April 2012

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Available at: https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/jgi/vol6/iss2/5

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Manipulation and Counter-Framing: A Content Analysis of Media’s Response to the Anti-communist Movements in 1990 Romania

Adrian Popan

Abstract
The purpose of the present article is to demonstrate the importance of counter-framing for the outcome of social movements. To do so, I focus on a particular case, namely Romanian society during the first half of 1990. The research identifies some strategies of the ruling group to create and impose their own framework and to align it with the interests of the people. It is based on content analysis of a Romanian daily newspaper faithful to the government, employing grounded theory as the method of research. The analysis highlights several relevant categories, grouped under two main subsections: creating an unfavorable public image of the protest movement, and creating an unfavorable public image of the opposition’s leaders.

Introduction
On June 13th, 1990, more than 10,000 coal miners from Jiu Valley, a remote area of Romania, invaded Bucharest, the capital city. Their trip was in response to the call of the then newly elected president, Ion Iliescu for defending the democracy by shutting down the voices of anybody who disagreed with the leading elite. For two days, they turned the capital of Romania into a city at war, devastating buildings, beating and killing people indiscriminately, and operating arrests. The third day, June 15th, people from Bucharest crowded the streets in a spontaneous manifestation of sympathy toward the miners. This article attempts to find an explanation for this attitude, displayed by decent people, who would not otherwise approve violence and destruction. More generally, this article reveals some of the mechanisms used to manipulate people into willingly acting against their declared (and most of the times internalized) values and beliefs.

The theoretical frame employed in order to accomplish the stated tasks relies on Snow’s and his colleagues’ concept of frame alignment (Snow, Rochford, Jr., Worden, & Benford, 1986), yet somehow reversed, in the sense that the empirical focus is on the government’s attempt to align its own frames with those of the individuals, against the frames proposed by the Social Movement Organizations (SMO). Although the establishment’s response to the challenge posed by the movements hasn’t been overlooked by researchers of social movements (see Marx, 1977; Molotch, 1977), it is important to acknowledge its importance as an explanatory variable for the outcome of the move-
ments. Only relatively recent literature approaches the research on frame alignment from a dynamic perspective, being aware of the framing competition which takes place between different actors interested in the outcome of a particular movement. I will study anti-communist movements in Romania between December 1989 and June 1990 and analyze one of the multiple means used by the government to repress the movements. In order to derive some characteristics of counter-framing, the focus of this paper will not be on the social movements per se, but rather on the reaction of the pro-government mass media, and its role in preserving the status quo.

The rationale of writing this paper goes back to my involvement in the movement, on the protesters' side; my background induces therefore an unavoidable bias to this research. Although I will try to address the bias by refraining from axiological statements, I also disclose it here, in concordance with scientific fairness.

For a better understanding of the context, in the next section I will provide a brief historical overview of the events. Then I will review the literature on manipulation through mass media and framing. The analytic part of the paper will utilize grounded theory approach to perform a content analysis of the most widely read daily newspaper, Adevărul [The Truth], covering the same time period as the events under focus, December 1989 to June 1990.

**Literature Review**

**Historical Overview**

Ruled with an iron hand, using the diabolically efficient secret police called the Securitate, Romania largely ignored the major changes that shook Europe in 1989. The only information about the Berlin Wall’s fall was received by the Romanian people via Radio Free Europe and the TV stations of neighboring countries (Hungary and Yugoslavia) (Rady, 1992).

