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MISREPRESENTATION OF MUSLIMS AND ISLAMOPHOBIC PUBLIC
DISCOURSES IN RECENT ROMANIAN MEDIA NARRATIVES

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Abstract: This paper represents a case study interpretation of the political and media discourses in Romania referring to Islam and the threat of Muslim refugees. Using a selection of media narratives from the public debates that took shape immediately after the Brussels attacks on March 22, 2016, this study uses a critical discourse analysis approach as an interpretative tool to understanding how in Romania the opinion leaders, the political elites and the media are building an anti-Islam propaganda. By applying a textual and ideological analysis of a selection of media discourses that refer to the terrorist attacks and the implicit threat of Islam, the author describes the dominant rhetorics of conflict between the West and the Muslim world. By elaborating a list of Islamophobic stereotypes used in the Romanian mainstream media and by discussing the negative narratives propagated in the public sphere, a case is made against the artificial growth of intolerant attitudes. The central argument of the author is that we are witnessing a generalized anti-Islam propaganda, where a specific religion and its followers are demonized by politicians, cultural figures and opinion leaders. This paper's conclusion is that in the Romanian media and the political discourses a form of unjustified Islamophobia is cultivated for ideological purposes.

Key Words: Islamophobia, propaganda, critical discourse analysis, ideology, media, misrepresentations, political discourse, stereotypes, negative narratives.

Introductory arguments

Donald Matheson convincingly argued¹ that media discourses are not simple mirrors of our society, they also build our social understanding, they create social meanings. Thus we can use the media texts and their choice of language in order to understand the formation of our identities, of social and cultural values². The main research premise of this paper is that by overviewing media representations and media discourses we can have access to the mechanisms that generate specific views in an otherwise extremely complex social and political dynamics. The framework of analysis is provided by media discourse analysis, with a particular attention for the way in which public opinion leaders and politicians use media attention and how their public interventions lead to a subsequent formation of social identity.

In order to proceed with an analysis of media representations, the first conceptual set that has provided insights into the meaning formation processes through the media is the interpretative practice used in cultural studies. As Stuart Hall elaborated the standard model³ of interpretative approach in his classical study on media consumption practices, we must understand our cultural representations as part of a more complex structure of formation of meanings. The language in the media and generally the discourses are continuously charged with signification, through a process that can be described as encoding and decoding. The general model proposed by Hall is based on an oppositional and structural interdependence between the “power positions” of those ideas that are represented in the media. Thus, a discourse which naturally serves a political purpose is encoded and later, through consumption, is decoded and then takes shape as a dominant political perspective. As Hall pointed out, this relationship becomes more meaningful when using exceptional situations, with a high emotional impact or a crisis situation, since they provide an oppositional context.

The second major concept used in this paper derives from Hall's assumptions and is based on the principle that media discourse analysis can also provide access to the ideological dimension of media representations. By using an extremely “hot” topic (in this case the terrorist attacks of radical Islamists) the way in which public discourses are selected, prioritized and distributed can be an indicator for the formation of political attitudes (Islamophobia).

Thus, the assumption is that the production of discourses and the accumulation of specific meanings become relevant for the dominant political understanding, and that this process is taking shape in the media, through its visible manifestations in language selection.

The methodology of the research

This paper is designed as a case study using media discourses that are representing Islam and Islamism in the Romanian public sphere. The research was developed in two stages, with the first part dedicated to identifying a relevant corpus of *texts* and *signification producers* - that is choosing those media discourses that were pertinent. In order to achieve this task, the technique was to identify the most prominent producers of social meaning and to select a variety of sources for the corpus of analysis. By consequence, the most meaningful discursive instances were considered first to be the news published by the “traditional” media. Next the selection of social media discourses was done considering their visibility into the national press. The second level of selection was to choose representative communication “producers”, in the sense that they had to be both visible and influential opinion makers. Here, two types of public figures were considered to be relevant: politicians and public intellectuals.

Without being a quantitative media analysis, the method proposed here is qualitative and is based on the classical method of critical discourse analysis (CDA). As pointed out by authors like Fairclough or Wodak, the role of a critical discourse analysis is not simply discursive, it must be understood as part of a wider and critical evaluation of social practices. Using CDA in this dimension allows the research to interpret discourses as carriers of social meanings and, more importantly, to identify the “social wrongs” in institutions, ideologies or any other political manifestations.

