ Neumann, “Identități multiple...”, 38

⁸⁷ Bodó Barna. “Banat și interculturalitate” [Banat and interculturality] in *Interculturalitate – cercetări și perspective românești*, edited by Rudolf Poledna, Francois Ruegg and Călin Rus, (Cluj Napoca: Presan Universitara Clujeana, 2002), 181–187

⁸⁸ Vultur, Smaranda. “Memorie și identitate într-un spațiu intercultural (cazul Banatului)” [Memory and identity in an intercultural space (the case of Banat)] in *Interculturalitate – cercetări și perspective românești*, edited by Rudolf Poledna, Francois Ruegg and Călin Rus, (Cluj Napoca: Presan Universitara Clujeana), 2002, 189

Bucharest are presented the only cities that “excelled in receiving [the anti-Communist ideas],”⁸⁹ both of them evolving in their specific way.

The second interpretation of the Banat–Bucharest opposition is a cultural one. Many of the regional authors (Neumann, Bodo) frame this differentiation in the broader historical and socio-cultural difference between Central Europe and South-Eastern Europe. In this perception Banat, by interiorizing European models of modernization, reached a level of development, when needed space for the realization of its own values and ideas. Therefore, Bucharest appears as the centralizing ‘other’, who holds back the regions development. This aspect is underlined by a strong strategy of victimization, since “Bucharest has always been reserved vis-à-vis the values of Timisoara [and Banat]”⁹⁰ and “tried to reduce the importance of [the region with] a large range of politico-administrative means”⁹¹ Consequently, the region was depicted – and still is – as a heavily discriminated region, which despite the actions of the center, conserved its regional uniqueness.

Therefore, most of the ‘us’–‘them’ comparisons can be understood as hierarchy construction, where the Banateans are showed in the leading position, on economic and cultural levels. In this construction, in many cases the ‘other’ is represented as inferior, or even with negative characteristics. A special aspect of this relationship is the one with the center. On one hand, the region is presented as the only one that is capable of competing with Bucharest, and on the other hand it is the main source of self-victimization.

5. Communism and the 1989 Revolution

An important topic of the Banat-discourse is the interpretation of the 1989 Romanian revolution, and role of Timisoara at its beginning. Moreover, the events that occurred in

⁸⁹ Neumann, “Ideologie...”, 185)

⁹⁰ Neumann, “Multikulturalis identitas... ¶1

⁹¹ Bodó, “Banat si interculturalitate”, 179

December 1989 largely influenced the way how the regional scholars interpreted the relationship between the region and the communist period of Romania.

Timisoara and Banat were interpreted as a place of opposition, where a strong civic sense existed, with a strong need for a pluralistic society. Thus, it is not surprising, many of the scholars see the national integration process initiated by the Communist Party as a repression directed toward “differences and their rights for recognition”⁹² and as a national homogenizing process. As I mentioned in the previous part this sense of repression is strengthened by economic measures as well. Furthermore, the negative image of the Communist party and its policies are associated with the image of the center, Bucharest. In this perspective, the post-Communist period is characterized as a ‘return’ to the old state of art, where “diversity is rediscovered and revalorized”.⁹³ Communism appears as an element of perturbation, which tried to disturb the continuity of the social and cultural realities of Banat.

Some authors (for example Victor Neumann) admit that the post-1989 events, most importantly the demographic changes in the last fifteen years – the massive emigration of the Germans and Hungarians – radically changed the ethnic content of the region. However, these observations do not question the validity of the constructed model. Yet, most of the authors do not consider this element. This option is rooted in the Revolution of 1989 and its occupied role in the regionalist discourse. The revolution is considered to be the main example and legitimizing factor for the survival of the multicultural solidarity and the liberal pluralistic values that characterized the region. Starting with a moment of ethnic solidarity – the protection of the Protestant pastor, László Tőkés – it grew into a separate anti-Communist demonstration, which finally resulted in the abolishment of the Communist system.

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⁹² Vultur, “Memorie și identitate”, 189

⁹³ Vultur, “Memorie și identitate”, 189 (Similar ideas appear in Vultur, Smaranda. *Memoria salvată. Evreii din Banat, ieri și azi* [Saved memory. Jews in Banat, then and now]. (Iasi: Polirom, 2002), 457)

In conclusion, in the academic literature on the regional history Banat there are several elements of regional identification, which are reinforced by a strong differentiation from Bucharest and the other regions of Romania. The appearance of these can be explained by the liberalization of the historical discourse in general after 1989, which created space for new voices besides the nationalizing homogenizing discourse. The part played by the region in these changes opened up the road for interpretations and explanations.

However, the regional academic literature is divided in four major perspectives. First, some of the scholars continue the homogenizing discourse of the communist period, highlighting a homogenous Romanian identity and nation. Second, a significant number of the scholars integrate their discourse in the larger nationalizing one, emphasizing on the distinctive cultural and political features of Banat, which is an integrated part of the Romanian history. This narrative is a more open and integrating version of the nationalizing discourse. A third group of scholars form their discourse in a Central European field, without reaching for all the national histories in the region as constitutive elements of the uniqueness of the region. Consequently, this purely regionalist academic literature can be understood as an alternative against the hegemony of the communist rooted national homogenizing discourse. The fourth alternative discourse is the one presented by the Hungarian authors. They try to deconstruct some parts of the two abovementioned models, in order to offer an alternative definition to multiculturalism, which is in concordance with their own goals.

Despite these differences, all three perspective use almost the same (self)-stereotypes and in-group characteristics in order to construct their most important elements of identification. In this process they evaluate and reevaluate the existing historical space linking it to the events and representations of the present, pointing out, constructing and legitimizing old and new identifying elements, which can be gathered together in two main themes: the 'leading role' and the 'uniqueness' of the region.

Table 1 – Strategies, argumentations and linguistic realizations in the academic literature		
Strategies	Arguments	Linguistic realizations
<i>1.1 – Romanian nationalizing, homogenizing perspective</i>		
Justifying strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – references to the ‘historical truth’ and ‘historical rights’ of the Romanian nation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – personifying the Romanian nation, provinces presented as ‘brothers’ – using national and ethnic groups as crystallized entities
Strategies of inclusion/exclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – disregarding the multicultural characteristics of the region – speaking from a national perspective – tracing the boundaries of the group – ‘Banateans’ included into the Romanian nation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – using the pronoun ‘we’, to reflect on its own position – using the pronoun ‘we’, to create a common consciousness – using homogenous terms such as ‘Banateans’, Romanians
<i>1.2 – Romanian regional perspective</i>		
(Self)-stereotyping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – economic prosperity of the region – civic consciousness – tolerance and peaceful cohabitation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – using phrases like ‘Banatean characteristics’, typical’, ‘have always been’, ‘in consens with the tradition’
Justifying strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – emphasizing on demographical data that underline the Romanian presence in the region – references to historical documents that mention the Romanian presence – etymological meaning of the term ‘Banat’ 	
<i>1.3 – Pure regional perspective</i>		
(Self)-stereotyping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – economic prosperity of the region – civic consciousness – multiculturalism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – using phrases like ‘Banatean characteristics’, typical’, ‘have always been’, ‘in consens with the tradition’
Justifying strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – emphasizing on the continuity of the (self)-stereotypes from the Habsburg period to the post-communist era – parallel Romanian, German, Hungarian and Serbian education system – the case of the 1989 revolution – disregarding the national movements of the 19th and 20th century in the region 	
Strategies of singularization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – comparison with other region in different fields – emphasizing on the leading role of the region on economic and cultural level – civilizational differences – interethnic and inter-confessional openness compared to the population from other regions or immigrants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – ‘Still Banat is the foremost’ type phrases

Strategies of victimization	– Bucharest as the centralizing and discriminating other
<i>1.4 – Hungarian regional perspective</i>	
Dismissing strategies	– arguing against the continuities presented by the previous perspectives
	– arguing against the tolerance and peaceful cohabitation model
Justifying strategies	– presenting own definition to multiculturalism, using the past as an example
	– toward the Hungarian in-group presenting the nationalistic strategies used by the Romanian elites

V. Essayists, editorialists and their discourse

As a second part of the analysis I wanted to explore the discursive peculiarities of the regional public opinion leaders, in order to understand how the discourse is constructed and what is the logic behind it. However, as soon as I started collecting the data, I realized that a comprehensive analysis of this field cannot be carried out within the timeframe of this MA thesis. The analysis of the activities of the multitude of regional journals, newspapers and cultural organizations which are involved in the regional public opinion formation is far bigger project that I could get involved in. Therefore, I decided to focus on three essay-writers – Alin Gavreliuc, Radu Pavel Gheo, and Daniel Vighi – who come from different fields of study, represent different stylistic schools, and publish(ed) articles in three different type of media.

