The National University of Political Studies and Public Administration

PhD Thesis Summary

MYTHS AND STRUCTURES OF THE POLITICAL IMAGINARY IN THE ROMANIAN MASS MEDIA

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SUMMARY

Without claiming to be exhaustive, this thesis examines myths and structures of the political imaginary in the Romanian mass media, being a research in the field of political science that addresses the sphere of political symbolism.

The General Objective (GO) of this research refers to making a contribution to the specialised literature in the field of political science, a contribution at the level of the general level of contribution that is usually present in the practice of this field. The specific objectives are detailed in the following pages.

The subject matter of political symbolism stands as a realm very rich in meanings, a sublime area of political science, given its qualitative-interpretive nature, whereas at the same time being an area of political science that often tends to be pejoratively encumbered by a possible perception of a certain lack of scientific rigor when it comes to applied analyses on political symbolism, in terms of the divide between the qualitative side of research inherent to the niche of political symbolism and an approach that is also/mainly oriented toward the quantitative side that engenders a more efficient potential in terms of scientific rigor, in the meaning in which rigor is nowadays regarded in the context of social sciences.

Both the type of this study and the assumed specific objectives derive from the specificity of the area of political symbolism. I aimed at creating a tool for applied analysis to allow quantification as well – and not just quantification as in counting, but quantification through a research method that would bear multiple attributes regarding the notion of scientific rigor pertaining to a mainly quantitatively-oriented version of approach.

In terms of types of PhD theses, this thesis is a thesis that is focused on an applied type of analysis approach, with a large sample size, it is thus only natural for this thesis to look different in counterdistinction to the other type of thesis consisting exclusively in a theoretical approach.

This research is very complex, a research that did not limit itself to the applied analysis approach, as it also addresses a theoretical approach through the lens of fundamental authors from the area of political symbolism. The advantage brought forth by focusing mainly on fundamental authors such as Raoul Girardet, Gilbert Durand, Roger-Gérard Schwartzenberg, Murray Edelman, etc. in the theoretical part of this study is occasioned by the relevance that their theories nowadays still bear.

Others authors addressed, such as Philip Seargeant and Lucian Boia, refer to Raoul Girardet's four fundamental political myths.

Philip Seargeant indirectly refers to these political myths as narrative constants of a seemingly singular story in the context of the post-truth era, of the divide between the rational side and the emotional side in terms of voter reactions, of the elements that nowadays amplify propaganda, disinformation or the fake news phenomenon, for instance those regarding the

matter of populism, whereas Lucian Boia directly refers to these four fundamental political myths, regarding them as essential archetypes from the standpoint of political symbolism.

An example of a slogan used for political purposes in recent years, a slogan that was successful from the perspective of the ability to mobilize crowds could be, for example, a simple phrase with a mobilizing role that can encompass at least two political myths at the level of its meaning. Hence, the urging ”Let's go towards the Government, for they work at night like thieves!” is a phrase made up of two short sentences in an imperative mode containing the myth of the Conspiracy (at night, like thieves) and the myth of the Unity (Let's – us, together, united against the conspiracy). Here, what is unclear is the myth of the Saviour – but it is implicit, and the myth of the Golden Age – which is also implied, by reference to the fall of a corrupt and thieving government, possibly followed by an uncorrupt and honest government. Another example of a successful slogan would be the one in the Unitaed States, that of Donald Trump, ”Make America great again!”, a slogan implicitly referring to all four myths, whereas explicitly referring to the myth of the Golden Age and to the myth of the Unity, and implicitly referring to the myth of the Conspiracy and to the myth of the Saviour.

These are only a few of the arguments underlrying the fact that approaches through the lens of fundamental authors such as Raoul Girardet still hold relevant to the field of political science.

In the following I will present the calibrated objectives of the research.

When it comes to the specific objectives, the First Specific Objective (SO1) regards a contribution to a better understanding of the theories on political symbolism and political mythology, without claiming to be exhaustive, of course.

The first research question is hence: *What would be a few elements pertaining to the sphere of political symbolism and political mythology that may be outlined for the purpose of gaining a better understanding on the dynamics of political symbolism from the Romanian mass media and political imaginary?*

In this regard, the hypothesis is that focusing on the four fundamental political myths of Raoul Girardet, together with other general elements pertaining to the sphere of political symbolism and mythology, would generate a theoretical puzzle that can aid by adding to the current state of understanding from the perspective of studying the dynamics in terms of the myths and structures from the political imaginary in the Romanian mass media.