By focusing on a particular media context in which the social wrong has a profound impact – in this case the tragic events related to the Brussels attacks in March 2016 – a narrow selection of discourses was operated in order to overcome the statistical irrelevance of such range. Also, the possible complications produced by a more ample content based interpretation, as would have been, for example, the depiction of foreigners in Romanian media, was avoided. By choosing a particular and critical media event (such as the Brussels attacks), it was considered fitted for the interpretative purpose because it provided the contextual conflictual situation in which the ideological differences and the contrasting patterns of expression would be manifested.

The selection of the cases was also limited in time and this reach of the approach took into account only the early reactions and not the following debates triggered by the horrendous Brussels attacks on March 22, 2016. The selection of interventions was limited to a period of 4 days (22-26 March) and was restricted to those media narratives that referred directly to the terrorist attacks (the deflagration in the Zaventem airport and, subsequently, on the Maelbeek subway station) in relation to Islam or to the impact of refugees and migrants from the Middle East. The interpretation took into consideration also those articles that were

presenting online reactions of opinion leaders that had a clear reference to the selected theme and sub-topic. The overall rhetoric of conflict between ISIS/ DAESH and the Western coalition was used as a background context.

After the selection of texts was completed, all the references to the main topic were grouped together in clusters of oppositions. These were re-contextualized in an overall analysis of the political and social discourses with an important focus on the representations and misrepresentations of Islam and Muslims. The frequencies identified (terms, metaphors) were connected with the dominant vocabulary used and, generally, with the dominant structures of meaning used by Romania opinion leaders, political elites and their respective media manifestations.

Since the method used in this case study was based on critical discourse analysis practices, it is using linguistic representations only as tools for understanding a broader social processes. As indicated by Wodak⁴, this critical discourse analysis focuses on large units of meaning and not on the specific words, thus its purpose is the understanding of the social use of language and not of the particular linguistic components. Another important level of the critical discourse analysis was considered to be the micro-analysis of the dichotomies between a dominant group representation and negatively depicted minorities – in this case “Europeans” versus “Muslims”.

Here the main indicators used are oppositional, and within the analyzed texts we have to search for the discursive manifestation of contradictions. Last but not least, the main hypothesis of the analysis is that we are witnessing a process of de-familiarizing of a group of people which are in fact oppressed – the migrants – which is done by a coding process that leads to their transformation into a dangerous group – the terrorists.

Clearly one of the major shortcoming of any discourse analysis is the fact that it provides a qualitative interpretation, based on a limited timeframe of analysis. The data selection is not intended to offer a statistically relevant result, it is rather a transversal image of a given moment. For a more complex understanding of this major phenomenon a quantitative based survey would add to the relevance. Another problematic aspect is the very nature of the political realities discussed – this interpretation is only one possible explanation for a more complex social manifestation, one that cannot be dealt with a single critical discourse approach. This research is taking into consideration the multi-faceted nature of the representations in society and it accepts that it can only be relevant for the given context and the specific situation in the Romanian public sphere at this given time.

Theoretical background of the topic

Since the main *topic* of the analysis is the media representation of Islam, with the related sub-topic of the negative depiction of the “threat” of Islamism, we need to briefly overview the recent recurrences of anti-Islamic discourses. As it was documented by Akbarzadeh and Smith (2005), the Western media continue to construct a negative image of the Muslims, based on the old rhetoric of the “Other” as radically different.

Clearly there is a resurgence of the negative narratives developing in the Western world about the Muslim civilization, and fifteen years after the 9/11 attacks on the United States and only a couple of months after the November attacks in Paris, the impact of fundamentalist terrorism on the collective psyche in the West is still extremely controversial. Global Islamophobia is exacerbated by the anti-immigrant and anti-refugees rhetorics, while many Western politicians are using these events to bring forward a discrimination agenda. Islamophobia has become one of the most important propaganda machines in recent political discourses. This can be illustrated with the case of Donald Trump in the United States, who, in the middle of the pre-election campaign, claims publicly that once elected president he will impose special IDs for Muslims or that he will even close down mosques in America⁵.

