

*The National School of Political Science and Public Administration*

**An Analysis of Power in Romania from  
the Perspective of Antonio Gramsci  
and Michel Foucault**

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# Summary

## Introduction

Classical analyses of power in contemporary societies focus predominantly on its visible forms, namely on laws, political parties or state institutions. However, such an approach misses precisely the subtle mechanisms through which domination is reproduced in everyday life. In the contemporary public sphere, the levers of direct coercion are increasingly being replaced by sophisticated technologies of consent production and by practices of social disciplining that no longer require physical constraint in order to be effective.

Starting from this observation, the present thesis sets out to shift the analytical focus away from institutional forms and towards the area in which power operates through discourse and through technologies of government. In order to do this, the thesis brings together Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault, two thinkers who are usually employed separately and whose conceptual apparatuses are often considered incompatible.

The central thesis of the work is that public discourse does not merely describe reality but constructs it. In other words, discursive macrostructures are not a passive mirror of society but actively shape relations of power and crystallise materially in the form of class relations. The language through which we speak about the economy, about public sector employees or about austerity is not merely a way of describing the world; it is the very instrument through which that world takes on a particular form.

The aim of the research is to decipher the mechanisms through which power is produced and reproduced in contemporary Romania by means of media discourse. The period of analysis is the 2023-2025 interval, chosen because it represents, in Gramscian terms, a moment of organic crisis superimposed on an intensification of governmentality in the Foucauldian sense. It is an interval marked by budgetary pressures, sectoral strikes and political reconfigurations, that is, a moment in which the structural tensions of society become visible and can be observed at the level of discursive production.

The research is guided by three fundamental questions. The first concerns the way in which the theories of Gramsci and Foucault can be synergistically instrumentalised in order to analyse the physiology of power relations in society. The second concerns the way in which media discourse shapes the configuration of power relations. The third concerns the concrete

impact of discursive macrostructures upon the micro level, tracking how these shape the way individuals act and define themselves within society.

### **Structure of the thesis**

The thesis is structured into six chapters, four of which are devoted to the construction of the theoretical-methodological framework and two to the empirical analysis.

Chapter I, Introduction, presents the general context of the research, the current state of the art, the problem and the research questions, the methodology, the structure of the work, and its original contribution. This chapter fixes the general framework of the investigation and justifies the choice of a hybrid perspective on power.

Chapter II, Hegemony – from Gramsci to a Contemporary Understanding, is devoted entirely to Antonio Gramsci. The chapter traces the sources of the concept of hegemony from the ancient Greeks, through Lenin and Croce, up to its refinement in the Prison Notebooks. It then addresses, in turn, the relation between Gramsci and the Marxist heritage, the Gramscian concept of ideology and the central apparatus of hegemony, with references to related concepts such as the historical bloc, the integral state, the organic intellectual, civil society, common sense and passive revolution. The final section of the chapter discusses the strategy of the war of manoeuvre versus the war of position, as well as the problem of counter-hegemony. Gramsci thus provides the tools for analysing power at the strategic level, namely at the macro level of society.

Chapter III, Michel Foucault – on Power, is devoted to the Foucauldian conceptual apparatus. The chapter successively presents the concepts of governmentality, (neo)liberal governmentality, technologies of the self, the genealogical and archaeological methods, the concept of discourse, the relationship between discourse and power, the relationship between knowledge and power, and the concept of regime of truth. Foucault shows that modern power no longer operates solely from the top down, through force, but circulates horizontally through fine-grained networks that discipline bodies and shape minds. External constraint thus becomes internalised self-discipline, and the individual ends up supervising himself.

Chapter IV, Gramsci and Foucault – Towards a Common Approach, is the theoretical core of the thesis. This chapter proposes a functional articulation of the two authors, rather than a fusion that would dilute the specificity of each conceptual apparatus. The articulation is inspired by the contributions of Mark Olssen, Jonathan Joseph, Michael Ekers and Alex Loftus. Within this division of analytical labour, Gramsci is mobilised for the macro level and explains

who holds power and why, whereas Foucault is mobilised for the micro level and explains the concrete way in which power is implemented in everyday life. The chapter also details the compatibilities between Critical Discourse Analysis and the synergistic use of the two authors, the perspective proposed by Norman Fairclough, the relationship between critical discourse analysis and hegemony, the influence of Foucault on Siegfried Jäger's approach, and the concrete stages of critical discourse analysis.