Alin Gavreliuc is a social-psychologist at the Sociology and Psychology Department of the West University of Timisoara. He published several scientific articles on Banat, on topics like interculturality from a socio-psychological perspective, and the modernization of Romania. He has a weekly column in the western insert of the *Evenimentul Zilei* national newspaper, the third largest newspaper in Romania. The main topics that he writes about are day-to-day events in Romania, national and regional identity.

Radu Pavel Gheo is a writer and translator, editor of *Orizont*, the journal of the Writers Union from Romania and the Center of Multicultural Dialog, which is published monthly in Timisoara. He is a regular writer of the journal, publishing essays mostly on regional topics, emphasizing on local patriotism and national identity. In contrast with

Evenimentul Zilei, Orizont is a cultural publication, it has a more restricted reading public, mostly intellectuals.

Daniel Vighi is a writer born in Banat, a founding member of the Provincia group – a joint project started by Romanian and Hungarian intellectuals – and is one of the first signers of the memorandum initiated by the group, as an invitation to a public debate for the regional structuring of Romania.⁹⁴ Between 2000 and 2002 the group edited the *Provincia* journal, which published ideas and debates on the possible regionalization of Romania, the Romanian-Hungarian relations, minority rights and the question of Banat and Transilvania. It appeared at a monthly rate, simultaneously in Hungarian and Romanian, as an insert for the two of the most important regional newspapers at the time, Ziua de Vest (in Romanian) and Kronika (in Hungarian). Daniel Vighi was one of the regular participants of these debates. Despite the fact that the circulation of the journal was very high, its impact on the mass population is questionable, because the articles were written on a very high academic level. The Provincia group was clearly constituted as a civil movement with strong political implications. Although they did not make the break through they were looking for, their debates reached a wide range of the intelligentsia and other public opinion leaders from Transilvania and Banat.

In the analysis of the discourse of the editorialists and publicists I follow two important goals. First, I reveal the characteristics that appear in the writings of the three authors, focusing on the discursive elements and the major differences between the three of them. In this process I was taking into account the position that they speak from and the context where their texts appeared. Second, I emphasize on how these discourses are distinct from the ones that can be found in the academic sphere. Moreover, I introduce some new analytical terms that help to understand the peculiarities of the discourse.

⁹⁴ The Memorandum to the Parliament Regarding the Regional Structuring of Romania can be downloaded from the following webpage: <http://www.provincia.ro/>.

The key difference between the academic literature and the studied essays is purely stylistic one. Scholars in many cases frame their work in academic paradigms, try to find evidence for their statements, take a pragmatic approach, with no visible ideological background. On the other hand the field of essay writing is more dynamic and subjective. It is not subordinated to the laws that define academic thinking, the author can freely stress his own ideas and beliefs.

1. Alin Gavreliuc

One of the most important characteristic of all three authors is their critical position toward the question of the homogenous national identity and consciousness in Romania, on one hand, and toward the validity of the regional identifications and peculiarities on the other. However, the three authors do not form a homogenous platform on these issues. They approach the subject of national identity from a liberal perspective, questioning the essence and realities of it, but in function of the contexts and the goals that they pursue.

Alin Gavreliuc follows a deconstructing strategy on the taboos of national identity. He argues that

the ‘Romanian’ as a unified category does not exist, only on the level of social representation, but not on the level of ‘objective’ realities.⁹⁵

However, this cannot be considered as a simple argument for regional differences, but more a possible accentuation on the problematic interpersonal relationships of the post-socialist Romania. As a result of the destructive processes of the communism, the contemporaneous Romanian social realities present many discrepancies: conflictual relation with the “other”, valorization of authoritarian symbols, the marginalization of the masses, or

⁹⁵ Alin Gavreliuc, “Cine suntem? (1)” [Who are we? (1)] *Evenimentul Zilei*, May 4 (2006), <http://evz.ro> (accessed on May 19, 2007)

the absence of horizontal socio-political space.⁹⁶ Despite the strong anti-Communist stance in which he positions himself, Gavreliuc in most of the cases does not deliver answers, just leaves open questions, letting his readers to make the decisions.

Although Gavreliuc does not touch regional topics that frequently, he takes a slightly different approach when talking about regional identities and within these, the Banatean identity. On one hand, similarly to the national identity definitions, he argues against the homogenizing approaches, stating that

Banateans are [...] of many kind, and the generalizing interferences [...] which talk about homogenous populations with distinct psycho-social characteristics need to be abandoned.⁹⁷

On the other hand, he makes references to different large scale sociological studies, which are presented as evidence for the different values, attitudes and behavioral patterns of the 'Banateans' compared to the 'others', such as higher interpersonal confidence, public initiatives, dissatisfaction with the country's future and lower ethnic distance.⁹⁸

However, these differences are not just simple constructions of a positive (self)-stereotyping as it was seen in the academic discourse, they are used for a further deconstruction of the homogenous national identity.

The most important conclusion is: 'we' are not better than 'them'. [...] This is the [result] of a distant history, when some values, attitudes and behaviors were more encouraged 'here' and lesser 'there'. [...] Which needs to be challenged is the perversion of a dominant model in society, characterized with centralization, suffocating birocrtatism, the balkanization of public customs and the absence of an authentic social dialog.⁹⁹

or

⁹⁶ See Alin Gavreliuc, "Cine suntem? (1)–(4)" *Evenimentul Zilei*, May 4, 11, 18 and 25 (2006) <http://evz.ro> (accessed on May 19, 2007); "Majoritățile minoritare" [Majorities in minority] *Evenimentul Zilei*, June 8 (2006) <http://evz.ro> (accessed on May 19, 2007); "Ipoteza frustrare-agresiune si Romania recenta" [Aspects of frustration-aggression in contemporary Romania], *Evenimentul Zilei*, July 27 (2006) <http://evz.ro> (accessed on May 19, 2007)

⁹⁷ Alin Gavreliuc, "'Noi' și 'ei'" ['Us' and 'them'], *Evenimentul Zilei*, December, 15 (2005) <http://evz.ro> (accessed on May 19, 2007)

⁹⁸ Alin Gavreliuc, "'Noi' și 'ei'", "Banatul și 'centrul'" [Banat and the 'centre']; *Evenimentul Zilei*, March 23 (2007), <http://evz.ro> (accessed on May 19, 2007); Alin Gavreliuc, "Relația cu celălalt si calitatea democrației" [Relation with the other and the quality of democracy] *Evenimentul Zilei*, September 6 (2006), <http://evz.ro> (accessed on May 19, 2007)

⁹⁹ Gavreliuc, "'Noi' și 'ei'"

The hypothesis of a heterogeneous Romanian identity is confirmed again, while the boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’ are not always structured on ethnic bases, but on other social and historical determinants (which are related to regional development, entrepreneurial culture, work ethics [...]).¹⁰⁰

Therefore, Gavreliuc supports the idea of a heterogeneous Romanian identity and the need of a public debate on this topic. However, the context of these statements is very important, in many cases it is embedded in a historical and cultural perspective, which legitimizes not only the deconstruction of the national identity, but the viability of the regional identity as well.

2. Daniel Vighi

Similarly to Alin Gavreliuc, Daniel Vighi is engaged in the deconstruction of the homogenizing national identity, however from another perspective. Vighi’s discourse is framed in the broader discourse of the Provincia group, which lobbied for regionalism and the administrative-political reorganization of Romania. Thus, Vighi is involved not only in the deconstruction of the hegemony of the homogenizing and ultra-centralizing national strategies, which in his view are considered a heritage of the pre-1989 communist system, but in the construction of Romania’s future in an European context as well.

