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Ice Hockey and Discourse on the Other in the Romanian Press

JULIEN DANERO IGLESIAS, POMPILIU NICOLAE CONSTANTIN

At the end of 2011 the world of ice hockey in Romania was hit by a scandal: during a match of the national team against Hungary, the Romanian players started singing the Hungarian and Székely anthems but remained silent for the Romanian one. A few weeks later, on December 1, a player of the national team “under 16” was beaten up in the locker room by his teammates because he had asked them not to speak in Hungarian between each other but in Romanian “at least on Romania’s national day”. The Romanian tabloid press then gave important coverage of both events and showed allegations of strong nationalism on the side of the Hungarian members of the Romanian ice hockey teams¹. Indeed, the vast majority of the players in the Romanian national team belong to the Hungarian minority of the country. These players mostly operate in the club of Miercurea Ciuc, a city in Transylvania located in the Harghita county in the region of Transylvania where most citizens belong to the Hungarian minority. The city itself, with less than 50.000 inhabitants, has about 80 per cent of inhabitants of Hungarian origin, part of the Székely ethnic group.

This scandal occurred in Romania at a moment of renewed tensions between the Hungarian minority in the country and the Romanian majority. Firstly, tensions were due to the Hungarians’ People’s Party in Transylvania. Founded in 2011, the party was claiming a greater autonomy for the minority. Secondly, while treaties of friendship between Budapest and Bucharest were signed in 1996 and had help the restoration of a climate of trust and appeasement of the minority issue², the coming to power of Viktor Orban in Hungary and what is perceived as a nationalist turn changed the game. Thirdly, at the time of the scandal, Romanian authorities were working on an administrative reform in which the forty-one departments of the country would be grouped into eight major regions, which would dilute the power of local elected Hungarians³. In this context, the question arises for members of the

¹ Julien Danero Iglesias, Pompiliu Nicolae Constantin, “Hockey sur glace et tensions nationales en Roumanie”, *STAPS*, vol. 105, no. 3, 2014, pp. 101-116.

² Alain Dieckhoff, *La Nation dans tous ses états. Les identités nationales en mouvement*, Flammarion, Paris, 2000, p. 211.

³ Mirel Bran, “Les Hongrois de Roumanie relancent le débat sur la question de leur

Hungarian minority as whom to give first their loyalty⁴, Romania or Hungary. At the same time, rivalry between the two countries is not new and football matches between each other often trigger violence between supporters demonstrating nationalist and revenge discourses. For example, a qualifying match for the World Cup 2014 between the two countries was played behind closed doors⁵. All this demonstrates that in the context of an ongoing economic crisis in Romania after 2008, it seems that “shared patriotism” can difficultly be put forward⁶. Ice hockey is somehow the “sport of Hungarians” in Romania and represents “a repository of traditional practices” which allows its practitioners to anchor their identity at the local level⁷. The minority group is perceived as a threat to the majority, and its control of a sport like hockey pinpoints the general fear of the majority of a loss of power and control over its destiny. While the balance of power between the established majority and the marginal minority seems to be reversing⁸ in the field of sport, the scandal takes enormous proportions in the press in the context of tenuous links between sports, business and politics in Romania.

The scandal was put forward by the daily tabloid *Libertatea* (Freedom). A series of articles with a strong nationalistic tone were then published for several weeks. The aim of this paper is to analyse these newspapers articles and to show how the interaction between the Hungarian national minority and the Romanian majority is discursively constructed in those chosen newspapers. The paper demonstrates that Hungarians in Romania are systematically constructed as an “other” and that they are seen as threatening the country. Such discourse is then taken over by politicians trying to capitalise on the event. But the paper goes further and shows that this discourse is not only to be perceived in a tabloid or in the speeches and comments of some extreme-right party leaders,

autonomie”, *Le Monde*, Paris, 13 January 2013.

⁴ Yves Gastaut, “Le sport comme révélateur des ambiguïtés du processus d’intégration des populations immigrées. Le cas du match de football France-Algérie”, *Sociétés contemporaines*, no.1, 2008, pp. 49-71.

⁵ Claudiu Sorin, “Roumanie-Hongrie, chronique d’une rivalité sans fin”, *Le Courrier international*, 22 March 2013.