The political use of the anti-Muslim emotions in order to gain public support is in fact hiding a more profound social divide. As Maxime Rodinson pointed out in *Europe and the Mystique of Islam*, the contemporary “fear of Islam” is promoted as a “moral obligation” to fight *against* Islam, which actually hides a dramatic situation of the Muslim world, where large groups of human beings are underprivileged and oppressed⁶. Recurring to the medieval representations and the anti-mohammedan perceptions, which are rooted in the open conflict between the Medieval Christian kingdoms and the Ottomans, recent political discourses are reusing this ancient divide between “Crusaders” and the “Jihad” for very narrow purposes. From G. W. Bush, who used the term “crusade” to justify the military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, to Francois Hollande who declared war on DAESH (the Islamic State), without it even existing as a state, we see how the typical encoding-decoding operation is activated. The dominant discourse is encoding public narratives that are cultivating divisions, instead of providing positive and objective meanings so that the citizens would decode properly the social realities.

Needless to say that one major bias towards the Muslims is their misrepresentation as intrinsically “terrorists”. In fact terrorism is not a practice limited to the Jihad or exclusively belonging to Islamist radicals and fundamentalists. As it was extensively documented by Jessica Stern in *Terror in the Name of God*, religious terrorism was practiced by almost all faiths: from the protestant terrorists in Northern Ireland, to the “Christian

terrorists” in the United States (the best example being Timothy McVeigh), who killed other Christians without hesitation⁷. More importantly, as is the case with most of the religious fanatics, the violent fundamentalist groups are a minority even in their own cultures, they do not represent the majority opinion. So naturally the stereotypical identification of *all* Muslims with the aggressive and murderous extremists is ideologically biased.

The situation in Romania is not different. In his extremely well documented study on religious fundamentalism and ideological wars, Sandu Frunză argues that the fundamentalist tendencies in Romania today are specially noxious since they are spread within the political sphere⁸. Many Romanian politicians are “tempted” to use fundamentalist religious discourses in order to mobilize nationalist fervor. As Frunză properly analyzes several types of media discourses, the politicians are using fundamentalism as a tool for cultivating a dangerous mixture between the religious and political⁹. As Frunză makes a relevant conceptual distinction between Islam and Islamism, the Romanian media discourses show a confusion between the two, often used as synonymous. For further research a content analysis of the use of these concepts would prove extremely relevant.

As for the current media discourses in Romania, often the construction of a racist identification of the Muslim immigrants is done by constantly emphasizing the “danger” presented by these migrants and minimizing their tragedy and suffering. According to Teun Van Dijk, who shows the functioning of this mechanism in his compelling analysis of the relationship between racism and the news headlines¹⁰, the media coverage of racial minorities is often associated with negative information (crime, violence, rape) thus the general image of the readers is discriminatory. This is illustrated by several headlines like “Romania, in danger”¹¹, “Muslim Leader announces attacks on Romania”¹² or “The Third World War”¹³.

Using the suggestions of Baker, Gabrielatos and McEnerly¹⁴, we must understand the media discourses about Islam and the Muslims as not only providing an insight about the bias towards a religion or an ethnic group, but also as offering a relevant basis for identifying more profound biases within societies, which allow such discrimination. The “negative storytelling” developed about Islam in fact indicate a predominant negative attitude of many opinion leaders in Romania towards the liberal policies of the European Union.

Media stereotypes and factual misrepresentations

An important distinction that must be made before an in-depth analysis should deal with the divide between the social reality and the

media rhetoric in the Romanian public debate. No factual indications are for the so-called “conflict” between Islam and Romania does not exist. As a matter of fact Romania was, during the regime of Nicolae Ceaușescu, one of the hotbeds of terrorists training for many Muslim political factions. It is a known historical fact that the communist leadership supported the so-called “liberation” movements in the Middle East, with many members of the Palestinian Liberation Organization lead by Yasser Arafat training in Romania. Some reports indicate that even the most notorious global terrorist, Carlos the “Jackal”, was financially supported by the Romanian government and that he even acted upon the orders of Ceaușescu¹⁵. Thus, the argument is contrary to that promoted by the media, that Romania is an “innocent” bystander in the global political wars which escalated into fundamentalist and radical conflicts.