The memorandum issued by the group clearly links regionalism and the needed administrative reforms with Europe and the European Union, by referring to these terms in five of its ten points. In order to understand the importance of this articulation, one should look at these references from a broader perspective, namely the Romanian West-East debate. In the 90s a significant part of the Romanian intelligentsia initiated a debate about the position

¹⁰⁰ Gavreliuc, „Relația cu celalalt și calitatea democrației”

of Romania between the Occident and the Orient.¹⁰¹ This deliberation did not resume only to this limited question, it covered the topics of national identity, federalism/regionalism or European integration as well. The memorandum was presented in 2001, when the occident/orient debate was more or less over and Romania was already in the negotiation process with the European Union for two years. Thus, the EU was considered the only viable way for the country. Presenting regionalism as a European priority – as the Provincia group emphasizes – should have put the question in a top priority for Romania as well.

In this context, most of Vighi's arguments are in concordance with the ideas of the Provincia group's memorandum, radicalizing them into a bipolar system, in which on the one side there are the "centralization policies"¹⁰² and their "ideologists of social, ethnic and regional homogenization, [members] of the old political police or people who have similar perceptions."¹⁰³ Thus, the centralization and homogenization is not only remains of the communist past, but it is linked to its darkest institution, to the political police. On the other side of his argument there is the regionalism and the administrative reorganization of Romania. This argument is linked to the image of the future and construction.

In Vighi's discourse, the deconstruction of the homogenous national myth is parallel to the legitimization of the viability of the provinces. From this perspective the following sentence is illustrative

In the everyday life, Romania does not exist, just the provinces of Romania exist. [...]¹⁰⁴

Thus, Vighi denies the existence of Romania as an identity-bearing entity, creating other similar ones, namely the provinces of Romania. The legitimization of the latter entity instead of the former one is carried out by historical arguments. Presenting similarities with

¹⁰¹ On these debate see Gabriel Andreescu, *Nationalisti si anti-nationalisti* [Nationalists and anti-nationalists] (Iasi: Polirom, 1996) a collection of essays of Alexandru Paleologu, Octavian Paler, Gabriel Andreescu, Daniel Vighi, Laurentiu Ulici and others.

¹⁰² Daniel Vighi, "Iorga Lincolnja avagy ki az úr a háznál" [Iorga's Lincoln or who is the boss in the house] *Provincia*, I no. 2 (2000), <http://www.provincia.ro/mindex.html> (accessed on May 19, 2007)

¹⁰³ Daniel Vighi, "Amikor monász lesz a máság" [When difference becomes a monad] *Provincia*, I no. 3 (2000), <http://www.provincia.ro/mindex.html> (accessed on May 19, 2007)

¹⁰⁴ Daniel Vighi, "Iorga Lincolnja..."

the academic discourse, Vighi argues that the provinces of Romania – Banat, Transylvania and Northern Bucovina on the one hand, and Moldova, Muntenia, Oltenia and Dobrudja on the other – have a different political, cultural and administrative historical tradition, thus the most efficient strategy for their development would be decentralization. This cleavage is underlined in several ways, by emphasizing on the differences and conflicts in Banat between the native Romanians and the newcomers from Moldova or Oltenia in contrast with the multicultural cohabitation,¹⁰⁵ or by presenting positive regional examples from the western regions.¹⁰⁶

The discursive strategies presented by Vighi are similar to those, who approached the Banat question from a purely regional perspective. He makes allusions toward the Central European characteristic of the region and to the multicultural co-habitation as well.¹⁰⁷ An original element in Vighi's regionalist discourse is the justifying strategy, which is used to integrate those socio-political episodes that do not fit into the constructed socio-historical distinctiveness model. In the 2000 presidential elections the candidate of the extremist and post-communist Greater Romania Party received the highest support in Banat and Transylvania. Similarly in those regions of Banat, where the descendants of the Romanian anti-Communist armed resistance lived, the largest post-communist party, the Romanian Party of Social Democracy came out as winner. These political events are clearly in contradiction with the regionalist and transethnic model promoted by Vighi. Consequently, he uses alternative explanations to reconcile this phenomenon with the upheld model, without changing the latter one. What is more, these examples are used as evidence to sustain the model as well.

The fact that the electorate, which was considered to have a more democratic mentality in the past ten years, supported Vadim Tudor [the GRP leader] to get into this position, is more the sign

¹⁰⁵ Daniel Vighi, "Iorga Lincolnja..."

¹⁰⁶ Daniel Vighi, "A Provincia eszméi vidéken" [The ideas of Provincia in the country] *Provincia*, I no. 7 (2000), <http://www.provincia.ro/mindex.html> (accessed on May 19, 2007)

¹⁰⁷ Daniel Vighi, "A Provincia eszméi vidéken"

of desperation and helplessness, then of their change. [...] Consequently, the results of the first round can be considered as a warning to the whole political class. [...] As a result of the half-balcanic policies of the last four years, we lost the commitment toward the west.¹⁰⁸

In other words, the result of the elections is not the consequence of the abolishment of the regional differences, but is a protest against the ‘half-balcanic’ policies, which are conducted in the center. Thus, the disadvantageous example becomes an indirect evidence of the needed regionalization.

As one could see, Vighi delivers a lot stronger regional discourse than Gavreliuc, however both of them emphasize the socio-historical and cultural differences between the regions. Moreover, while Gavreliuc presented pragmatic analytical perspective, Vighi speaks from a normative one.

3. *Radu Pavel Gheo*

The writings of Radu Pavel Gheo differ from the other writers’ in several points. First, Gheo deals far more with the idea of Banatean identity and the region Banat, than Gavreliuc or Vighi, and second, his writings cannot be placed along one clear line of thought. Most importantly, similarly to the authors mentioned above, he is involved in the deconstruction of the image of the homogenous national identity. Moreover, he argues against the usages of regional clichés, initializing a progressive debate on these issues. In other essays however, he reifies some of these stereotypes, engaging himself in the Banatean identity construction.

One of the most important virtues of Radu Pavel Gheo is that he to draw the reader’s attention to the used clichés that surround the different questions of collective identifications. Gheo argues that the “unity of the Romanian people”¹⁰⁹ is an idea propagated by the

¹⁰⁸ Daniel Vighi, “Egy alternatív politikai konstrukció néhány alapvető kérdése” [The basic questions of an alternative political construction] *Provincia*, I no. 8 (2000), <http://www.provincia.ro/mindex.html> (accessed on May 19, 2007)

¹⁰⁹ Radu Pavel Gheo, “Mitica printre noi” [‘Mitica’ among us], *Orizont*, 8 (2002): 3

Communist party, and Romania is a space of interference for many ethnic groups. Moreover, he argues that the cliché of “keeping the national identity, not identities”¹¹⁰ is perpetuated from 100 years in the Romanian society. Therefore, an open debate is needed in this question, so much more because it is an existing debate in Europe and there is a need “to sort out the – confused – identity relations between the diversified Romanian communities”.¹¹¹ However, the position of the author is understood by the context of this deconstruction. Similarly to other adepts of regionalization, he uses the idea of homogenizing national identity in parallel with the centralization argument,

Let’s generalize: the excessive centralization, the arbitrary decisions that come from above, the inferiority complex and the – in many cases justified – complaints of the provincial cities, ignored complaints by the central authorities can be found equally in the realities of 1990 and 2000.¹¹²

which seemingly implies that both of the processes have their roots at central level.

Another important topic on which Gheo emphasizes is the subject of regional and local clichés. He questions the viability of some of the self-stereotypes and ‘other’-images, which circulate in the local everyday discourse, such as the Banateans are more civilized than others, are rich, good, hardworking, or the Moldavians are uncivilized and poor, and so on.

[W]hy do we have to declare always, compare ourselves, valorize ourselves positively, vis-à-vis the center (yes, Bucharest), outbid our values, to brag with every petty linkage of Banat with a from of personified glory [...] For all the exterior viewers [this self-identification could seem] as ridiculous as the nationalist intonation of the ‘Noi suntem romani’ [We are Romanians – almost 100 year old nationalist song]¹¹³

or

The local pride has to match reality, it is not enough to have that ‘realm of memories, regrets and nostalgias without cover. [...] However, the reality is the same here as at the other side of the mountains or in Transylvania.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Gheo, “Mitica printre noi”, 3

¹¹¹ Radu Pavel Gheo, “Un câine cu identitate” [A dog with identity], *Orizont*, 1 (2006): 19

¹¹² Gheo, “Mitica printre noi”, 3

¹¹³ Radu Pavel Gheo, “Mîndru mi-s că-s bănăţean...” [Proud I am to be Banatean...], *Orizont*, 4 (2005): 15

¹¹⁴ Radu Pavel Gheo, “Timișoara mirabilă, Timișoara mizerabilă (I)” [Admirable Timisoara, despicable Timisoara] *Orizont*, 10 (2006): 27

In other words, these overgeneralizations and repetitions on regional level have the same homogenizing effects as the criticized national one.