⁶ Alain Dieckhoff, *La Nation dans tous ses états...cit.*, p. 220.

⁷ Sébastien Stumpp, Denis Jallat (dir.), *Identités sportives et revendications régionales (XIX^e-XX^e siècles). Contribution des pratiques sportives à l’Europe des “petites patries”*, Presses universitaires de Grenoble, Grenoble, 2013, p. 18.

⁸ Norbert Elias, John L. Scotson, *Logiques de l’exclusion. Enquête sociologique au coeur des problèmes d’une communauté*, Fayard, Paris, 1997.

but the same constructions are made available in mainstream quality newspapers. The paper shows therefore how a sport with limited popularity, ice hockey, practiced by a few thousand people at the national level, is made a national issue for a period of one month and emphasizes a latent discourse of fear against an internal “other”.

A sports event is a good way to identify the state of mind of a society in relation to the issue of the “integration” of one of its minorities⁹. The press participates in the politicisation of the sports sphere¹⁰ while it constructs the definition of a “self” and “other” - key elements of the construction of a national discourse¹¹. If the media are involved in the production and reproduction of a discourse, its direct effects are difficult to observe¹². Nevertheless the press chooses and sends information to its readers and determines the availability of information. The media have therefore a social power and autonomy in the production and reproduction of some content and they can strengthen social structures (of power)¹³. In this way, the media define the terms of the public debate: its internal structure, its ideological boundaries and its social representations. They then offer models, facts and opinions, which are used by readers¹⁴.

To analyse these newspapers, the paper uses a methodology inspired by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). It takes into account the historical dimension of discursive acts and considers discourse as a social practice maintaining a dialectical relationship with its context¹⁵. *Discourse* is used as a general encompassing term and is defined as a “social activity” occurring in specific situations in which meanings are given by language and other symbolic systems. It involves models and common practices of knowledge and structure.

⁹ Yves Gastaut, “Le sport comme révélateur des ambiguïtés...cit.”.

¹⁰ Stanislas Frenkiele, Larbi Ben Barek, Marcel Cerdan, Alfred Nakache, “Icônes de l’utopie impériale dans la presse métropolitaine (1936-1944)?”, *STAPS*, no. 80, 2008, p. 100.

¹¹ Ruth Wodak, Rudolf de Cillia, Martin Reisigl, Karen Liebhart, *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2009 [1999], pp. 11-15.

¹² Teun Van Dijk, *Racism and the Press. Critical Studies in Racism and Migration*, Routledge, London, 1998, pp. 226-227.

¹³ Roger Fowler, *Language in the News. Discourse and Ideology in the Press*, Routledge, London, 1991, pp. 2-12.

¹⁴ Teun Van Dijk, *Racism and the Press...cit.*, p. 244.

¹⁵ Ruth Wodak *et al*, *The Discursive Construction...cit.*, pp. 7-8.

In this, the *text* is a unique and specific realisation of the discourse¹⁶. The articles are an example of these texts and the research takes into account four general Romanian daily newspapers in which all articles that address the scandal that hit the world of ice hockey at the end of 2011 were analysed. In each of these articles, the content of the texts, the discursive strategies used by their authors, the figures of speech and other forms of realisation were observed. Particular attention was given to issues of transitivity and modality as well as to non-verbal elements¹⁷. However, before beginning this analysis, going back to the interaction between nationalism and sports in a country that aspires to unity but is in fact divided ethnically seems essential to the understanding of the issue at stake in the paper.

Nationalism and Sport in an Ethnically Divided Romania

Nationalism follows an inherent logic of inclusion and exclusion. Regardless of the form it takes, a logic of exclusion is at work and all types of nationalism are commonly centred on the issue of an “other” against which the definitions of the nation are built¹⁸. Thus, all sorts of nationalisms are simultaneously inclusive or exclusive and nations only differ in the content¹⁹, scope and more or less inclusive national culture they set as well as the modes of integration they set up²⁰. The role of sports in the construction and reproduction of national identity is well known²¹. Sport can in fact be used to promote a sense of belonging to a specific political community or a nation-state by asserting national unity. It can also serve subgroups of the community or the nation-state to support their own claims to sovereignty or their own interests

¹⁶ *Idem*, “Introduction: Discourse Studies – Important Concepts and Terms”, in Ruth Wodak, Michal Krzyzanowski, *Qualitative Discourse Analysis in the Social Sciences*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2008, p. 6.