The Romanian Revolution began on December 15th, 1989, in Timișoara, a city in the Western part of Romania, when some parishioners of Hungarian Reformed pastor László Tökés, also a well-known anti-communist dissident, gathered around his house to protect him from harassment and eviction. In short time, the protest turned into an anti-communist demonstration, while the original cause became largely irrelevant by dusk (Mioc, 2002). On December 16th the protesters marched around the city, occupying the Opera Square. Despite the law enforcements’ effort to disperse the crowd, the protest resumed the next day. On December 18th, Timișoara’s mayor declared martial law, prohibiting people from going about in groups larger than two. While the city center was guarded by military forces, a group of about 30 young people defied the curfew and gathered in front of the Romanian Orthodox Cathedral, waving Romanian flags from which they had removed the communist coat of arms and singing Deșteaptă-te Române [Awaken Thee, Romanian], a national historical song banned after 1947. They were fired upon and most of them died or were injured. The authorities continued their attempt to quiet the protest deputizing armed workers from other regions; they were told that Hungarians and “hooligans” were devastating Timișoara, but after arriving there they realized it was not true and joined the protests (Mioc, 2002; Rady, 1992). On December 21st the unrest spread in Bucharest and other cities such as Brașov, Sibiu, and Cluj-Napoca.
Cutting short a visit to Iran, Ceaușescu returned to Bucharest. Proving he had no sense of actual popular sentiment, he staged a mass meeting on December 22nd, presented by the official media as a spontaneous movement in his support. The rally, broadcasted live by Romanian Television, turned into a protest demonstration and the anticomunist message was unintentionally dispersed all over the country. As protesters started to occupy the building of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, Ceaușescu fled in a helicopter. In the meantime, military forces considered loyal to the old regime and labeled later as “terrorists” by the individuals speaking on the Television, continued to fire upon the crowds. Bucharest was a city at war until December 25th, when Ceaușescu was tried and executed (Siani-Davies, 2005).

On December 22nd, Romanian Television switched to the protesters’ side, and became the focal point of the Revolution by keeping the people informed and hosting the foundation of the new government. Early broadcasts featured anticommunist dissidents as messengers of the change; communist leaders, as Ion Iliescu, Alexandru Bărlădeanu, Silviu Brucan, or Dumitru Mazilu, all known for their ideological disputes with Ceaușescu, had shown up at the television building (Rosca, 2005). Seizing on the existent “vacuum of power,” they formed a transition government, with Ion Iliescu as president, under the name of National Salvation Front (FSN). The Front included, initially, former dissidents, but most of them withdrew soon, realizing what was happening in fact: power control exercised by former communists. The first quiet day was December 26th, after Ceaușescu’s execution. The terrorists vanished and all shooting ceased. FSN took over the State institutions and the revolutionaries who refused to accept its stated intentions attempted to gather people to a rally. In the meantime a rumor spread: the rally is just an instigation launched by the terrorists. The television supported the rumor and so the rally did not take place. This allowed the FSN the necessary time to take control over the state’s institutions (Rosca, 2005).

Another confrontation took place on January 12th, after a broadcasted commemoration of the revolution’s victims. The indignation displayed by people from Timișoara towards the hush up of the murders of December, and their demands for the murderers’ names to be disclosed, ignited protests in Bucharest. FSN, unprepared to face such challenge, made some concessions and issued two decrees by which they outlawed the Communist Party and reinstated the death penalty, which they had abolished (probably as a self-protective measure) right after Ceaușescu’s execution. Few days later, FSN canceled the decrees, claiming that they were issued under unfair pressure (Roșca, 2005). Although the official number of the Romanian Revolution’s casualties was totaled at 1,104 deaths and 3,352 wounded, as of 2007 no “terrorist” has been identified or tried (Cristea, 2007b). To my knowledge, these data remained unchanged to the present (i.e., 2011).

On January 23rd, FSN announced that, “as a response to the will of the nation,” it would run in the elections as a political party and that Ion Iliescu would run for president. This announcement increased the irritation and aroused a new wave of rallies which occurred daily until January 28th. In Bucharest, the FSN deputized factory workers who were armed with clubs and chanted “death to intellectuals.” The next day, over 5,000 miners from Jiu Valley arrived in the capital to support FSN; they attacked and devastated the headquarters of the two main parties in opposition, and “reinstalled peace.” The miners returned to Bucharest one month later, on February 28th, openly threatening to return in force whenever somebody opposed the government. Ironically, in the aftermath
of this violent event, they maintained their relative innocence of the violence, claiming that the agitation and most of the brutality was the work of Iliescu’s government agents who had disguised themselves as miners (Roșca, 2005).

Despite the repression, the protests continued in Bucharest and a few other cities. On March 11th, the Timișoara Society, an organization created in January, drafted a 13-point document known as The Proclamation of Timișoara. The most popular of its amendments, the 8th Point, called for all former communists and for the Securitate cadres to be banned from holding public offices for a period of 10 years, with an emphasis on the office of the President (Cesereanu, 2005).