However, in some cases the context in which these deconstructions appear change completely their meaning. The author uses justifying strategies to legitimate the usages of these self-illustrations. In his interpretation, the regional identity “supposes the existence of more complex [...] mechanisms then the simplistic national identity model” and the overbidding is needed in order “to affirm and outline the regional identity”.¹¹⁵ Therefore, in this case the abovementioned mechanisms are justified and welcomed.

Despite the fact that Gheo argued against the usages of the self-stereotyping and ‘othering’ mechanisms, he reifies some of them. The most used self-stereotypes are the reference to the high economic development, diligence,¹¹⁶ ‘the Banatean independent nature and pride’,¹¹⁷ ‘the Banatean pragmatism’¹¹⁸ and “music and freedom [as] typical properties for Banat”.¹¹⁹

Similarly to the academic literature, the Banat–Bucharest and the Banat–other regions comparison appears as well. Gheo compares the region with the center and the other regions in the field of economic development,¹²⁰ democratization,¹²¹ and music,¹²² implying that it is the only region that can compete with Bucharest. This comparison is used as a strategy of singularization, through which the author puts Banat in the leading role of an imaginary hierarchy between the provinces. Parallel to this vis-à-vis Bucharest in some cases he uses elements of victimization as well.

¹¹⁵ Gheo, “Mîndru mi-s că-s bănăţean...”, 15

¹¹⁶ Radu Pavel Gheo, “Timişoara e Belissima!” *Orizont*, 8 (2005): 24

¹¹⁷ Radu Pavel Gheo, “Mulţumim, boier Tăriceanu” [Thank you boyar Tariceanu] *Orizont*, 5 (2005): 21

¹¹⁸ Radu Pavel Gheo, “După aniversară” [After anniversary] *Orizont*, 9 (2005): 25

¹¹⁹ Radu Pavel Gheo, “Acasă la Phoenix” [Home at the Phoenix] *Orizont*, 3 (2006): 9

¹²⁰ Gheo, “Timişoara e Belissima!”, 24

¹²¹ Gheo, “Mulţumim, boier Tăriceanu”, 21

¹²² Radu Pavel Gheo, “Timişoara culturală undeva în Europa” [Cultural Timisoara somewhere in Europe] *Orizont*, 1 (2007): 23

Besides the center–periphery theme, Gheo also makes reference to the cultural difference topic. He emphasizes on the existence of the civilizational differences between the provinces which were part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the Romanian Old Kingdom. As Gheo argues, Banat, Transylvania and Bucovina were part of a occidental cultural milieu, while the provinces of the Old Kingdom had oriental social and administrative customs or attitudes.¹²³ Similar ideas are discussed in other articles, where the author is pointing out the analogies between Banat and Hungary or Central Europe to the detriment of Oltenia or Bucharest.

I had the chance to see [...] the European Union, so close to us. From Timisoara really close, because to the capital of Hungary there is five hour train-journey, while to Bucharest normally eight.¹²⁴

Another subject that underlines the distinctiveness of the abovementioned ‘occidental’ regions is familiarity toward the ethnic ‘other’. The author introduces the multicultural characteristic of Banat, by emphasizing the familiar feeling being in Hungary and hearing the Hungarian language, despite the fact that he does not understand it.

In Timisoara I hear all around the Hungarian language (but Serbian, Italian, and even German as well) and the Hungarian gives me more a sense of comfort and familiarity. In Iași or Bucharest I do not really hear Hungarian on the street, but I do not feel at home there either.¹²⁵

Thus, the presence of the ethnic ‘other’ is generalized, implying its presence in Timisoara ‘all around’ and it is introduced as a criterion of familiarity as well. By bringing up the multicultural topic, the author not only sets an important group belief of the Banatean identity, but reconstructs the boundary between Banateans and the ‘others’.

The discussions on center–periphery relations and the cultural differences appear as a response or interpretation of political and social events. Gheo builds up interpretations for events that were lived or seen by the audition, influencing their understanding. The most

¹²³ Radu Pavel Gheo, “Administrație și unire (II)” [Administration and Union] *Orizont*, 11 (2005): 20–21

¹²⁴ Radu Pavel Gheo, “Vörös, sárga, kék – este-al nostru tricolor” [Red, yellow, blue – is our flag] *Orizont*, 12 (2005):23

¹²⁵ Gheo, “Vörös, sárga, kék...”, 23

important example in the case is the 2005 inundation in Banat, when several villages were destroyed by the water. The Prime Minister, Călin Popescu Tăriceanu visited the refugees, and in one of the villages, he was encountered by a group of villagers, who complained about their situation. Tăriceanu responded irritably: “But what do you want, we cannot build a hotel for you?!” Everybody would agree that the gesture of the Prime Minister was far not a tactful gesture. However, Gheo interpreted the events as another example of the problematic center–periphery relation.¹²⁶ He used both the victimization strategy – implying that the center, in this case the Prim Minister, discriminates the population from this region –, and the (self)-stereotyping one – presenting some ‘general’ characteristics of the people from these parts in order to strengthen even more the sense of victimization. Moreover, the whole essay is entitled “Thank you boyar Tariceanu!” From etymological point of view, the word boyar means landowner aristocrat, which was used in the feudal Romania, Bulgaria or Russia, but not in Transylvania or Banat. Thus, this kind of usage has a double meaning. On one hand emphasizes on the cultural difference between the Bucharest and Banat, and on the other hand it alludes to the exploitation and centralization led from the center.

Although in many instances Gheo questions some elements of a possible Banatean identity, he uses his own interpretation of some crucial events in order to strengthen the same consciousness what he criticizes. In order to achieve this he uses several discursive strategies, such as victimization, singularization or (self)-stereotyping.

* * *

As we could see, the three authors show a high level of resemblances when dealing with the regional question – not only among them, but with the academic discourse as well –, but with different intensity. One of the main similarities is the cultural-historical justification of the regional differences as an alternative for the homogenizing nationalizing discourse.

¹²⁶ Gheo, “Mulțumim, boier Tăriceanu”, 21

Thus, the most important element of the Banatean identity becomes its comparison and differentiation from the ‘other’ which is personalized by the South-Eastern provinces of Romania and especially the center. In many cases this differentiation is clear value-judgments, or it appears as a classic occident-orient relationship, with a slight civilizational superiority to the occident. Sorin Antohi in radiography on the Romania of 2004 characterizes this relationship as Orientalism,¹²⁷ after the famous book of Edward W. Said. In Said’s perception, [t]he Orient is not only adjacent to Europe, [but is] one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other, [...] the orient has helped to define Europe (or the West)”¹²⁸ Correspondingly, Bucharest and the other provinces of Romania has become for Banat the ‘other’ which contributes in the construction of a regional identity. However, this was a gradual process, which intensified after 1989.

Although the image of the ‘other’ is an important aspect of the identity building the three authors introduce some (self)-stereotypes as well, which mostly correspond with those presented in the previous chapter. However, these elements appear a lot more dynamically, showing a number of objections and questionings.

Gavreliuc stays at the historical and cultural level, introducing most of the (self)-stereotypes in order to further emphasize on the flaws of the homogenizing national theories. Thus, his primary objective is not the demonstration of the existence of the regional identities, but the questioning of any kind of thick homogenizing identifications. In contrast with Gavreliuc, Vighi and Gheo take a stronger regional stance. This can be observed in the number and contexts, when (self)-stereotyping and victimization strategies are used. Both Gheo and Vighi radicalizes its discourse in a bipolar system, in which on the one side there is the center, with its own cultural and administrative characteristics, and on the other side there

¹²⁷ Sorin Antohi, “România în 2004: ‘marea evadare’ e în toi” [Romania in 2004: the ‘great escape’ in full swing] *Revista 22*, XIV no. 757 (2004), <http://www.revista22.ro/> (accessed on May 19, 2007)

¹²⁸ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York : Vintage Books, 1979): 1

are the historical provinces with their peculiarities. Furthermore, they use the victimization strategy to emphasize even more on these distinctions.

