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## **Unifying or disuniting? Media interferences in shaping identities**

The target area of our paper brings into attention the reality of the migration of a significant proportion of the population in countries where labor is better paid that has not been studied previously, since its appearance is of recent date. The first actions that were questioning the ethnic identity of the majority population in Romania have emerged only after 1989, and visible tensions or conflicts did not exist before 2000. The novelty brought by this study – which is part of a larger research - is consistent with a fact which dominates the EU: the mobility of individuals and hybridization of identities are major challenges of the new Europe. Previous analyzes that have addressed the issue of identity in Romanian have focused mainly on the minorities in our country and on how we are perceived, as an ethnic group, by other nations. We do not know, however, authors or works that have analyzed the relationship between Romanians, balancing between identity and otherness.

The development and the liberalization of access to multimedia technologies reconfiguration the social relations in a short time. The postmodern media discourse suffered as well a series of transformations. The factuality, the eventuality are no longer dominant, the personification of subjects (or news) took their place. The way of saying (the enunciation) determines and imposes "what it is said" or "what should be said" at a time. The discoursivization scheme - by promoting aphorisms against syllogisms, para-argumentative speech patterns and oral verbosity, and pathos – are, in fact, censoring the reality, the factual reality. The sensationalisation and dramatization led in time to the establishment of stereotypes that have captured both subjects (stories) and language. The stereotype, as a prefabricated unit of language (thought, representation etc.) revealing the other, mediates our relationship with the reality. Defined as "verbal cultural palimpsests" by Galisson (1995), the stereotypes create and maintain a sense of belonging to a community and facilitate the creation of a collective identity. From this perspective, the stereotypes used in journalistic discourse must be integrated into a broader discussion concerning not the originality, but rather the veracity of speech and its effects on the sense of belonging. The stereotypes ("these pictures in our heads," Lippmann, 1991) represent systems of conditioned reflexes - composed of both images and representations, concepts, beliefs, ideas, judgments - emerged by repetition in the same conditions and which can be reproduced and can reproduce themselves indefinitely.

Due to the direct relationship with the receiver, the journalistic discourse exploits and often abuses of the reflective side of the stereotype. We admit, of course, that stereotype is essential to the enunciative and representative journalistic activities; the stereotype designates and notifies, explains and enforces, is a social catalyst, facilitating the access of a large number of receptors to the global, simplified, schematic knowledge, but equally he may become a genuine social disruptant in some cases, a source of tension and conflict. Especially

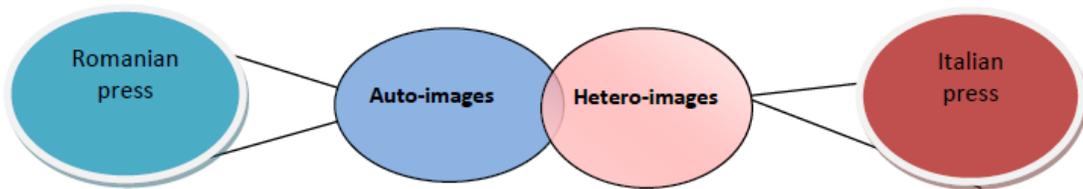
when the subject of the stereotipization is a minority situated at a distance and without feedback. From the perspective of this paper, the stereotype interests in terms of narrative technique, of discourse returned to modified contexts and participant in creating / shaping a collective imaginary.

### Media – promoter of social distance?

Romanians living abroad came to the attention of the media in two distinct waves:

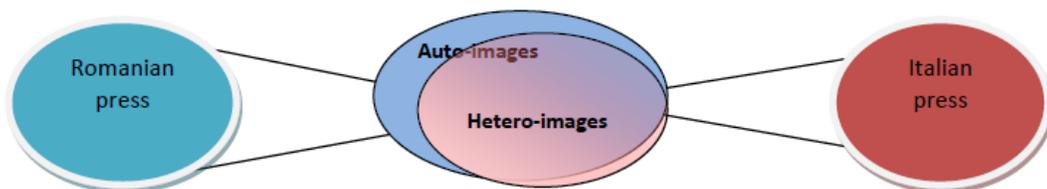
a) immediately after the 1989 revolution - the rhetoric used by media was overly positive; the country's borders open to allow the many immigrants to return home, often with humanitarian aid;

- in this first wave, the feeling of belonging and self-assertion of former emigrants coincided with recognition of the group, the identification occurring naturally and without convulsion;
- the "confrontation" has occurred between auto-images (self-image of a people), rather than between auto-images and hetero-images (as the case may be later, as it actually happens, today);
- some of these immigrants, after they were integrated in the new Romanian society became even leaders (in areas such as politics, economy, culture, etc..), representatives of collective social identity.



b) after 2000, with the relaxation of work and travel conditions in EU countries and the sedimentation of an often pejoratively designated social group as "strawberry pickers (căpșunari)“;

- as their number increased, so is the interest of media in monitoring them;
- through a paradoxical discursive derive, the coverage effect proved to be a perverse one: in search of sensational, trivial matters and conflict, the "strawberry pickers" have been marginalized and shown as outsiders, the hetero-images being favored over auto-images.