Chapter V, *The Analysis of Power Relations from the Perspective of Gramsci and Foucault – Case Study*, opens the empirical part of the thesis. This chapter presents the resolution of the Gramsci-Foucault tensions at the analytical level, sets out in detail the methodological approach, justifies the choice of the four media platforms (Digi24, Adevărul, Libertatea and Știrile ProTV) and clarifies the specific function each of them performs within the architecture of dominant discourse. Digi24 is analysed as a technocratic legitimator of political decisions through its appeal to experts. Adevărul is investigated as an anchor of hegemony in traditional values and conservative sensibilities. Libertatea functions as a case study for the limits of freedom of expression, especially after its takeover by Ringier. Știrile ProTV is interpreted as the supreme instance of depoliticisation, through the transformation of structural problems into individual dramas or fatalities. The chapter then details the three levels of analysis, namely the micro-analysis of the text itself, the meso-analysis of discursive practice and the macro-analysis of social practice, and sets out the concrete indicators tracked at each level. This framework is subsequently applied to three strategically selected case studies. The first is the fiscal moment, centred on the austerity packages of 2024-2025, generically known as the „Ordonanța Trenuleț” and the Budget Law. This moment addresses the way in which austerity is naturalised through expert discourse under the imperium of the TINA doctrine. The second is the disciplinary moment, triggered by the teachers' strike of spring 2023. This moment allows the analysis of pastoral power and of the rhetoric of vocation as subtle instruments of intellectual labour exploitation. The third is the biopolitical moment, generated by the „Houses of Horror” (Azilele Groazei) scandal that erupted in July 2023. This moment investigates the way in which the state manages the surplus population and negotiates the boundaries of responsibility between institutions and the individual. Each case study activates a distinct mechanism of power and allows the observation of a distinct dimension of the hegemony of governmentality.

The final chapter revisits, in turn, the three research questions and formulates synthesized answers. To the first question, regarding the combined use of the two authors, the conclusion

is that Gramsci provides the indispensable strategic framework for understanding the profound stakes of power, through the concepts of historical bloc, integral state, and organic intellectual, while Foucault furnishes the tactical toolkit necessary for its operationalization through the concepts of governmentality, biopolitics, and regime of truth. To the second question, concerning how media discourse shapes power relations, the conclusion is that the mass media functions as an active hegemonic apparatus through two main mechanisms, namely the construction of antagonistic categories (public sector workers versus private sector workers, welfare recipients versus taxpayers) and the naturalization of inequality by adopting economic language as the only possible truth. To the third question, regarding the impact on the subject, the conclusion is that hegemonic discourse produces the ideal neoliberal subject: an atomized individual who internalizes their own precarity as a personal fault.

### **Research results**

At the level of micro-analysis, the research identifies three linguistic mechanisms through which unequal power relations are naturalised. The first mechanism is nominalisation, understood not as a mere stylistic variation but as an ideological operation of reification through which dynamic processes are transformed into static entities. The dominant terms in the description of the fiscal crisis are not verbs that indicate direct governmental action, such as „the government cuts” or „the coalition has decided”, but rather abstract nouns derived from those actions. The government's decision to cut salaries becomes „fiscal adjustment”, and the lack of funding becomes „budget deficit”. For instance, the article published by Digi24 on 4 February 2025, titled „The Government does not take into account the socio-economic realities...”, although seemingly critical, validates the technocratic vocabulary through strategic nominalisations such as „economic growth of 2.5%” and „budget deficit of 7.04% of GDP”. Through this procedure, human decisions, by definition contingent and contestable, are metamorphosed into immutable states of affairs.

The second mechanism is the use of biological metaphors, through which the economy is described as a sick body that needs to be healed. Formulations such as „restoring the health of public finances”, „cleansing the system” or „the obese state” appear repeatedly. Within this logic, austerity becomes a necessary surgical intervention, and the economic expert is transformed into a physician. The citizen becomes the passive patient who must endure the pain. Whoever refuses austerity no longer appears as a citizen defending his rights, but as an

irrational patient refusing treatment. This semantic framing delegitimises from the outset any rational resistance to fiscal measures.

The third mechanism is the lexical division between the private sector and the public sector, which functions as an active instrument of social stratification. The private sector is valorised through phrases such as „the engine of the economy”, „the business environment”, „the investors”, or „those who produce surplus value”. The public sector is stigmatised through terms such as „bugetari” (public sector employees), „bloated apparatus”, „sinecures” or „unsustainable expenditures”. The most telling case is the transformation of the term „bugetar” into a pejorative label. The teacher, the doctor or the civil servant are no longer defined by the nature of the work performed, but solely by the source of their income, presented as a burden upon the private taxpayer. This divide et impera strategy serves to obscure the real conflict between capital and labour, redirecting social frustration into a horizontal struggle between various categories of wage-earners.

A fourth tier of the micro-analysis, modality, reveals the absolute dominance of deontic modality in political statements concerning fiscal measures. The corpus abounds in constructions such as „we can no longer carry on like this”, „it is a national emergency”, „we must take action” or „the only responsible solution”. Through the use of these markers of absolute necessity, a contestable political option is transformed into an incontestable objective truth, which decisively contributes to the installation of a regime of truth in the Foucauldian sense.