The second specific objective of this research (SO2) may be placed in the context mentioned in the above, i.e. in the context of the divide between the qualitative approach to research inherent in the addressed niche of political symbolism and an approach also/mainly oriented towards a quantitative nature, that may be able to generate a more efficient potential in the sense of scientific rigor as it is currently understood in the context of the social sciences.

In this regard, I intended to create an instrument for applied analysis. The second specific objective of this PhD thesis thus refers to a quantitative approach, to the aspect of a predominantly quantitatively-oriented approach intended to be imprinted on this mainly qualitative sphere of political symbolism.

The method of applied research thus chosen for this purpose is the method of content analysis, a method that by means of sampling as a *sine qua non* aspect may enable to conduct an applied analysis on an extremely large quantity of research data, i.e. articles in the mass media, more specifically, press articles, newspaper articles. I thus aimed at calibrating a version of a mainly quantitatively-oriented research method, a version engendering the possibility of being practically applicable to newspapers from different periods, to both a newspaper from almost a century ago, e.g. the Romanian newspaper "The Universe" from the from the interwar period, more specifically, from the period of the Regency, and to a more recent newspaper, e.g. the Romanian newspaper "The Truth" from the 1990s, the analysis being applied on the year 1992.

The Second Specific Objective of this PhD thesis (SO2) is hence to calibrate a version of content analysis that would be practically applicable to the area of political symbolism-mythology when it comes to mass media and, more specifically, to newspapers.

The second research question may hence be phrased as follows: *What would be a few elements in terms of political symbolism dynamics, from the perspective of the niche of political symbolism, that may be outlined through the drafting, through the practical calibration of a version of the method of content analysis?*

The hypothesis is that for the area of study of political mythology-symbolism, a version of a predominantly quantitative method of applied analysis such as the content analysis method may be calibrated to aid in enriching the existing knowledge – without claiming to be exhaustive, of course – in the sense of a possibility for a slightly better grasp on the general topic of the dynamics of the political myths in the Romanian media, a version of the content analysis method that may be applied to a large amount of information such as that in newspapers.

In accordance with the type of thesis and with the assumed research objectives, as well as with the specificity of the sphere of political symbolism-mythology, I will now very briefly present only a few of the elements of the entire complex research design of the PhD thesis.

The theoretical foundations part of the research bears the advantage of focusing both on the theories of fundamental authors in the field of political symbolism and the added advantage of certain elements of interdisciplinarity brought forth through the case studies focused mainly on the theoretical side. In the part of theoretical foundations, I also outlined theoretical aspects regarding to the deeper layer of political symbolism represented by the notion of archetype according to C.G. Jung, in the context of the phylogenetic component within political symbolism.

This PhD thesis bears the advantage of interdisciplinarity, the main method – but not the only method used herein – the Content Analysis method pertaining to the field of communication sciences.

The part of applied analysis regards the methodological calibration of a version of the Content Analysis method with the potential to be applied to an extremely large number of newspaper articles, as well as its actual application and the results and graphs obtained, and their

interpretation. Moreover, I also carried out a qualitative text analysis, applied to part of the sample used for the the Content Analysis method.

From the perspective of the methodological design, the methods used in the applied analysis are the analysis of social documents (newspapers being social documents), the content analysis, and the qualitative text analysis.

Regarding the method of Content Analysis, the main method of applied analysis in this research, I researched the definitions and approaches regarding this method in the specialized literature and calibrated the version of content analysis so that it may be applied on newspapers, on an extremely large number of newspaper articles. For reasons of methodological validity, I aimed to calibrate a version of the content analysis method that may be applied even to interwar newspaper articles, as well as to other periods, e.g. to press articles from the 1990s.

The calibrated version of the content analysis method has sampling as a *sine qua non* element, in order to allow for a better overview. It was necessary to calibrate a precise sampling method. In order to formulate the sampling methodology, I consulted more newspaper articles than those which ended up being included in the sample.

The sampling is from ten to ten days, which was then updated to the structure of the months, then updated once again in accordance with the structure of a calendar year. This resulted in the following sample configuration: the 1st, the 11th, and the 21st of each month of each year (e.g. January 1st, January 11th, January 21st). From the resulting calendar dates, I consistently selected every front page of the newspaper from each day. From this front page, through an applied analysis comparative approach, I selected one newspaper article, the one with the greatest symbolic potential in terms of political symbolism.

When it comes to the newspaper article having thus resulted following the pre-selection phase of the analysis – one article for each day from the sample, I considered the *idea* with a mythological substratum referring to each of Raoul Girardet's four fundamental political myths of the collective imaginary as an analysis unit. I determined which of the four myths is the most present in each newspaper article – one dimension of analysis (the most present of the four myths), and I also determined the other political myths (given that from Raoul Girardet's point of view the myths are implicitly interrelated), which generated other three analysis dimensions (i.e. the second most present myth, the third, and the fourth).