¹⁷ Ruth Wodak *et al*, *The Discursive Construction...cit.*, p. 30.

¹⁸ Philip Spencer, Howard Wollman, “Good and Bad Nationalisms: A Critique of Nationalism”, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 3, no. 3, 1998, p. 255.

¹⁹ Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed. Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, p. 64.

²⁰ Will Kymlicka, *Politics in the Vernacular: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Citizenship*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001; Daniel Sabbagh, “Nationalisme et multiculturalisme”, *Critique internationale*, no. 23, 2004, pp. 118-119.

²¹ Alain Bairner, John Sugden, “Sport in Divided Societies”, in *Idem* (eds.), *Sport in Divided Societies*, Meyer & Meyer Sport, Oxford, 1999, p. 1.

within the established state²². In this way, in the case of a divided society as post-Communist Romania, sports is to be understood in the framework of a power relationship, according to MacClancy, in which the dominant groups in society use sport to consolidate their control while other groups may use it to gather and challenge control. Therefore, sport is more than a barometer of the division, it is an integral part of it²³.

Modern Romania was built as a unitary nation-state. Such a “utopia”²⁴ is still relevant today. Alongside the Romanian majority of the population live an important number of national minorities, among which the Hungarian minority is the largest. The minority accounts for some 1.2 million people for a total Romanian population of just over 20 million according to the last Romanian census of 2011. Hungarians in Romania can be described as an “old minority”²⁵ which is at the centre of a tension since Transylvania was incorporated into the Romanian state at the end of World War I.

In the state created in the mid-19th century, competitions have been seen historically not as confrontations between “states” but between “nations”. This “competing patriotism”²⁶ holds true particularly during the inter-war period when Romanian authorities were engaged in “nationalising” processes²⁷ to gather and assimilate national minorities in Greater Romania. In the context of an ethnically diverse Romania, inter-ethnic issues quickly influenced sports while the discourse on the nation was determined by the representation of athletes and their sports performance.

This issue was predominant throughout the inter-war period and was regularly discussed in the media and in the public debate. Transylvanian athletes at the time dominated the competitions, earning medals and attracting public attention. At the same time, discourses against athletes from the Hungarian minority are common for the period. Such athletes were singled out by a nationalist discourse understood as a form of prevention or response against

²² Jean HARVEY, “Sport and Québec Nationalism: Ethnic or Civic Identity?”, in John Sugden, Alain Bairner (eds.), *Sport...cit.*, p. 38.

²³ Jeremy MacClancy, “Sport, Identity and Ethnicity”, in *Idem* (ed.), *Sport, Identity and Ethnicity*, Berg, Oxford, 1996, p. 5; Alain Bairner, John Sugden, “Sport in Divided Societies”, *cit.*, p. 7.

²⁴ Antonela Capelle-Pogacean, “Roumanie: l’utopie unitaire en question”, *Critique internationale*, no. 6, 2000, pp. 101-120.

²⁵ Alain Dieckhoff, *La Nation dans tous ses états...cit.*, p. 212.

²⁶ Jean-Philippe Saint-Martin, “Sport, nationalisme et propagande (1918-1939)”, in Philippe Tetart (ed.), *Histoire du Sport en France du Second Empire au Régime de Vichy*, Vuibert, Paris, 2007, pp. 183-208.

²⁷ Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed...cit.*

three neighbours described as “revisionists”, such as Hungary, Russia and Bulgaria²⁸. In the context of the development of the mainstream press and the sports press, sports become more than just leisure and the ideological implication of the authorities is strong. Gradually, a Romanian sportive identity is imposed while the role of minorities in sports is diminished.