This is also illustrated if we overview basic statistical data and we compare the information with the media narratives. According to the information provided by the United Nations between January and May 2015 only 719 people requested asylum in Romania, and only 343 persons were from Syria¹⁶. The true fact is that, although the many press articles in the Romanian media are describing a catastrophic image when it comes to the “wave of Muslim refugees”, who are streaming from the “Islamic world”, in reality Romania was not a target for migrants. Even though the officials in Romania accepted the quota of 1,800 refugees imposed by the EU, which, from the reported 120.000 estimated refugees in 2015, is in and of itself completely insignificant. More so, the real number of actual refugees that have come to Romania is irrelevant, since 1991 only over 5.000 people received asylum in Romania overall.

Still, the public arguments against the quota follow the logic of the “Muslim threat”. The best example is provided by Liviu Dragnea, the president of the most important party in Romania (PSD), who visited Hungary to see the “phenomenon of migration” and publicly stated that he does not want to see “thousands of migrants of the streets of Bucharest”¹⁷. More relevantly, the public statements of Dragnea, who is among the most influential politicians in Romania, the head of the major left wing party in the country, indicate that he shares the view of a conspiracy behind the refugees moving across Europe. Dragnea claimed that it was “strange” to see mostly “young males” who are “speaking English” and are “extremely well organized”¹⁸.

Clearly the media discourses in Romania, just as it is the case with many Western media, are overemphasizing the “Islamic threat”, by perpetuating the idea of the imminent “Muslim invasion” and its “dangerous impact” on the European Union. After the attacks Belgium was quickly described by an article as “the Heaven of Jihadists” in Europe, with the apparent factual demonstration that out of 11 million inhabitants this European country has more than 400 fighters accounted among the ISIS/DAESH militants¹⁹. Once more, the factual data is twisted in such a

way that it exaggerates the figures, since the Islamic State army is estimated to have somewhere about 31.000 thousand fighters, with 3,400 from Western countries²⁰.

While the social identification of the all Muslims with the terrorist behavior is recurrent in many European media²¹, which shows a strong cultural bias against the Islamic civilization, fear mongering and the cultivation of intolerance is gratuitous in the Romanian context. A negative example is provided by one of the main editorialists of *Evenimentul Zilei* newspaper who is attributing the current crisis to the “impotence of Europe” while describing “the Islamists” as capable people. More relevant is the fact that the journalist elaborates a list of “failures of Europe”: the failure of “integrating the Muslims” - where the author makes no distinction between arabs and other Muslim ethnic groups; the failure of “public policies” - where the author enunciates the “positive discrimination” of the “arab community” or the “excessive tolerance” toward the “arab infractions”²². This would be enough to qualify such discourse as Islamophobic, since the negative confusion between Muslims and Arabs is racist as indicated by the Report of the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia²³.

Regrettably such superficial and stereotypical depictions of the Islamic presence in Europe, when connected with the metaphors of aggressive behavior surpassed by open claims of an apocalyptic scenario, put in motion by “Muslims” who are “at war” with the “values of Europe”. Such messages are best exemplified by a series of articles published by a former senator of the Romanian parliament, now editorialist for one of the major national newspapers. Paul Ghițiu wrote a series of eight public interventions with the title “The Apocalypse of Europe?”, where he argues that Western Europe is “finished” because of there is an internal weakness of the continental politics, which is based on “discrimination against Europeans”, one that stimulated the wave of refugees and attacks. Using a conservative discourse, the former senator expresses the typical coding-encoding formula: the “good” Christianity is in danger, attacked by the “evil” Islam²⁴.

Violent discourses and the ideological encoding of Islam

Using the scare of Islamization is one of the most important discursive tools used by Western politicians who are inducing Islamophobia in order to promote their own agenda. Although the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), working under the authority of The Council of Europe, issued two major policy recommendations combating intolerance and discrimination against Muslims (General Policy Recommendations 5 and 7) the negative discourses and the discrimination is a current practice in many European

Union member states. These rules and regulations allow us to identify the Islamophobic manifestations and discourses by the fact that they use the superiority of the West compared to the Muslims, a superiority expressed by negative attitudes and even racial discriminations. As indicated by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia *Islamophobia* is another form of a xenophobic incitation. And this incitation, in turn, leads to violence against refugees or the local practitioners of the Islamic faith, as it was the recent case with an attack in Bucharest, when a group of young people gratuitously attacked two young Muslim women²⁵.