The sample related to the content analysis method implied going through a number of 1,826 newspaper articles from the interwar newspaper The Universe, from the years 1927-1931, as well as going through 425 newspaper articles from the newspaper The Truth from the year 1992, these being the newspaper articles from the archieves of the Carol I Central University Library. In total, I consulted over 2,251 newspaper articles from the archieve, which implied an enormous amount of effort.

The Results Centralization Table for the content analysis from the perspective of political symbolism thus includes the dynamics from the perspective of the four myths, ordered from top to bottom in the respective column, from the most present to the least present in each of the articles selected and analyzed on these four dimensions.

The table including the content of the title of each column-section but not including the other content (the one regarding the specific newspaper articles from one newspaper or another) refers to the calibrated version of the content analysis method.

The table including the analysis applied to the specific newspaper articles regards both the analysis design and the results of the analysis.

The results of the content analysis also include the interpretations of every quarter of the table for each of the analysed years, as well as each annual graph consisting of the results expressed numerically, and the interpretation of each of these annual graphs, followed by an aggregate graph, an additional graph regarding the sample from the interwar period and its interpretation.

In the context of this PhD thesis that pertains to the category of applied analysis theses, both the version of the calibrated content analysis and the tables and graphs as the centralization of the analysis results represent elements of originality, to which various originality elements from the theoretical framework and interdisciplinarity elements from the case studies are added, as well as the originality elements from the additional qualitative text analysis.

From the content analysis we can notice, for instance, that in the sample from the newspaper The Universe from the year 1927, the political myth of the Unity appears as the first and most present of Raoul Girardet's four fundamental political myths in thirteen newspaper articles out of the thirty-six, therefore in just over a third of the articles, followed by the Conspiracy, the Saviour, and the Golden Age, the Conspiracy being the most present of the four political myths in fewer newspaper articles than the political myth of the Unity, the Saviour being the first most present of the myths in fewer newspaper articles than the Conspiracy, whereas the Golden Age myth stood as the first most present of the political myths in fewer articles than the myth of the Saviour, as we may notice from the graph regarding the sample from the year 1927, the newspaper The Universe.

In the case of the sample from the year 1928 from the same newspaper, the political myth of the Conspiracy appears as the first most present of Raoul Girardet's four fundamental political myths in twenty-four of the thirty-six newspaper articles, in exactly two thirds of the articles, followed by the Unity, then by the Saviour and the Golden Age in equal proportions.

In the sample from the year 1929 from the same newspaper "The Universe", when referring to this dinamic of the political myths in terms of the first most present myth of the four political myths, the myth of the Conspiracy appears as the most present of the myths in the case of twenty-eight out of the thirty-six articles, i.e. in over two thirds of the articles, followed in this regard by the Unity, the Golden Age, and the Saviour.

When referring to the sample from the year 1930 from the same interwar newspaper, the political myth of the Conspiracy stands as the most present of the four myths, by the same criteria, appearing as the most present of the four political myths in twenty-three articles out of the thirty-six – that is, in almost two thirds of the articles, follwed by the Unity, the Saviour, and the Golden Age.

In the case of the year 1931 from the same newspaper The Universe, the political myth of the Conspiracy appears as the first most present of the four political myths in twenty-two articles

out of the total of thirty-six, hence in almost two thirds of the articles, followed by the political myths of the Unity, the Saviour, and the Golden Age.

When it comes to the sample from the year 1992 from the Romanian newspaper "The Truth", the political myth of the Conspiracy appeared as the first most present of the four political myths in fourteen articles out of the total of thirty-six – i.e. in slightly over a third of the articles, followed by the Unity, the Saviour, and the Golden Age.

When aggregating the results regarding the sample from the newspaper The Universe, the years 1927-1931 (five years), we may notice that the political myth of the Conspiracy stands as the first most present of Raoul Girardet's four political myths in the case of one hundred and nine out of the total of one hundred and eighty newspaper articles, i.e. in the case of sixty percent (60.5555555556%) of the articles, followed by the political myth of the Unity (23.8888888889%), the political myth of the Saviour (8.8888888889%), and the political myth of the Golden Age (6.6666666667%). I also created an aggregate graph of the results obtained for the period 1927-1931 from the interwar newspaper "The Universe".