The case of the teachers' strike highlights a specific dimension, namely that of pastoral power. The official discourse consistently uses the term „vocation” to frame teaching activity. When political decision-makers state that being a teacher is „a mission, not a profession”, they are not paying a compliment, but rather deploying a technology of disciplining. „Vocation” places the work within a spiritual, pre-modern and extra-economic register and cancels out material claims. The teachers respond through phrases such as „we are not welfare recipients”, attempting to extract themselves from this framing. Yet, through the very formulation of the negation, they indirectly validate the stigma attached to the term „welfare recipient”, which shows how deeply the neoliberal common sense has penetrated. Their lexical struggle only partially manages to destabilise the very neoliberal moral hierarchy that they contest. The political response to the strike follows the classical script of a Gramscian passive revolution, through the granting of immediate concessions (partial salary increases, bonuses) and the refusal to guarantee a salary grid by law in the long term.

The „Houses of Horror” case brings to the fore the biopolitical dimension of contemporary power. The analysis of the articles published by Libertatea and Digi24 highlights a procedure that Norman Fairclough calls over-wording, that is, the sudden accumulation of synonymous, graphic and violent terms. The reality that was uncovered can no longer be contained within the usual administrative-linguistic patterns. Within the logic of a strictly economic rationality, the elderly and persons with disabilities are no longer seen as citizens with rights, but as a budgetary burden.

At the meso-analytical level, the research documents the institutional role of the mass media as a hegemonic apparatus. The case of the Libertatea takeover by the Ringier trust and the open conflict in the autumn of 2023 illustrates the mechanisms of corporate censorship in late capitalism. When the journalistic narrative collides with the interests of the financiers, editorial freedom proves to be a legal fiction, easily annulled by the imperatives of capital. The intertextuality analysis shows how media texts take up, absorb and transform discourses originating from other sources. A technical observation about the current account deficit can be turned into an alarmist headline of the type „The National Bank warns”, designed to induce a state of urgency. Through this strategy, the epistemic authority of the expert is borrowed in order to validate a specific editorial agenda.

At the macro-analytical level, the research shows that hegemonic discourse produces a new social stratification on moral, rather than economic, grounds. Three categories emerge. The first is the meritocratic class of the private sector, made up of entrepreneurs of the self who internalise the neoliberal imperative of self-disciplining. The second is the parasitic class of the „bugetari”, which functions as a scapegoat for the structural failures of the system. The third is the surplus class, made up of those excluded from the labour market and biopolitically abandoned. This division is no longer based on the relation to the means of production, but on the economic utility of each individual. The political function of this tripartition is to block the formation of an alternative collective will.

The macro-analysis also shows that the Houses of Horror case cannot be interpreted as a mere bureaucratic malfunction; instead, it reveals the structure of what Gramsci calls the integral state. The private association run by Ștefan Godei and the supervisory institutions such as AJPIS, DGASPC or the Voluntari Town Hall form a local hegemonic bloc in which the liberal distinction between public and private dissolves. The political response to the crisis follows the script of passive revolution. The resignations of ministers Marius Budăi and Gabriela Firea are presented as „gestures of honour”, yet they function as tactical sacrifices

necessary for preserving the hegemonic equilibrium. Gabriela Firea's subsequent return to the political forefront demonstrates the resilience of the system and the strictly cosmetic, rather than structural, character of the sacrifice.

### **Theoretical relevance and limitations of the research**

The thesis proposes the concept of the hegemony of governmentality, a hybrid model that captures the dual nature of contemporary domination through the coexistence of a Gramscian-type strategic dimension with a Foucauldian-type technical dimension. Overall, the trajectory of Romania is described as a continuous passive revolution, in which modernisation is not the result of a democratic negotiation, but an administrative engineering implemented from the top down.

The research honestly assumes several limitations. The first and most important is its focus on the production of discourse, rather than on its reception. The analysis shows what power emits, but does not show what the public does with these messages. The second limitation is the short period of analysis, the 2023-2025 interval, which captures only a defensive hegemony in crisis. The third limitation is the focus on mainstream media, which leaves outside the scope of the analysis the social networks, where counter-discourses take shape that the study is unable to capture.

### **Directions for future research**

Starting from the limitations and from the relevance of the research, three directions for future inquiry emerge. The first concerns the analysis of what the thesis calls coercive digitalisation, namely systems such as e-Factura or digital identity, in order to investigate the emergence of a possible digital panopticon. The second direction is the complementing of discourse analysis with qualitative methods such as focus groups or in-depth interviews, in order to verify empirically the internalisation of the discourse of power at the level of the citizen. The third direction is the analysis of anti-system parties and progressive movements, in order to see whether these put forward a genuine counter-hegemony or whether they are merely a passive revolution tolerated by the system.