The major difference between Vighi's and Gheo's discourse is that Vighi uses the discursive strategies, most importantly victimization, (self)stereotyping and references to the cultural cleavage theme in order to legitimize the viability of the regionalist claims. In contrast with Vighi, Gheo speaks from an exclusive Banatean perspective. Although he has some regionalizing claims, those cannot be included in the general trend for which Vighi pleads for. Gheo when describing Banat, besides the references to the cultural cleavage and center-periphery arguments, introduces singularization strategies in several social-economic field, creating imaginary hierarchies in which Banat would take the leading role. Thus, Gheo can be seen as an author who is strongly involved in the regional identity construction.

Table 2 – Strategies, argumentations and linguistic realizations in the work of the three essay writers and editorialists		
Strategies	Arguments	Linguistic realizations
<i>2.1 – Alin Gavreliuc</i>		
Deconstructing strategy	– Romanian identity as a homogenous identity does not exist	
	– regional identities as homogenous identities do not exist	
(Self)-stereotyping	– historical and cultural differences between people from Banat and other provinces	
<i>2.2 – Daniel Vighi</i>		
Deconstructing strategies	– Romanian identity as a homogenous identity does not exist	
Strategies of victimization	– Bucharest as the centralizing and discriminating other	
	– linking the centralizing policies to the communist past	
Justifying strategies	– linking regionalization to Europe and the European Union	– using the terms ‘Europe’ or ‘European Union’ in several textual contexts
	– cultural and historical differences between the provinces	
<i>2.3 – Radu Pavel Gheo</i>		
Deconstructing strategy	– Romanian identity as a homogenous identity does not exist	– using ‘identities’ not ‘identity’
	– questioning the regional clichés	
(Self)-stereotyping	– high economic development, diligence, freedom, multiculturality	– using phrases such as ‘traditional’, ‘typical properties’
		– using the term ‘Banatean’ as a bounded group
Strategies of singularization	– Banat the only region capable to compete with Bucharest	
	– cultural difference in administration between the East and the West	
	– similarities with Hungary, differences with Eastern parts of Romania	– using linguistic generalizations
Strategies of victimization	– Bucharest as the centralizing and discriminating other	– using the word ‘boyar’ to describe the prime-minister who represents of the center

VI. Political elites – usages of the regional discourse

After looking at the academic literature on the region and the discourse of some public opinion leaders, it is important to analyze how, when and why the topics related to regional identity appear in the discourse of the different political elites. Starting from the assumption that the media in many cases present the political leaders' opinions biased, exaggerating or diminishing some aspects of the statements, I decided to include only primary material in my analysis. Within this category, I focused on speeches and texts delivered by politicians that can be found in written version, or interviews published by the written media. Most of the politicians included in the analysis are from Timis County and Timișoara. This is a result of a pragmatic decision. Navigating the official web pages of different institutions from the region showed that Timis County and the municipality of Timișoara inherited the history of Banat, none of the other counties or cities make reference to the history of Banat on their web-pages. Having said this, the selected data is the following.

1. Editorials signed by Gheorghe Ciuhandu, Dorel Borza or Adrian Orza, in the official gazette of the mayor's office, *Monitorul Primariei* [The Mayor's Office Gazette]. Ciuhandu is one of the most central figures of the Banatean local politics. He is the Mayor of Timișoara since 1996. In the 2004 local elections he won the seat in the first round gathering around 60% of the votes.¹²⁹ The *Monitorul Primariei* is a gazette that first appeared in December 2002 and it is distributed free of charge to every household in the city. However, this publication can be considered a reference to the past alone, because as one of the issues

¹²⁹ "Alegeri locale 2004 – Rezultate" [Local elections 2004 – Results] *Monitorul Primariei*, 19 (2004), <http://www.primariatm.ro/monitorul/> (accessed on May 22, 2007)

mentions, it is a resurrection of a one hundred year old tradition in the city.¹³⁰ Besides the useful information on the different aspects of the city's life, in every number there is an editorial signed by the mayor, or one of his deputies.

2. Opinions and interviews with the regional leaders of the Hungarian minority, published in Hungarian and Romanian newspapers that appear in Banat. The regional Hungarian newspaper, *Heti Új Szó*, publishes several interviews with Hungarian politicians. Moreover, the paper publishes a monthly insert of the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (DAHR) entitled *Keresztmetszet*. In this four paged insert the Alliance publishes its official communicates and opinions on different socio-political events as well.

3. The third category of texts that I included are interviews or opinions of regional political leaders that appeared in newspapers or journals such as *Revista 22*, *Renașterea Bănățeană* or the Western inserts of *Evenimentul Zilei* and *Ziua*.

Crucial elements in the analysis of political discourse are the outside influences. As Wodak points out in her analysis on the Austrian national identity, the content of the speech is influenced by two important factors: the speaker's political position, the occasion or context and the audience.¹³¹ Gheorghe Ciuhandu in most of the cases speaks as the Mayor of Timișoara. Besides this he was the president and presidential candidate for the Christian-Democratic People's Party in 2004. The speaker's political position is important in the case of the Hungarian elites as well. In principle the Hungarian politicians speak as the leader of the DAHR, not as a representative of a state or regional institution. Additionally, one of the key spokespersons of the community, Toro Tibor, DAHR deputy in the Romanian parliament, is one of the main promoters of autonomy and regionalism. Moreover, he submitted two draft laws on the regional autonomy of the Szeklerland and the personal autonomy of the

¹³⁰ Gheorghe Ciuhandu, "Bilanț de sfârșit de an" [End of year survey] *Monitorul Primăriei* 37 (2005) <http://www.primariatm.ro/monitorul/> (accessed on May 22, 2007)

¹³¹ Wodak and colleagues, 72–73

Hungarians from Romania.¹³² Other important speakers are Viorel Coifan, head of the Timis county council between 1992 and 2000, liberal parliamentary deputy between 2000 and 2004, and the advisor of the Prime Minister on administrative issues since then,¹³³ and Sorin Maxim the director of the Regional Development Agency for the West.

The second influential factor is the audience. Most of the speakers try to address the totality of the readers. Therefore, in the case of the Hungarian political elites, one has to differentiate between those messages what are directed only toward the Hungarians and those that are directed toward the region's whole population.

Having set the most important background information, the analysis of the political discourses is structured in the following way. First, I present how the Banatean identity and consciousness appears in the texts, and what is their function. Second, I focus on the 'othering' mechanisms. The third part deals with the references to the common past, present and future.

1. Banatean identity, Banatean consciousness

There are two major contexts where references to the Banatean identity appear, the question of the regionalization of Romania, and the presentation of the Mayor's achievements. These references can take several forms, the speakers talk about concepts such as the 'spirit of Timișoara', 'mentality of the population' or directly the Banatean identity. However, these terms do not appear alone, their content is filled by the social actors. In most of the cases, different (self)-stereotyping strategies are used, in order to justify the viability of their actions.

¹³² Additional data can be found on the homepage of the Chamber of Deputies from Romania, <http://www.cdep.ro>.

¹³³ <http://www.cdep.ro>

In the texts signed by Ciuhandu, Borza or Orza most of the enumerated characteristics appear in passages where they talk about achievements. Although these authors talk exclusively about the city of Timișoara, the used characterizations are the same as the one used by the essay writers or the ones found in the academic literature. The most important (self)-stereotypes used are references to the civilization of the city, the Central European open mentality and diligence of the population, the presentation of Timișoara as an economic and administrative model, Timișoara as ‘Small Vienna’ or the ethnic tolerance and understanding theme. In most of the cases, these distinguishing features are used together and in the same textual setting with the description of a positive project finished by the city’s leadership. For example, talking about the success of attracting foreign investors, Ciuhandu presents the following conclusions:

[T]he recipe of the success is simple: the mentality of the inhabitants of Timișoara, the quality of their work and the openness of the local authorities in supporting the investments in the infrastructure and economy of Timișoara.¹³⁴

On one hand he reinforces some of the positive stereotypes that circulate in the region, and at the same time links it to the action taken by the office he is running. Another similar strategy used in the gazette, is the parallel usage of the specific and abstract achievements.