After World War II the expression of nationalism in sport continues during the internationalist communist period (1947-1953) and during Nicolae Ceaușescu’s National Communism (1965-1989). The Romanian national model combines then a “French” Jacobite model for the organisation of the State and a “German” ethno-cultural model for the definition of the nation around the Romanian majority of the population. Such model is maintained without any major changes²⁹. The end of the Communist regime does not result in a rupture with the Unitarian tradition and slogans are only changed from “All united around the Party and the *Conducător*” to “All united against Ceausescu”. After the change in power, when the “anti” identity proves fictitious, national unity is redefined on an ethnic basis but the theme of unity has remained central. At the same time, the Hungarian minority starts engaging into a process of nation-building by creating its own institutions and strengthening ties with neighbouring Hungary. The Hungarian minority has been then perceived as a threat to the stability and the integrity of the nation-state, reviving a tradition of competition for the domination of Transylvania³⁰. Romanian nationalism after 1989 thus appears, according to Boia, as a quest for identity based on two key factors: speaking the same language and taking a strong stance against Hungarians³¹.

In the “nationalising state” after 1989, the authorities are trying to achieve national unity by combining a classical model of liberal democracy and a model of ethnic democracy³². Nevertheless, in this process, they face the demands of a national minority supported by its external homeland, following Brubaker’s nexus. In Romania, contrarily to the general trends in Western Europe and as in other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, regionalisation is still embryonic. There is a strong affirmation of the central state linked to the emphasis, in line with the French republican model, on the indivisible unity of the nation against all centrifugal tendencies. Democracy can be seen as ethnic

²⁸ Florin Constantiniu, *O istorie sinceră a poporului român*, Univers Enciclopedic Gold, București, 2010.

²⁹ Antonela Capelle-Pogacean, “Roumanie...cit.”, p. 107.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 102 and 109.

³¹ Lucian Boia, *De ce este România altfel?*, Humanitas, București, 2012, p. 98.

³² Antonela Capelle-Pogacean, “Roumanie...cit.”, p. 117.

and the association between the state and the majority frequently gives rise to a sense of alienation on the side of minorities³³.

The situation of sports in the country mirrors this context and is influenced by the triangular relationship between the Romanian authorities, the Hungarian authorities and the Hungarian minority in Romania. In June 2001, for example, the Hungarian Parliament adopted a law for the Hungarians living in neighbouring countries with Hungary. The law sets up that every citizen of a neighbouring country has the opportunity to obtain Hungarian citizenship if Hungarian descent can be proved. At the same time, the Romanian Intelligence Service expressed concern in a report after describing the loss of state control over the Romanian districts of Harghita and Covasna and after mentioning that the Hungarian anthem was sung at a meeting of the Hungarian political party UDMR (Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania)³⁴. In this context of tensions between both countries, the national football teams of Romania and Hungary competed in 2001 in two matches, won by the Romanians by two to nil. The atmosphere that surrounded the matches was characterised by tension and, for example, buses carrying Romanian supporters were attacked in Budapest. In 1999 Romania achieved a historic victory in a football match against Hungary in Bucharest by two to nil. This success was then interpreted as a war victory and proved a symbolic moment of catharsis against a sense of frustration and inferiority compared to the Hungarian strength in sports. In order to fight against these conflicts, the Romanian authorities gradually integrated sports champions from the Hungarian minority, as Gabriela Szabo, Tibor Selymes, Eva Tofalvi or Flavius Koczi.

Generally speaking, it can be said that sports nowadays in Romania is far from being a priority for the state. Sports federations are funded by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, depending on their performance and the number of their members. At the same time, federations need to attract sponsors. Nevertheless it seems that the political world is actually very involved in sports: at the top of each of the sports federations of the country are placed individuals who have direct or indirect links with political parties. The presidents of the federations are perceived by the public as real politicians. At the local level, sports clubs rely on funding from their local authority for a significant portion of their budget. Therefore, the presence of political figures in the clubs and federations is considered necessary.

³³ Alain Dieckhoff, *La Nation dans tous ses états...cit.*, p. 202.

³⁴ Gabriel Andreescu, *Națiuni și minorități*, Polirom, Iași, 2004, p. 73.