The Romanian minority living abroad was presented as an alterity, against which citizens of

Romania had to differentiate, not to be identified with; thus, Romanians abroad were stealing, raping and committing crimes, while in the country, all these acts are committed by individuals with behavioral problems (convicted, drunks etc.). Few, very few have been the cases where the media have adopted a different behavior, telling about the success of the integration of Romanians (the case of Costel Busuioc, one of the participants and later on the winner of the TV show *Spain's Got Talent!*).

The tabloid cut of reality by promoting subjectivity and affectivity destabilized the journalistic discourse. To the extent that it was institutionalized - initially by an abuse of the journalists, then with the complicity of the public - a contract was concluded and media works are exclusively presented from this angle. More important however is that when, exceptionally, the journalistic discourse tries to objectify itself, reactions occur (on forums) to criticize this attitude or minimize the importance of the information. As in a spiral, the news production destabilized the perception that, in turn, led to a speech-pattern, a stereotyped speech. A stereotypical expectation emerges: we know, whenever we are to be provided with information about Romanians abroad, what will follow - a rape, a theft, a crime.

***Distribution of articles dedicated to Romanians living in Italy in Romanian newspapers between 2001-2005<sup>1</sup>***

Publication	Occurrences	Tonality	
Adevărul	534	Positive (60)	
		Neutral (87)	
		Negative (387)	
Libertatea	210	Positive(19)	
		Neutral (41)	
		Negative (150)	

***Table no. 1***

Until the recent case Mailat, the ratio between the positive and negative news about Romanians in Italy was about. 1/5.

***Distribution of articles dedicated to Romanians in Italian newspapers between 2001-2005***

Publication	Occurrences	Tonality	
La Repubblica	234	Positive(30)	
		Neutral (89)	
		Negative (115)	
Il Secolo XIX	160	Positive(16)	
		Neutral (56)	
		Negative (88)	

***Table no. 2***

Thus, the Romanian media reflected the image of a group stating his Romanian affiliation in the same way the Italian media did (the ratio being the same 1 / 5).

Through a phenomenon common to all media in recent years - ***media mimicry/imitation*** – Mailat-case has become a symbol of confrontation between the reference groups and the affiliation/membership groups. Romanians in Italy began to assign, in varying degrees, items that gave them the illusion of belonging to the daily habitat. Or, media worked in destabilizing this process from two directions: both from Romania, by the way the case was

<sup>1</sup> Many of the news from this period of time concerned sport issues (Romanian football-players were in Italy back then, Romanian teams played friendly games against Italian teams etc.)

illustrated by updating similar facts committed in the past, and from Italy, through a generalization of the – at all flattering - attributes assigned to the Romanian ethnics.

***Distribution of articles with reference to the Mailat-case in Romanian media***

Publication	Occurrences between 1.11.2007 – 10.07.2009	Tonality
Adevărul	145	Positive (15)
		Neutral (8)
		Negative (122)
Libertatea	77	Positive (7)
		Neutral (6)
		Negative (64)

**Table no. 3**

Later on, after numerous joint calls of both the Romanian and the Italian authorities who denounced the dangerous ennonciative drift adopted by media, resulting in a multiplication of cases of abuse by Italians against Romanians around, the media have tried to rebalance the relationship between identity and alterity, adopting strategic measures. Pages and headings appeared dedicated to these types of topics (Romanians in Italy, Romanians in Spain – in Adevărul) and a slight reduction in the gap between negative and positive news can be seen already in the Romanian media.

***Distribution of articles about Romanians in Italy after the Mailat-case***

Publication	Occurrences 1.11.2007 – 01.02.2010	Tonality
Adevărul	523	Positive (95)
		Neutral (57)
		Negative (371)
Libertatea	402	Positive (82)
		Neutral (49)
		Negative (271)

**Table no. 4**

***Distribution of articles in Italian press after the Mailat-case***

Publication	Occurrences 1.11.2007 – 01.02.2010	Tonality
La Repubblica	298	Positive (15)
		Neutral (68)
		Negative (215)
Il Secolo XIX	189	Positive(11)
		Neutral (36)
		Negative (142)

**Table no. 5**

### **Instead of conclusions.**

Identities are not only "political constructions" but also "cultural systems of representations" (Hall, 1994: 200), through which one can interpret the imaginary of a coherent community. Our belief is that Romanian minorities in Italy are discursively participating in the construction of two symbolic communities: the one in the country of origin and in the country of employment or residence. Analyzing how these two discursive communities overlap provided us with a number of elements that confirm a dominant orientation – id est the adherence to the "borrowed" identity. Under these conditions, the journalistic discourse takes valences of destabilizing the *status quo*. We appreciate, based on these preliminary results, that media tend to favor transformational and destructive strategies and practices at the expense of constructivist or perpetuation strategies.