We made efforts to attract investors to our city [...] the economic model of Timișoara is known and appreciated not only in the country but abroad as well. We tried to administer the budget as good as possible. We tried to keep the spirit of Timișoara alive. All of us enjoyed this year’s festivals, which have become traditional.¹³⁵

A third example for the usage of the (self)-stereotyping strategy is the one in conflictual situation. In 1999 the local council approved August 3rd as the official day of the city. The date commemorates the entrance of the Romanian troops into Timișoara in 1919. Since the decision of the local council, the minority leaders object to this decision. They argued that this choice for the day of Timișoara is a nationalist decision, and excludes the

¹³⁴ Gheorghe Ciuhandu, “Modelul economic Timisoara” [Timisoara, the economic model] *Monitorul Primariei*, 4 (2003) <http://www.primariatm.ro/monitorul/> (accessed on May 22, 2007)

¹³⁵ Gheorghe Ciuhandu, “Timișoara înseamnă în primul rând oameni” [Timisoara first means the people] *Monitorul Primariei*, 1 (2002) <http://www.primariatm.ro/monitorul/> (accessed on May 22, 2007)

cohabiting nationalities from the celebration, thus is against the Banatean spirit. In 2006, for example, the Mayor's office as a response to this criticism, emphasized on the city's multiethnic and tolerant characteristics.

The essential characteristic of those of us who live here is tolerance. [...] The city developed and is still developing in the spirit of tolerance and the good understanding. [...]

We will keep the multiethnic spirit of the city in the prepared manifestations: along the local bands, groups from Germany, Serbia and Hungary will perform as well.¹³⁶

Therefore, the political leaders of the city of Timișoara are evoking the elements of the regional identity in order to consolidate their own political position, by linking the positive (self)-stereotypes of the Banatean consciousness to their own administrative success, or using them in resolving conflicts.

The second context in which aspects of the Banatean identity appear is regionalization theme. The speakers present the different (self)-stereotypes as legitimating strategy for the viability of the regionalization of Romania. The most important characteristics that are evoked are the interculturality/multiculturality, economic development, high qualified labor power, entrepreneurial mentality. Additionally to these some speakers emphasize on Banat as a unity, the common history of the region,¹³⁷

An important aspect in the understanding of these discursive strategies is the position of the speaker. The Romanian politicians highlight these characteristics in order to legitimize their regional claims and to emphasize on the regional identity construction as an alternative for the national one. Another goal pursued with the help of these legitimizing strategies is the differentiation between the Banatean claims and the ones formulated by the Szeklerland.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Adrian Orza, "Timisoara multi-etnica" [Multiethnic Timisoara] *Monitorul Primariei*, 44 (2006) <http://www.primariatm.ro/monitorul/> (accessed on May 22, 2007)

¹³⁷ "Banatul nu are lider regional" [Banat does not have a regional leader] Interview with parliamentary deputy Toro Tibor, *Evenimentul Zilei*, February 20 (2007) <http://www.evz.ro/> (accessed on May 15, 2007)

¹³⁸ The Szeklerland is a territory of Hungarian majority in Romania, which incorporates territories from four Romanian counties: Harghita, Covasna and some parts of Mures and Brasov.

Banat is “traditionally a privileged area from the point of view of the ethnic, social and economic composition [where] did not exist dominant nations, or major economic discrepancies,¹³⁹

The discussion on decentralization and regionalization is pragmatic, they do not have the “passional connotation”¹⁴⁰ of the ones in the Szeklerland. Moreover, later in the cited interview Coifan disapproves the autonomy on ethnic criteria, characterizing it “enclaving, discriminatory, collective rights, politically incorrect for the EU.” Therefore, the evocation of the different (self)-stereotypes is a legitimizing strategy toward both the regional in-group and the nationalist out-group.

Most of the Hungarian politicians speak from a dual position, as Banatean, or as the member of the local community, and on the other hand as a Hungarian from Banat. From this dual positioning different strategies result. One directed toward the Banatean in-group, and the other toward the Hungarian in-group. The themes in the Hungarian texts are the problem of autonomy and the local political mobilization.

In the case of the autonomy, similarly to the Romanian speakers the Banatean (self)-stereotypes are used in a positive context, in order to legitimize its claims. However, the Hungarian speakers do not exclude any types of autonomy

As Banatean, with a proclaimed Hungarian identity, I tried to introduce the idea of regionalism in the DAHR’s agenda. [...] We did not propose to emphasize only on the ethnic elements, we tried to find discussion partners among the political elite.¹⁴¹

Thus, for the Hungarian politicians the two types of autonomy or regionalization are strongly linked together. Finding Romanian partners for one of the projects legitimizes the other.

Although the Hungarian politicians use the (self)-stereotyping strategies, when approaching the Romanian out-groups, they evoke it on rare occasions toward the in-group. The only time when it is used is in the case of elections, and only one element,

¹³⁹ “Regionalismul la bănațeni, de jos în sus” [Regionalism at the Banateans, from bellow] interview with Viorel Coifan, liberal politician, advisor of the Prime Minister on administrative issues *Evenimentul Zilei*, February 17th (2007) <http://www.evz.ro/> (accessed on May 15th, 2007)

¹⁴⁰ From “Regionalismul la bănațeni, de jos în sus”

¹⁴¹ From “Banatul nu are lider regional”

multiculturality and tolerance. However, these references appear in negative textual setting, the speakers dismissing these stereotypes, bringing out examples of Romanian nationalism.¹⁴² This action is used for political mobilization, thus to strengthen their political position and legitimacy.

The political elites use more or less the same (self)-stereotyping mechanisms as the academic sphere or the public opinion leaders. However, these characteristics are used in order to legitimize and justify their actions and opinions, to consolidate their own political position or to dismiss other conquering discourses.

2. Banateans and the ‘others’

Similarly to the academic literature and the essays and editorials, in the manifestations of the political elites the references to ‘others’ appear with the same content, the comparison with other provinces and Bucharest on cultural, economic or even on political level. However, there are major differences regarding the contexts and situations in which these elements appear.

Many of the politicians – most characteristically Ciuhandu and Orza – make comparisons between Banat/Timișoara and other parts of Romania or Bucharest. However, these are at the same time (self)-stereotypes as well, emphasizing on the ‘leading role’ of the region/city.

Our city is appreciated today for its civilization, being recognized as the most occidental city of the country.¹⁴³

We are a reference point, for the others from economic perspective as well. We are the economic model of Timisoara.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² “Befejeződött az előválasztás, kezdődik a választási kampány” [The pre-elections finished, the electoral campaign begins] *Heti Új Szó*, April 25th (2004): 4

¹⁴³ Ciuhandu, “Timișoara înseamnă în primul rând oameni”

¹⁴⁴ Ciuhandu, “Modelul economic Timisoara”

Why Timisoara? Because here it is not characteristic, what unfortunately can be seen in other big cities of Romania, namely the Mayor lacks the support of the local council.¹⁴⁵

When it comes to Romania in the international mass media, Timisoara is always used as an [positive] example.¹⁴⁶

The examples above show that the authors use the discursive singularization strategy, putting the city of Timisoara on the top of the hierarchy. Furthermore, similarly to the (self)-stereotyping strategy, these linguistic formulations appear in positive textual setting which highlight the achievements of the Mayor and his collaborators.

Why Timisoara? Because here it is not characteristic, what unfortunately can be seen in other big cities of Romania, namely the Mayor lacks the support of the local council.

For the population of Timisoara this means improved public illumination, more frequent and comfortable tram transportation, new playgrounds for their children and investments that created new workplaces. This means teamwork.¹⁴⁷

The singularization strategy is embedded in a context where the accomplishments of the local leadership are enumerated. Therefore, the politician is not only highlighting the city's position in an imaginary hierarchy, creating a special kind of group belief that reinforces the regional identity, but associates these characteristics with his or her own actions and achievements.

Another case when the political elites make allusions to the 'others', is the center-periphery relationship theme. Although the singularization strategy is used in some cases regarding the relationship between Banat and Bucharest, by references made to the comparisons between the two, there are other strategies at work as well. The most important one is the victimization strategy. Many of the text present the Banat-Bucharest relationship as a hyper-centralization through which the center is pressuring the provinces and particularly Banat.