Just like many other European countries, Romania has its own radical groups openly inciting to discrimination against Muslims and specially against the asylum seekers from Muslim countries. This is the case of Călin Mărințuș, who gained notoriety when he publicly confronted the prime-minister Dacian Cioloș, accusing him of accepting refugees quotas agreed by the EU member states. This anti-Islamist activist, who previously organized a rally in Cluj-Napoca under the banner “No to the Islamization of Romania”, has created a Facebook page where he constantly promotes violent messages such as: “an Islamist would cut a Christian throat out of conviction” or “the cancer of Islam is spreading in Europe and will swallow Romania”²⁶. Unfortunately this social media incitation form reached more than 45.000 likes. Once again, in Romania this “threat of Islamization” is baseless in reality, since according to the National Institute of Statistics the Muslim population in Romania reached 0,34% and even if there was a slight growth (from 1992 when there were 0,25%) the overall numbers of this community are actually decreasing, since in 1930 there were 1,03% declared Muslims²⁷.

While this page alone could be a case study for intolerant behavior in the media, more relevant are the messages of Islamophobic politicians, who are constantly cultivating fear and hatred towards a whole religious group by spreading oversimplified and negative stereotypes.

One of the highest ranking politicians in Romania, the former President Traian Băsescu, manifesting some of the most profound forms of discursive violence against Islam. In an interview for the online page of the national newspaper “Adevărul”, Băsescu spoke bluntly about “an invasion of Europe”, orchestrated by the refugees from Syria. Băsescu, a though Right-wing politician, declared the next day after the attacks in Brussels that the European nations are “building bombs” which will kill their own citizens if they accept migrants. And even though there were no attacks against Romania or Romanian citizens, and no proof was available for any conspiracies against this nation, Băsescu claimed that Romania “should feel threatened” because “we are a Christian country”²⁸. This opposition Islam vs. Christianity, which is Islamophobic since the European countries are supposedly secular and the perpetuation of a medieval mentality is noxious, illustrates the dichotomous thinking of many Romanian politicians. The former president of Romania claimed that

a “Quran educated population” cannot be “brought to democracy”. Bănescu, who was not among the most democratic president of our recent history, is in fact underlining a dismissive, superiority towards a whole group of people. And, once more, his argument goes further than is acceptable when he claims that only a “dictator can rule the Muslim countries”. By stating that it is an illusion to try and “integrate an Islamist into the European culture” Bănescu actually presents as inevitable the total separation between the West and Islam.

The political use of anti-Islamism was explicit in a later discourse that the former president Bănescu held at a political rally of his party, The Popular Movement, where he ironically suggested that the current president (Klaus Iohannis) could become an Islamic mufti in the new mosque of Bucharest. “We do not need an accelerated process of Islamization”, stated Bănescu who continued by supporting the idea of a “Christian Romania” while projecting the negative and Islamophobic idea that the Muslim immigrants are not able to adapt to the “European way of life”²⁹.

The same type of discourse was put in action publicly by many other politicians. Even if these statements were made on their personal Facebook pages, or on their personal blogs, these statements did not remain private; they made it into the national news and were integrated in the general narratives about the Islamic threat against Europe. An illustrative case is provided by Elena Udrea, one of the closest collaborators of president Bănescu - actually his favorite candidate for presidency after he left office. The politician, formerly a top ranking minister, suggested the same imminence of threat, stating that it is just “a matter of time” before the terrorist attacks will reach Romania. Udrea picked up the virulent discourse against the “weak” European politicians and blamed “Merkel, Hollande, Fayman” and the other European heads of states and governments for allowing the “arrogance” of ISIS/ DAESH. In a panicked discourse Udrea rhetorically asked some extremely Islamophobic questions: “Who can find a solution now that it is too late? Who would save Europe? Who would save Christianity?”³⁰.

Another politician, who used to be close to Traian Bănescu, now a senior member of the M10 party, Adrian Papahagi posted on his social media wall a message identifying “multiculturalism” as a “failure” of Europe. By claiming that we can no longer react to crimes with “academic symposia”, Papahagi used the radical stereotype of the European culture that has “nothing of value” to get from the “Islamic civilization”. By denying centuries of influences between the two cultures, the politician (who is also a university professor) stated that all Islam had to “export” was “resentment and terror”. Of course, in the logic of other Islamophobes, he blamed also to the Western left wing ideologies, the “shy” supporters of “human rights”, who are also brain-washed by their political correctness (“bien-pensisme”). Although after a couple of hours

Papahagi erased his statements from the Facebook page, his discourse made it into national news and he quickly got national attention³¹.