The results obtained for the analyzed sample from each year are quantifiable and can be compared to each other, and a more detailed interpretation of the results is also available in the sections of Partial Results following each of the annual graphs (1927 – the newspaper "The Universe", 1928 – the newspaper "The Universe", 1929 – the newspaper "The Universe", 1930 – the newspaper "The Universe", 1931 – the newspaper "The Universe", 1992 – the newspaper "The Truth"), as well as a more detailed interpretation of the results for the years 1927-1931 from the interwar newspaper "The Universe".

When it comes to the analysis of political symbolism – an additional analysis, a qualitative-text analysis on aspects regarding these four political myths of Raoul Girardet as well as on the more profound level of political symbolism represented by the taxonomy of archetypal structures and the regimes of the image in Gilbert Durand's sense, following the qualitative-text analysis we may notice, for instance, that the political myth of the Conspiracy was in the year 1930 in the newspaper The Universe related to the symbolic themes of the fear of Hungarians, the fear of Soviets, and the fear of foreigners in general, symbolic themes corresponding to the configuration of political symbolism from the fundamental political myth of the Conspiracy. It was also possible to illustrate the existence of an array of the political symbolism configuration comprising symbols and symbolic images referring to the existence of a nationalist discourse, even obsessively nationalistic, an array coming to replace the developmentalist discourse and the previous obsession over the country's development, another observation being, for instance, that the government and the political parties tended to be described as a group trying to destroy the country, acting against the people.

Regarding the case studies, they addressed the topic of legitimation and referred to myths and symbols that play a role in political legitimation. Whereas the main content analysis in this PhD thesis regards a sample of newspaper articles from the years 1927-1931 and 1992, and whereas the qualitative-text analysis is applied on a part of the sample from the year 1930, in order to convey a better outlook on the myths and structures of the political imaginary in the Romanian media, the case studies bear an approach focused on myths and symbols that bear a

role in political legitimation, the case studies referring to other periods and theoretical aspects pertaining to the sphere of political symbolism, occasionally including certain elements of interdisciplinarity.

Given the topic of this research and its title, as well as the corresponding type of research approach, there was no need for the case studies to refer to the same periods, the case studies referring in a complementary manner and in a broader sense to myths and symbols bearing a role in political legitimation. Given that the research is not focused on a historical approach, the fact that the case studies also covered periods other than those from the part of the content analysis or than those from the qualitative-text type of analysis does not stand as a methodological drawback and does not impact the overall coherence of the research, but, on the contarty, it may generate a better outlook on the myths and structures in the Romanian media – myths and structures which represent the topic of this research, and not the historical period itself to which the content analysis is applied.

I carried out an interdisciplinary case study regarding elements of political symbolism – including the four fundamental political myths from Raoul Girardet's theory, in relation to elements pertaining to the field of psychology – Jean Cottraux, Martin Seligman, a case study on a part of the period of the Coronavirus pandemic, the case study aiming, among others, at aspects related to the idea of legitimation within certain elements of the general context and of the *grosso modo* discourse from the mass media of the time, discourse in a broad sense, a discourse both reflecting and shaping the colelctive imaginary of the time regarding the topic of the pandemic.

Three other case studies also referred to the idea of legitimation, this time to the legitimation of politicians. The first of these case studies addressed a phenomenon in Romania related to the idea of the legitimation of some politicians through the appeal to symbols of scientific knowledge in the context of some cases of plagiarism, plagiarism that was subsequently formally proven, a case study in which starting from theoretical elements of Raoul Girardet, I then continued the line of reasoning based on the concepts from the specialised literature from the field of political and social science, continuing with Pierre Bourdieu's theory on habitus, cultural capital, educational capital, symbolic capital etc. and eventually discussing Thorstein Veblen's theory on emulation and the conspicuous consumption of luxury goods as a potential explanation to the intriguing phenomenon from the Romanian space described in the case study, a phenomenon implying the appeal to symbols of epistemic legitimation and not just the usual attempt at legitimation through popular vote, through good results in the elections.

The next case study consisted of an exploratory endeavour starting from concepts such as that of the Freudian slip and that of congruence from Freud's theory from the field of psychology, the case study referring to the attempt for legitimation of politicians through demagogic means in an effort of establish oneself as a Saviour, in the sense of the political myth of the Saviour from Girardet's stance.

The third case study – one regarding the idea of the legitimation attempts of politicians in Romania by appealing to symbols, a case study that is at the same time the fourth case study in this research, in the context wherein all four case studies addressed the idea of legitimation in

the context of political symbolism – was a case study comprising a different version of the method of content analysis, a version that I applied on social media posts, more precisely on a limited number of ten social media posts of each of three Romanian political leaders, the analysis of the thirty posts from social media generating quantitative results expressed in three graphs.