In Banat the discussions on decentralization [...] derive from the frustrations of the citizens concerning the hyper-centralized 'Dambovitean' administration.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Adrian Orza, "Echipa" [The team] *Monitorul Primariei*, 15 (2004) <http://www.primariatm.ro/monitorul/> (accessed on May 22, 2007)

¹⁴⁶ Gheorghe Ciuhandu, "Timișoara mereu în avangarda țării" [Timisoara always in the vanguards of the country] *Monitorul Primariei*, 34 (2005) <http://www.primariatm.ro/monitorul/> (accessed on May 22, 2007)

¹⁴⁷ Orza, "Echipa"

We do not get anything, the only regions, who get promotional tourist material from the government are Brasov, Bucovina, Moldova and the Romanian coastline.¹⁴⁹

With the help of the victimization strategies, the audition is reinforced in his beliefs. However, these kinds of statements mostly appear in two kinds of contexts. In the first situation they are contrasted with the successful actions taken by the local administrations.

One of the problems of any local administration is [that] the money gathered from taxes, duties and special funds go to the central budget to Bucharest.

Yet, in order to develop the community in which we live, we must make new investments, which need funds. The Timisoara of tomorrow cannot be built without financial resources. From this consideration we have chosen to attract external funds.¹⁵⁰

The contrast used by Ciuhandu in this paragraph not only presents the centralization policies in negative light, but underlines the positive qualities of the local administration, reinforcing their position.

The second usage of the victimization strategies appear on the subject of regionalization. Similarly to the previous topic, the speaker contrasts the negative image of the centralization with the positive outcome of a future regionalization.

Remember that year by year, although Timis [county] contributed to [the Road Fund] with the largest sum, after Bucharest, at the moment of the money-repartition became one of the last counties. Regionalization for the Banateans means, in the first case, a solution for the correct redistribution of the money which they pay to the central budget.¹⁵¹

By using this kind of contrast, Coifan not only strengthens the dissatisfaction toward the center, but legitimizes his claims of regionalization as well. Moreover, he repeats one of the (self)-stereotypes, the economic development of the region.

In both of the cases, by emphasizing on the centre–periphery relationships, the politicians strengthen their own achievements or claims. In this perspective, the victimization strategies are used to create both discontent among the audition, and to underline the positive

¹⁴⁸ From “Regionalismul la bănațeni, de jos în sus”. Dambovitean is a common reference to Bucharest, after the name of the river which crosses it.

¹⁴⁹ “Turismul din Timișoara, revigorat de primărie” *Evenimentul Zilei*, November 22nd (2006) <http://www.evz.ro/> (accessed on May 15th, 2007)

¹⁵⁰ Gheorghe Ciuhandu, “Timișoara de mâine” [Tomorrow’s Timisoara] *Monitorul Primariei*, 9 (2003) <http://www.primariatm.ro/monitorul/> (accessed on May 22, 2007)

¹⁵¹ From “Regionalismul la bănațeni, de jos în sus”

connotation of the formulated message – own achievements in decision-making and administration or the legitimacy of the regionalization project. The singularization strategies are used with the same purpose. The only difference is that, while in the former case the message is formulated in contrast with the strategy, in the latter situation the message and the presented (self)-stereotypes are interlocked.

3. References to past, present and future

A peculiarity of the political discourses compared to the one from the academic literature and the cultural elites' discourses is the way the politicians instrumentalize the past, present and the future. Both the (self)-stereotyping strategies and the construction of the relationship with the 'other' can be used in this context.

First, and most importantly the politicians – ex. Ciuhandu, Borza and Orza – are embedding the present and future projects of the city in a historical context, creating a sense of belongingness and continuity. This is achieved by the usage of different linguistic strategies. One of these is connecting the projects or the achievements to the city's 'once known fame', or referring to tradition, which needs to be kept.

Another strategy is the evocation of past events or triumphs of realization as model or analogy for the future projects. A good example of this kind is the promotion of the spring festival entitled 'Little Vienna'. On one hand the chosen name itself guides the audience to the Austro-Hungarian past of the city, creating an association between the capital of Austria and Timisoara. Besides the name, the invitation to the festival itself is formulated in the following way:

I can only invite you, once more, beginning with May 8th at Unirii Square to become European (again).¹⁵²

Therefore, ‘Little Vienna’ is not only a reference of the glorious past, but it is connected to the Europeanism of the region. Orza by using the word ‘again’ is emphasizing on the different socio-cultural states in which the city found itself. However, similarly to the academic literature this could be reference to either the cleavages created by the communist period – which is a very common in all the post-socialist countries –, or the homogenizing strategies of the state. However, this is not the only case when political actors make references to Europe or the European Union.

At the end of the year 2006 [...] Timisoara will become a European city not only in discussions and mentalities, but in every aspect which is implied by the European integration of our country.¹⁵³

In this second example, Ciuhandu clearly emphasizes on the Europeanism of the city, by using both the singularizing strategy and the (self)-stereotyping.

A further example of linking the past with the present and the future is in the article about the beginning of the reconstruction of major parts of the tramlines in Timisoara.

On July 9th, 1867 Timisoara became the first city from Romania, which had trams pulled by horses. Therefore, we are a few weeks interval from an anniversary, which we want to celebrate in the following way. Investing and modernizing [...] the infrastructure of the public transportation system [...] contributing to the development of the city to continue a tradition that needs to be kept.

In this perspective the investment is reevaluated, it becomes a duty for the leaders of the city to conform to it. Consequently, the reference to the past is used not only to legitimize the reconstruction project, but as a group cohesion process.

Therefore, the connection of the past with the present and future, on one hand emphasizes on the continuity of the developments, and on the other hand legitimizes the

¹⁵² Adrian Orza, “Timișoara Europeană” [European Timisoara] *Monitorul Primariei*, 17 (2004) <http://www.primariatm.ro/monitorul/> (accessed on May 22, 2007)

¹⁵³ Ciuhandu, “Bilanț de sfârșit de an”

future projects. Moreover, it creates a place for the commemoration of the glorious periods of the past.

* * *

In the studied political sphere the different references to the aspects of the regional identity appear in two major themes. First, political actors such as Ciuhandu, Orza and Borza link the (self)-stereotypes to their positive achievements as political leaders of the city. Similarly, but not in an accentuated way they use victimization strategies in presenting the center–periphery relationship to highlight their competence in administrating the city’s future. Thus, they connect the symbols of the regional identity – which are used in the academic literature and by some of the essay writers as well – to hold the power. Moreover, the references to the past are used in order to legitimize the ongoing and future projects or to give meaning to the future developments.

Second, regional leaders such as Coifan, Maxim or Toro emphasize on the center–periphery relationship in order to legitimize the regionalizing claims. By using victimization strategies they channel the frustrations toward the center in order to mobilize the population for their political projects. In this context the usage of the (self)-stereotypes has a double function. On one hand it creates a kind of group cohesion by emphasizing on the common characteristics, and on the other hand strengthens the abovementioned legitimating process. Within this context, the political representatives of the Hungarians and Romanians pursue different goals. While Hungarian political elites use the regionalizing project in order to find political partners for other similar projects – such as the autonomy of the Szeklerland – the Romanian political elites want to detach the two projects in order to legitimize themselves toward both the regional in-group and the national in-group.

A third important aspect in the political discourse is the usage of multiculturalism and tolerance, which appears only a few times and contexts. Most importantly appears as one of

the (self)-stereotypes that is used in the legitimizing process mentioned above. In addition, the Hungarian spokespersons make reference to it toward the Hungarian in-group, and most of the times in negative context. By dismissing this (self)-stereotype they are looking for political mobilization among the Hungarians. In contrast, the Romanian political elites use the terms in conflictual situations, in order to dismiss nationalist suspicions.