In all this, it should be noted that ice hockey is special. Indeed, this sport is seen in Romania as an attribute of the Hungarians. The headquarters of the Romanian Ice Hockey Federation are located in Bucharest, while the centre of development of this sport is in Transylvania, where ice hockey is most practiced. From the 2000s, investment in the Federation has been specially directed at this region and at the districts of Harghita and Covasna. In 2006, the Romanian Ice Hockey Federation had 47 clubs and 1.596 members. Since 2010, however, ice hockey has been in crisis: even if the number of clubs has remained the same, the number of members has been reduced by almost a half to 886 members according to figures from the National Institute of Statistics. In this way, hockey does not seem to raise interest in the Romanian audience and the level of the Romanian teams has decreased. In addition, the Romanian national hockey team, composed mainly of citizens of Hungarian origin, has not obtained good results for a long time. This situation put forward in the media has helped the reproduction of negative stereotypes against the minority and a general negative construction of Hungarians that is now going to be analysed in the framework of the 2011 scandal.

The Discursive Construction of the Romanian “Self” and the Hungarian “Other”

In December 2011 *Libertatea*, selling over 135.000 copies at this time, talks first about the scandal of the Hungarian anthem sung by the players of the Romanian ice hockey team. The newspaper was founded in December 1989 and was the first free newspaper after the revolution. Bought in 1995 by the Swiss group Ringier, the newspaper turned tabloid in 1999 and is known for its popular editorial content and for its constant quest for sensationalism. It is from this angle that what is considered directly a “scandal” is tackled in the articles. While taking into account that *Libertatea* is a tabloid is important to understand why such emphasis has been put on the events here analysed, the paper demonstrates later that the discursive construction that can be found in the tabloid is also present in other types of newspapers.

Articles in *Libertatea* all tell the same story, a story where the main characters sing Hungarian and Székely hymns “with all their heart” (Ionaşcu, 22/12/2011) while they do not say a word for the Romanian anthem. They also abuse a teenager who dared to ask them to speak Romanian between each other.

These characters are all Hungarian: players alongside supporters and officials which support their actions (Nistor, 22/01/2012). The impression of an “other” setting itself up against the Romanian majority is very present.

Tanczos Barna, president of the Romanian Ice Hockey Federation (FRHG) at the time can be considered the main character of the story. The emphasis of the newspaper can be observed when articles put forward that Hungarians have been controlling the Ice Hockey Federation from 2007, when the Hungarian-born Romanian citizen, Janos Kurko, became president. The emphasis is linked to the fact that these two personalities are powerful business men who have a remarkable influence at the departmental level in Covasna and Harghita. Both are close to the party of the Hungarian minority, the UDMR, and Tanczos Barna was secretary of state in recent governments. Tanczos Barna is blamed for refusing to take action against players (Nistor, 22/01/2012) or irony (Ionașcu, 17/12/11). Articles imply that he does not deserve the position he holds (Bisera, 14/01/12). *Libertatea* takes care to nuance all of Barna’s declarations, notably by using quotation marks, while all his opponents are presented as legitimate. For example, Gioni Justinian is introduced as “former glory of the Steaua and the national team”, this precision ensuring legitimacy to his words. Gioni Justinian explains then that the President of the Federation supports the rink where Hungarians train and sabotages knowingly the Romanian one in Bucharest. According to the newspaper, “at night Tanczos stops the engine cooling the surface in order to save money” (Ionașcu, 13/01/2012). Similarly, Ion Martin, coach of the *Sportul*, is presented as deciding courageously to denounce the “dictatorship” of the current direction of the FRHG, composed mainly of citizens of Hungarian origin. Following this permanent construction against Barna, the Hungarian “other” has an identified leader who personifies the insult addressed to the national community.

The story also has some Hungarian secondary characters who are used to strengthen the negative construction of the “other”. Firstly, Peter Levente, one of the players who sang the Hungarian anthem, “complained of being harassed on the Internet” and threatened, “even if it may seem incredible”, to leave the national team (Toma, 03/01/2012). Another player, Tihamer Becze then uses words that he wanted to be appeasing but which are considered scandalous because they highlight the fact that this is the “Székely country” and not Romania who defeated Hungary (Anon., 21/12/2011). These two players are even more at fault when compared to other sportsmen, such as Tibor Selymes, “former glory of the Romanian football”, a Székely who serves as a “good

Hungarian” when he says in an article in *Libertatea* that he is “proud” that he played for Romania (Ionașcu, 19/12/2011).