Hence, this PhD thesis employed mixed research methods, carrying out a methodological blend between a mainly quantitatively-oriented research approach and a qualitative type of approach, a blend that has the attribute of complementarity, the methodological aspects aiming at the possibility of a better outlook on the myths and structures of the political imaginary in the Romanian media.

This research is thus very complex, comprising the method of the analysis of social documents – newspapers being social documents, the method of content analysis in two versions – for the more complex version I consulted over two thousand newspaper articles in a physical format from the archive of the Carol I Central University Library, the method of qualitative-text analysis, and also three from the four case studies (the fourth case study of the research being the one corresponding to the secondary version of the content analysis method and at the same time the third from the section comprising three case studies on the topic of the legitimation of politicians), all this adding to the aspect of theoretical approaches comprising authors with complex theories such as Gilbert Durand, with the taxonomy of regimes of the image, and Carl Gustav Jung, with his theory of the archetype, the research also occasionally encompassing other interdisciplinary aspects such as the concepts of authors such as Thorstein Veblen, S. Freud or Jean Cottraux, as well as the interdisciplinarity of the method of content analysis from the field of communication sciences.

By those listed and detailed in the above, both the General Objective and the Specific Objectives (SO1 and SO2) of this research were achieved, the research making a contribution to the specialised literature whereas managing to convey a pronounced character of originality and innovation.

Personal contribution

The personal contribution from the perspective of the elements of innovation and originality (aimed at as a general desideratum at the level of PhD theses) regards elements of argumentation, the ability to operate with concepts and symbolic content, general critical thinking skills, the calibration of this main version of content analysis, as well as the results obtained through this applied analysis, by means of this calibrated version of content analysis, without claiming to be exhaustive.

The personal contribution also refers to aspects pertaining to the methodological design of this research, in the sense of the complementarity of the overall approach through the mixed research methods used, merging elements regarding the method of the analysis of social documents – newspapers being social documents, the method of content analysis in two versions in this reserach, of which the main version is significantly more complex and implied

the consulting of over two thousand newspaper articles from the archieve of the Carol I Central University Library, the method of qualitative-text analysis applied on newspaper articles from the interwar period, an analysis merging elements from Gilbert Durand's taxonomy of regimes of the image with aspects regarding Raoul Girardet's four political myths and, at times, with rhetorical-discursive elements, as well as the case studies regarding the legitimation of politicians.

I believe the level of contribution brought forth by this research is significant, addressing aspects regarding both the methodological design of the research and the conceptual approach of the theoretical framework.

When referring to the part of the presentation of the theoretical fundamentals, given the overall complexity level of this research as well as the level of complexity of the entire methodological design, and also considering the level of complexity of the theoretical elements regarding the conceptual framework of the world of political myths and symbols alongside the more profound layer of the complex phylogenetic component of political symbolism, at times, in the part of theoretical foundations, the focus was on a deeper-level aproach – such as the one in the case of the multiple bibliographic sources related to the theory of the archetype of C.G. Jung or such as the one in the case of the many facets of political symbolism-mythology from the perspective of Raoul Girardet – rather than a focus simply based on an extraordinary large number of different authors that in the specific context of the overall methodological and conceptual design of this research would not have necessarily constituted an approach able to offer significantly more value. Also, taking into consideration that the applied analysis is a first-hand analysis of the content of the newspaper articles from the calibrated sample, this stands as a great asset of this research, an asset that may counterbalance, within the applied analysis, the operation in the applied analysis part with only those authors on whose theories I founded and carried out that respective part of the analysis, hence making up for not operating with as many authors as would have corresponded to a secondary analysis.

In the case studies as well as in other parts of the research I occasionally included various types of interdisciplinary approaches, for the purpose of ensuring an even greater character of originality. The ideas, concepts, theories with interdisciplinary elements that I used are a part either of the topics that were of cognitive-intellectual interest to me during the carrying out of this research, or topics related to those of interest to me, or topics wherewith I had already been somewhat familiar. These being areas of cognitive-intellectual interest to me, of epistemic curiosity, thematic areas that were not part of what was mandatory for the purpose of the thesis in the field of political symbolism, I tried as much as possible to include what I believed may convey more value and originality to the research endeavour, motivated by this epistemic curiosity.

The potential impact of the research and future perspectives

The potential impact of this research also resides, among others, in the calibration of a version of the method of content analysis that may be applied in the future to more periods, to more newspapers, even to newspapers in various foreign languages.