Cultural encoding and negative stereotypes

This similar choice of words and stereotypes, which are characteristic to politicians, is also explicit in the discourses of important cultural opinion leaders. This is the case with Teodor Baconschi, a former Foreign Minister and a notorious essay writer, who was among the first to publicly promote the Islamophobic idea that “the radical Islam” is actually “stimulated” by European “politically correctness”. Christianity is “limited” by humanism, considers Baconschi and the problem is that of the “Islamophiles” who do not see the repetition of the scenario that took place a thousand years ago, when the South of Europe was “under the banner of the Prophet”³².

Even some high officials of the Romanian state, as is the case with Judge Cristi Danileț, who is a member of the Superior Council of Magistrates, use this belligerent and dichotomous imagination. The Judge posted on his Facebook wall a comment, which soon became a news article, where he claimed that there is no “conciliation between the two cultures” (read Western and Islamic) and he also stated that the “indoctrination” of the “politically correctness” is to be blamed³³.

This type of reversed encoding of arguments was further adopted immediately after the Brussels attacks by some important intellectuals. Among them was Gabriel Liiceanu, maybe one of the most visible cultural figures in Romania today. Liiceanu, a philosopher who translated Heidegger, expressed an even stronger negative attitude the very next day after the attacks. In an interview for Radio France International where he denounced the “weakness of European political leadership” as responsible for the current situation the “West” is facing³⁴. By claiming without any arguments that “our system of values” (read the Western) is incompatible with the attackers, Liiceanu goes on and uses a very strong language against “multiculturalism”. He connotes democracy and multiculturalism with several negative patterns when discussing the opposition between Islam and the West. By placing strong words like “criminal” in relationship with this fundamental value of the European Union, Liiceanu uses the same negative connotation that Baconschi supported. He creates an abhorrent connection by encoding between the “politically correctness” and the effects of the radical Islamist attacks.

Once again the coded depiction of the “Western” politicians uses a derogatory terminology like “ridiculous”, “dried out” or “impotent”. Liiceanu uses the emotional breakout of Mrs. Mogherini, the head of the EU foreign policy, who cried when speaking about the attacks in Belgium, as a manifestation of a “weak” leadership. This emotional response, which

is actually a sign of humanity, is encoded negatively, while the need for “strong” and “firm” political action is positively coded. The solution that Liiceanu proposes is the imposing of “very firm measures”, one that is expressed in a conservative discourse, which suggests the need for politicians who are “forceful”, “determined”, and able to “save the boat while taking water”. Again, this final metaphor indicates the deeply embedded idea that the West is doomed and on the brink of destruction, while the “Jihadis” are an unstoppable force.

Another major cultural and literary figure who was indirectly involved in the debate taking place immediately after the attacks in Brussels was Ana Blandiana. Blandiana, an opinion leader and a dissident during the Ceaușescu regime, was widely quoted by the media with the statements she made during an academic ceremony held at a public university on March 24th 2016, just two days after the Brussels attacks. The writer made it into national news when she declared that there is a “civilization war” going on, and that the crisis of Europe is similar to that of the Roman Empire. Europe was threatened by the millions of immigrants who were carrying a “cultural luggage” which was “more dangerous than terrorism”. Maybe for the former president of the Civic Academy (Academia Civică, an institution created to “educate young people”) to describe Europe as “bureaucratic and vegetative”, due to its “politically correctness” and to accuse the “insidious” infiltration of the immigrant was not Islamophobic. Yet when an important writer claims that Muslims are “firmly determined not to integrate” and that they will destroy from within the culture of XXIst century Europe, this is clearly an Islamophobic declaration. For this opinion leader, this conflict between the “autochthonous” population and the newcomers will imbalance and finally replace „European culture and spirituality”. Such apocalyptic choice of words comes from the same narrative of the “demographic invasion” which is cultivated by the media. Together with the attacks on the “politically correct” policies of Europe, which were also viewed by Blandiana as a new “dogma”, negatively compared with the dogmatism of the religious fundamentalism, we see in action the old dichotomy between “Christianity” (in danger) and Islam (as a threat)³⁵.