Opposed to these Hungarian characters, the Romanian characters seem to be in a constant position of victims who can only be outraged by what is happening. Consequently, another set of constructed characters come into the picture. For example, Victor Stăncescu, an almost anonymous ice hockey player for the Romanian audience, who plays in Switzerland, is presented as a “real player”, “one of the bravest sportsmen of Romanian origin in Europe” (Toma, 26/12/2011). Against the “bad” Hungarians, the player is presented as a “true” Romanian in an article dedicated to him. More importantly, the main character on the Romanian side is Cosmin Marinescu “fallen in the midst of an insane ethnic conflict” (Toma, 23/12/2011). The young player beaten up by his colleagues is made something of a hero of the nation and is presented consistently as a victim, both in the construction of the sentences and in the photos where he appears with a black band on his eyes,

The whole story is considered “hallucinating” (Ionașcu, 15/12/2011) and reactions are numerous. All the reactions presented in *Libertatea* are against the official reaction of the federation and they all condemn the instigators of the scandal. This is for example the case of Corneliu Vadim Tudor, the former nationalist leader of the Greater Romania Party known for his lack of political correctness: “I would throw them away from the country, because they have poisoned the Romanian soul. [...] They can go forever. I’ll drive them to the station with flowers. I’m sick of these ungrateful Hungarians. I do not like these ordinary provocateurs. [...] Even if there are very few Romanians in this area, they have even given Hungarian names to cemeteries. We will redirect the money from the state budget to hockey and we will enter the A League! [...] The Hungarians are not better than us’, thundered Vadim Tudor [...]” (Berciu, 21/12/2011). While this declaration shows that the politician seeks to speculate electorally in a unique social context, several interviewees show the same kind of reactions and their words are all echoed by *Libertatea*. As Tudor’s declaration, none of these reactions are nuanced in the newspaper and this lack of nuance seems to confirm that the authors of journal articles share the arguments. The newspaper plays in the valuation of the Romanian “self” and shows that Romanians are very good players (Toma, 23/12/2011 and 02/02/2012) even if an article acknowledges that Hungarians, although they do not speak Romanian very well, are “much better at the language of hockey” (Chirea, 21/12/2011).

In *Libertatea*, the two “scandals” put forward the construction of a Romanian “self” from where Hungarians are excluded. They represent an ethnic minority and, as such, they must adapt to their host nation, or leave. This discursive construction is permanent in articles in *Libertatea*. The final argument in this regards holds in the comparison with other countries, such as Spain, as one can find in a statement of a former Romanian player, Roberto Cazacu: “Say that Marcos Senna, who is Brazilian and evolves in Spain, sings in an official match against Brazil the ‘Selecao’ anthem. What do you think that would happen? He would definitely be excluded from the Spanish team” (Ionaşcu, 20/12/2011).

Evenimentul Zilei (The Event of the Day), a daily newspaper selling a little less than 25.000 copies in December 2011, belonged to the same group as *Libertatea* and is now owned by a Romanian businessman, Bobby Păunescu. The links are nevertheless still close between both newspapers and exactly the same story is told as in *Libertatea*. However, interestingly, *Evenimentul Zilei* is more conceived as a quality newspaper and caters to a more educated and more urban electorate. It is interesting to note that the “self” and “other” which addressed a rather popular readership in *Libertatea* here are constructed along the same lines. The discursive construction of the tabloid newspaper is found in a completely different format and shows how the staging of the majority against the minority is to be found among the entire mainstream press. The characters are indeed identical and they play the same roles. In addition, the newspaper does not hesitate to speak of an “interethnic scandal” (Cojocaru, 23/01/2012; Dobre, 27/12/2011; Băileşteanu, 04/01/2012; Dobre, 12/01/2012). In this regard, what is called the “1 December Case” (Dobre, 12/01/2012) is reframed in a “history of interethnic conflicts” in the region (Dobre, 15/12/2011), emphasizing the problematic character of the historical presence of Hungarians in the country.