Table 3 – Strategies, argumentations and linguistic realizations in the work of the political elite		
Strategies	Arguments	Linguistic realizations
<i>3.1 – In the regionalization theme</i>		
Justifying strategies	– historical and cultural differences between people from Banat and other provinces – supranational common history of the region – possibility of better economic situation	– positive textual context
Strategies of victimization	– hypercentralization – discrimination on economic level	– negative textual context in contrast with the positive context of the other strategies
(Self)-stereotyping	– multiculturalism, economic development, entrepreneurial mentality	– ‘mentality of the population’, reference to Banatean identity
<i>3.2 – In the discourse of Ciunandu and his colleagues</i>		
(Self)-stereotyping	– multiculturalism, economic development, entrepreneurial mentality, civilization	– ‘mentality of the population’, references to the ‘spirit of Timisoara’ – in context with the enumeration of the achievements of the Mayor’s office
Strategies of singularization	– Timisoara as model for other cities on cultural, economic, administrative level	– ‘the economic model Timisoara’ – in context with the enumeration of the achievements of the Mayor’s office
Justifying strategies	– connecting own projects, achievements to the realizations of the past – cultural and economic continuity between the Austro-Hungarian period and the present	– ‘little Vienna’ theme
Strategies of victimization	– hypercentralization	– negative textual context in contrast with the positive presentation of own achievements
<i>3.3 – Hungarian political elites toward the Hungarian in-group</i>		
Dismissing strategies	– arguing against the tolerance and peaceful cohabitation model	– negative textual context, at the time of elections
Justifying strategies	– regionalization as means for minority rights	

VII. Conclusions

The main goal of the research was to identify, reveal, describe and deconstruct the main strategies used by academic, cultural and political elites in order to construct a regional Banatean identity. Moreover, I wanted to understand why the members of these elites make references to the existence and characteristics of the regional identity, and whether or not there is one single discursive structure that all the regional actors can be integrated in. In order to find the answers, I analyzed the regional discourses present in three different social fields, the academic literature on Banat, the work of three editorialists from the region and the political statements and texts of some important regional and local political leaders. Although the included texts do not represent the totality of the material that can be found on this specific topic, there are important conclusions that can be drawn from the study on both the discursive structures and motifs behind the discourses.

The most important finding of the paper is that there is no single discursive structure in which all the actors can be placed. What is more, even within the same social field there are major differences between the strategies and goals pursued by the actors. However, in many cases, similarities can be traced between actors that are part of different social field.

Despite the differences, most of the actors, who speak in or about the regional discursive field, use nearly the same discursive strategies to illustrate the regional identity. The most important of these is the (self)-stereotyping strategy. According to this, the academic, cultural and political actors introduce and reinforce some peculiarities that are characteristic for the region or the people who live there. The most important are the high

economic development of the region, the specific work-ethics, diligence and openness of the people, the multiculturalism, high level of civilization and the related ethnic tolerance and peaceful cohabitation of the population of the region. These appear in all of the three fields, and most of the authors who speak from a regional perspective mention them.

A strategy which is closely related to (self)-stereotyping is the singularization strategy. This on one hand makes references to some of the above mentioned characteristics – most accentuated are economic development, democratization and multiculturalism – and puts them in a comparative form, creating imagined hierarchies between Banat and other regions and their inhabitants. These strategies are used in contexts in order to underline the ‘leading role’ of Banat. Similarly to the previously mentioned strategy, this can be found in all of the three fields as well, while the most important authors who are using it are Ciuhandu, Gheo or in the academic field Jianu, Bodo, Buzarnescu or Neumann. Another aspect of the Banateans– ‘others’ relationship is the cultural cleavage theme. Many of the actors emphasize on historical and socio-cultural arguments in order to underline even more these differences. Sorin Antohi, in an article published in the socio-political journal ‘Revista 22’ linked these ‘othering mechanism’ to orientalism, making reference to Said’s concept.

Another characteristic which appears in every analyzed field is the central position occupied by Bucharest. On one hand the comparison with Bucharest is used as a reinforcement of the singularization strategy, by claiming that the province is the only one which is capable of competing with the center. On the other hand Bucharest is the target of the victimization strategies. According to these, the center by homogenizing on cultural level and centralizing excessively on politico-administrative level holds back the provinces, and most importantly Banat.

Before describing the discursive differences and similarities within the three social fields, one important comment is needed to be said. When using the strategies described

above many of the actors make references to Banat as the province, or Timisoara as the city – in some cases the two are used interchangeably –, with the same characteristics. Moreover, narratives about the city are extrapolated to the totality of Banat, while talking about Banat Timisoara is included.

The most important differences between the discourses of the actors come as a result of the contexts and positions that they are involved in. On academic level one can distinguish between three major discursive fields. In communism there was only one perspective from which history could have been studied, namely a homogenizing Romanian national one. In the early 90s as a result of the changes, the academic field had become a more liberalized space for debate, thus regional historiography appeared. Although the majority of the authors argued the singularity and uniqueness of Banat, many of them integrated their work in the larger nationalizing one, emphasizing on the distinct socio-cultural and historical features of Banat, but framing it in a unified Romanian national narrative. This was achieved by the parallel usage of Banatean (self)-stereotyping and legitimizing strategies. A second perspective was the pure regional one. The adepts of this perspective (Neumann, Vultur) introduce a Central European perspective, emphasizing on the uniqueness of the region as a result of the different national and religious influences. A central element in the purely regional perspectives is the 1989 Romanian revolution, which has a dual significance. The revolution started in Timisoara and this is the main evidence and starting point for the regionalist theories – because of the ethnic solidarity and need for democratization –, and similarly many of the regionalizing theories evolved as a need for understanding the 1989 events. The arguments presented by these authors could be integrated in a regionalist agenda, represented by Vighi in the cultural sphere or Coifan and Toro in the political one. This second perspective can be understood as an alternative against the hegemony of the national homogenizing discourse rooted from communism, but the two are not in direct conflict. While

the national narrative emphasizes on the Romanian presence in the region from the 2nd century, the pure regional one focuses on the modern history of the region. Moreover, in dealing with the modernity the nationalizing perspective highlights the importance of the 18th–20th century national movements, disregarding the multicultural aspects of the region. In contrast the purely regional perspective does not focus on the national movements and their impact on the social realities of the period. A third perspective is the Hungarian one. The Hungarian authors try to deconstruct the multiculturalism and tolerance stereotype delivering an own definition, by which references to minority rights can be made.

The common element in the works of the three essay writers – Gavreliuc, Vighi and Gheo – was the critical approach to the homogenizing national discourse. Moreover, this is the main difference between the cultural sphere and the academic one. While the mainstream academic literature on Banat did not engage in this critical deconstruction – it integrated the national narrative or disregarded it – the essay writers have taken a more dynamic approach. Despite this similarity, there are major differences between the three authors. Gavreliuc emphasizes on the flaws of national homogenizing discourse, but the regional one as well, questioning every kind of thick collective identity. Vighi speaks as a member of the Provincia group, his allusions to regional identity, the cultural differences between the provinces and the victimization strategies regarding the actions of the center are elements which legitimize the viability of the group's regionalist claims. He did not use strategies that emphasize only the uniqueness of Banat. In contrast with the other two authors, Gheo writes from a pure Banatean perspective. He questions the homogenous national identity and delivers similar arguments as the adepts of the purely regional perspective in the academic literature for the uniqueness and leading role of Banat, positioning himself in the same discursive field.

The third field that was included in this study was the political one. Compared to the academic and cultural spheres, the most important difference between the discourses

mentioned above and the political one is the context where the references to the Banatean identity appear. In Ciuhandu, Orza and Borza's case commemorations of the past and the strategies of regional (self)-stereotyping, singularization or the victimization appear as a legitimization of the achievements and projects in which the Mayor's office is involved in. Therefore, they try to reinforce their positions of power, by emphasizing on regional symbols and creating a sense of belongingness and group cohesion. The second main theme in which the regional references can be framed is regionalization. In this case speakers such as Coifan, Maxim and Toro – in the same way as Vighi from the cultural sphere – use the center-periphery relationship, the victimization strategies and the cultural cleavage argument in order to legitimize their claim of regionalization and decentralization. The third important element of the political discourse is related to multiculturalism and tolerance. On one hand, the Hungarian politicians make reference to it toward the Hungarian in-group in the same way as the Hungarian intelligentsia in the academic literature. By deconstructing the model and arguing against the Romanian nationalism, they are looking for political mobilization among Hungarians. By the same token, the Romanian elites are using it in conflictual situations as an integrating strategy, which dismisses the nationalist accusations.

The three discursive fields are neither a homogenous discursive structure, nor independent from each other. Actors from different social fields who pursue the same goals, use similar discourses. The references to the past are used in order to legitimize the pursued goals, actions or achievements. Moreover, the references to the regional elements regardless of the pursued goals or contexts in which they are has a latent function, through which they can generate a sense of collectivity, which creates a social identity in every individual. Therefore, a possible continuation of this research would be the measurement of these discursive elements on grassroots level, by analyzing the attitudes and beliefs that control the discourses of the population.

Appendixes

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