Conclusions

The main conclusion provided by this overview of the Islamophobic discourses and narratives in contemporary Romania, is that the politicians and the most important public opinion leaders are promoting negative stereotypes, through the use of several biased labels about Islam. During the monitored period there were no balanced attitudes and the description of the entire Muslim community was based on a profound misconceptions, on evaluations that made little to no distinctions between

Islam, Islamism and the various Muslim communities. The political and ideological bias was explicit not only in the lexical choices, where generalizations and the attribution of negative qualities were recurrent. Also the selection of media discourses indicated a constant reference to a supposed threat of Islam, with references to an inexistent conflict between the West and the Muslim world, with Romania as part of this war. All these stereotypes were contradicted by the social realities and the factual data referring to immigration. Romania was not a target for migrants and any basis for such labelings were simply propagandistic.

The Islamophobic stereotypes used by the Romanian media and by the intolerant discourses of the politicians are part of a generalized anti-Islam propaganda, where a specific religion and its followers are demonized by politicians and opinion leaders which develops a form of unjustified narrative about Muslims and their culture and civilization. This in turn are cultivating fear and hatred, allowing the development of social narratives that separate rather than promoting tolerance and solidarity.

Appendix

TABLE 1. Typological representation of Islam vs. the West

Islam	Western culture
masculine	feminine
aggressive	passive
mobile	decadent
brutality	civilization
faith	atheism
frugal	hedonist
strong	weak
virile	impotent
young	old
assertive	shy
dynamic	doomed

TABLE 2. Typological representation of DAESH terrorists vs. Western politicians

Fundamentalists	Western leadership
arrogant	incapable
active	tired
initiative	inert
resentment	appeasement

Notes

¹ Donald Matheson, *Media Discourses. Analysing Media Texts*, (New York: Open University Press, 2005).

² Matheson, 7-11.

³ Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding", in *Culture, Media, Language. Working Papers in Cultural Studies 1972-79* eds. Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Love and Paul Willis (London: Hutchinson, 1980).

⁴ Ruth Wodak, "Critical Discourse Analysis", in *The Continuum Companion to Discourse Analysis*, Ken Hyland and Brian Paltridge (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 39.

⁵ Obeidallah, Dean. "Donald Trump's horrifying Muslims", CNN, November 21, 2015, <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/11/20/opinions/obeidallah-trump-anti-muslim/> (accessed March 30, 2016).

⁶ Maxime Rodinson, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam*, trans. Roger Veinus (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008), xiv.

⁷ Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God. Why Religious Militants Kill*. (New York: Harper Collin, 2003).

⁸ Sandu Frunză, *Fundamentalismul religios și noul conflict al ideologiilor* (Religious Fundamentalism and the New Conflict of Ideologies), 2nd Edition. (Cluj-Napoca: Școala Ardeleană, 2015), 344.

⁹ Frunză, 349.

¹⁰ Teun van Dijk, *Racism and the Press* (London: Routledge, 1991), 61-62.

¹¹ Spynews.ro, "România, în pericol. Rețeaua Stat Islamic amenință cu atacuri toate țările care participă la coaliția antiteroristă", March 22, 2016, <http://spynews.ro/actualitate/romania-in-pericol-reteaua-stat-islamic-ameninta-cu-atacuri-toate-tarile-care-participa-la-coalitia-antiterorista-98140.html> (accessed March 30, 2016).

¹² Șelaru, Cristi. "Lider musulman anunță atentate în România", November 14, 2015, http://www.stiripesurse.ro/infiator-lider-musulman-anun-a-atentate-in-romania-video_973310.html (accessed March 30, 2016).

¹³ Șelaru, Cristi. "Cristian Tudor Popescu pune diagnosticul: E al treilea război mondial", November 15, 2015, http://www.stiripesurse.ro/cristian-tudor-popescu-pune-diagnosticul-e-al-treilea-razboi-mondial_973325.html (accessed March 30, 2016).

¹⁴ Paul Baker, Costas Gabrielatos and Tony McEnery, *Discourse Analysis and Media Attitudes The Representation of Islam in the British Press* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 261.

¹⁵ See more in Ion Mihai Pacepa, *Red Horizons: The True Story of Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu's Crimes, Lifestyle and Corruption* (Washington: Regnery Gateway, 1987), 24-36.

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