In an interesting interview with Tanczos Barna, President of the Federation, the questions asked by the journalist clearly show how the Hungarians, and the Székely population, are considered by the majority in general: “What are you?” [You’re different] “but you live and work still in Romania?” “Why are Romanians bothered by the attitude of the citizens of Hungarian ethnicity?” “How do you explain the fact that many Hungarians [...] do not know the Romanian language?” (Dobre, 17/01/2012) This passage highlights all the problems that arise according to the majority and Romania is presented as the country that gives a chance to Hungarians who have

consistently proved ungrateful. Another article clearly shows the same when the author insists on the fact that if the ice rink on which ice hockey players train is modern, it is because it is paid by the Romanian taxpayer: Miercurea Ciuc “now dominates the League and players have the most modern ice Romania, made with the money from the state budget. In Bucharest, the rink ‘Mihail Flamaropol’ is about to collapse” (Dobre, 15/12/2011).

When comparing these constructions to two other mainstream newspapers, *Jurnalul National* (The National Newspaper) and *Romania Liberă* (Free Romania), a difference in treatment can be seen directly. Unlike *Libertatea* and *Evenimentul Zilei*, both newspapers merely repeat some information already relayed by their competitors. Therefore, the words which are used seem more neutral, even if the majority position always appears more or less implicitly and meets the same construction of “self” and “other”. Firstly, *Jurnalul National*, a centre-right daily newspaper, founded in 1993 and selling just under 30.000 copies in December 2011, seems generally quite subtle about the facts in question. Articles usually are fairly neutral and let the facts speak for themselves. This neutrality could be explained by the presence in the editorial staff of a journalist of Hungarian origin, Istvan Deak, who writes some articles especially about sports but more generally about events concerning Hungary. However, even an article as short as one can find on 18 December 2011 shows the newspaper’s position:

“The game between the Hungarian and Romanian national hockey teams was preceded by an incredible moment. The players of our national team refused to sing the Romanian anthem and preferred the Hungarian anthem, according to *ziare.com*. Ethnic Hungarians are a majority in the Romanian national team (24 out of 26 players), and it has been best seen on Saturday night before the official match against Hungary. Adrian Catrinou, the only player of Romanian origin of the Romanian team, looked disappointed, being unable to convince his colleagues to give up singing the Hungarian anthem. Shortly after the two anthems were sung, the fans began to sing the anthem of the Székely country” (Anon., 18/12/2011).

The article is constructed as a story where the Romanian character “seems overwhelmed by the nationalism of his Hungarian colleagues”. Even more, the fans end up singing the Székely anthem. An article on 28 December goes in the same direction when Octavian Morariu, president of the Romanian Olympic and Sports Committee, is put forward as the “man of the day” because he responded “promptly” to the scandal: “For the firmness with which he acted in this specific case of discrimination and for the fact that he responded early

and with responsibility when the sense of national dignity was attacked” (Anon., 28/12/2011). Looking at these articles, it seems that the apparent neutrality of certain items is offset by certain discursive constructions that suggest the same construction of a Romanian “self” undergoing an affront from the Hungarian “other”.

Secondly, *Romania Liberă*, a daily newspaper for intellectuals and the middle class selling just over 43.000 copies in December 2011, shows often purely informative articles on the issue. The newspaper talks about “incidents” (Anon., 20/12/2011) that take place in the context of the “scandal” of the Székely anthem (Pădurean, 20/12/2011). An article is particularly interesting as it introduces outraged reactions from Bucharest supporters, holding a Romanian flag and a portrait of King Ferdinand, chanting “out, out with the Hungarians of the Country”, “Romania, Romania” or “We, we do not want Hungarians in Romania”, and singing anthems such as “Pass the Carpathians, Romanian battalions” and “We are Romanians”. The article then concludes with a neutral account of the events that led to this reaction, contrasting with the most common accounts of the events one can find in other newspapers:

“The ice hockey player, Cosmin Florin Marinescu was assaulted on the national day by his colleagues of Hungarian ethnicity of the national team under-16. According to information published by *Libertatea*, another incident occurred Friday in Miercurea Ciuc. Before the game, the Romanian players, the majority of which are ethnic Hungarians, would have sung the Hungarian anthem. At the end of the game, when ‘Wake Up, Romanian!’ was sung, players have kept the same silence like at the beginning, but sang publicly the anthem of the Székely country, according to the newspaper” (Anon., 20/12/2011).

However, other constructions prove less neutral, as when Tihamer Becze’s words are seen as “outrageous” (Anon., 22/01/2012) or when parts of articles and sentences are put in bold in order to emphasize some elements, as in the following excerpt:

“The President of the Romanian Ice Hockey Federations, Tanczos Barna, threatened to resign and joked about Romania, following the scandal in which were involved ice hockey players, according to *gsp.ro*. The statement comes after one of the best players of the national team, Tihamer Becze, who plays for the HSC Miercurea Ciuc, said that the Székely country, not Romania, has beaten Hungary [this last sentence appears in bold in the article]. Tanczos Barna said he thought to leave the country with all players so that everyone is happy” (Anon., 22/12/2011).

Once again, the apparent neutrality of certain articles is offset by constructions that show how the majority is attacked by the minority. In this way, articles in the four newspapers here under scrutiny all tell the same story, regardless of the type of newspaper. It is the history of a nation deeply offended and outraged by an ethnic minority. Although some articles seem more nuanced, the narratives remain the same, the Hungarian act altogether, without nuance, and refuse to adapt and recognize that they owe their allegiance to Romania. Looking at the articles here, all seem to point towards exclusion: Hungarian citizens of Romania are not part of the Romanian nation. But this is presented as this situation is the one they were wishing for.

Conclusion

The reactions of the press here analysed, and especially of a tabloid such as *Libertatea*, are indicative of the current tension that exists in a country like Romania nowadays³⁵. In the context of a dream of a unitary state and a nation built according to the classical model of the nation-state, the integration of minorities, and in particular the Hungarian minority in Transylvania, remains a sensitive subject. Raising national symbols which are not Romanian is considered a threat to the integrity of the state and the media see behind it a “symbolic aggression”. While tensions are expressed in political and public life, the world of sports, influenced by economic and political interests, can be seen as mirroring these tensions and is conducive to the demonstration of nationalist sentiments such as those which caused the scandal here analysed.

Constructing all a story of a Romanian “self” threatened by a Hungarian “other”, where the “self” is always presented as a victim and where the “other” always appears in a vengeful and aggressive position, the articles analysed

³⁵ While this research is based on general newspapers articles, it should be noted that this subject has been given little attention in the sports press. *Pro Sport* and *Gazeta Sporturilor* (The Gazette of Sports) both exhibit minor interest to the event. This lack of interest could be explained by the limited number of editorials in Romanian sports press in general and the limited number of articles in general in the printed versions of Romanian sports newspapers. Nevertheless, according to Maria Andrieș, the events tackled by the general press are a demonstration of nationalism influenced by local politics and the journalist believes that “a few confused boys” (20/12/2011) are the victims of political propaganda. Presenting a balanced view of the events, she believes that singing the anthem of the opponent when winning the game can be taken as a good compromise. The mainstream media who build the case are only guided by scandal and political interests.

demonstrate that “shared patriotism” remains difficult to establish, and that the Romanian nation is still constructed as unitary and threatened by a centrifugal minority. Hungarian ice hockey players seem to show that they do not wish to integrate the nation they violate by chanting the anthem of the opponent. As such, the solutions consist of the “Romanianisation” of the team and the eviction of citizens of Hungarian origin who reject integration. The discursive constructions can be found in all four newspapers, and not only in a tabloid like *Libertatea*, which seems to show that such constructions are latent in the country’s public sphere. However, beyond these constructions and beyond some reactions by nationalist supporters or by nationalist politicians, it must be noted that the majority of the Romanian supporters seem to integrate more easily athletes from the Hungarian minority if they perform well. Otherness decreases when athletes are known and obtain remarkable results for Romania, as shown by the example of ice skater, Emil Imre of Hungarian origin, who won a gold medal at the Olympic Festival of the European Youth, held in Romania in 2013, and has received popular support from both the majority and the minority.

For now, the press, and particularly the tabloid press, seems to be driving these scandals which take a political turn after its use by politicians in the country. While ice hockey is not very popular, emphasizing the nationalist Hungarian discourse sells and allows politicians to gain an electoral capital in a context of a dire economic crisis. This can be linked to Breuilly’s conclusions that nationalism is primarily a matter of politics³⁶. Pointing out the Hungarian otherness works then fully and the scandal allows giving value to “Romanianess” in sport as well as in the rest of the nation.

³⁶ John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1994.