As the elections scheduled on May 20th grew near, the protests intensified; yet, a small percentage of the population participated, most of them intellectuals, students, and former political prisoners. On April 22nd, during a commemoration dedicated to the victims of 22 December, a flower pot thrown from a balcony seriously injured a woman. Protesters went to University Square, which was safer, and where they decided to sit overnight. Two days later, the Geography Department balcony became a tribune for speakers. For the next month, prominent intellectuals, anti-communist dissidents, and revolutionaries addressed the crowd from this balcony. This was to become the most extensive social protest in the recent history of Romania, gathering roughly 50,000 people every evening. The main demands were focused on the forthcoming elections: 1) the application of the 8th Point of the Proclamation of Timișoara; 2) access to the state-owned mass media for all the candidates, not only for FSN candidates, and 3) postponing of the elections, as the only party that had the resources for the campaign was FSN. An additional demand urged the government to reveal and punish the individuals guilty for the massacre in December 1989. President Iliescu refused to negotiate with the protesters and called them “golani” (hoodlums). The protesters adopted the nickname and the president’s insult soon became the symbol of the anticommunist fight in Romania. The peaceful protests continued in the University Square, surnamed the “neo-communism free area” or the “kilometer zero of Romania’s freedom.” Although the elections were held as scheduled on May 20th, and showed a crushing victory for Ion Iliescu and FSN (University of Essex, 2001), a group of protesters decided not to leave the square, including 56 people who had been on hunger strike. On May 24th, there were roughly 250 protesters, but the crowd got back to its original size by the first weeks of June (Cristea, 2007; a; Rady, 1992). On June 13th, police forces surrounded the square and attacked the hunger strikers, followed by some workers who attempted to provoke the protesters. Actual fighting began in the afternoon, when police set fire to their own buses which had been serving as barricades in an attempt to create a pretext for a more decisive intervention. Despite these efforts the protesters could not be defeated. The next morning, about 11,000 miners from Jiu Valley, brought overnight by special trains made available by the government, invaded the square. In addition to this suppressing activity, they were led to the headquarters of the main opposition parties and anti-governmental media agencies and destroyed them. The police and self-appointed civilians affected over 1,000 arrests of protesters (Cristea, 2007 a; Roșca, 2005). By the next day, June 15th, the miners con-

1 The “Hymn of Hoodlums”, a well known song composed during the manifestations in the square by Laura Botolan and Cristian Paturca, stated: “I'd rather be a tramp than a traitor, / I'd rather be a hooligan than a dictator, / I'd rather be a hoodlum than an activist, / I'd rather be dead than communist.”
trolled Bucharest. President Iliescu held a speech to praise them for "defending liberty and democracy," while many people of Bucharest initiated a spontaneous demonstration of admiration for the miners, whom they called liberators.

The official figures report that during these days, seven people were killed and over 1,000 were wounded. On June 29th, in Strâulești cemetery, 128 bodies were buried, most of them with epitaphs that read "unidentified, 1990" (Cristea, 2007a; Cristea, 2007b; Gallagher, 2005).

Theoretical Considerations

The interconnections between mass media and social movements have been subject to a great bulk of literature, originating in the 1950s, when the increasing presence of mass media in the life of middle class Americans attracted sociologists' attention. A strong correlation between symbols circulated through mass media and the crowd behavior has been evidenced by a quantitative study as early as 1956 (Turner & Surace, 1956). Subsequent literature, especially that triggered by the unprecedented flourishing movements of the 1960s, approached the relation between mass media and the movements as a process, emphasizing on the role assumed by mass media in preserving the status quo through selective coverage of the movements (Gitlin, 1980). Molotch (1979) in his analysis of the relation between social movements and mass media, he contends that media generally serves the ruling class interests, whose members are not interested in engaging in social movements, as the existent social institutions already satisfy their interests. He concludes that it is reasonable to assume then that mass media action reflects class interests and that its primary action is to take no action (i.e., to avoid coverage of such movements). Still, media coverage is critical to social movements, as the activists involved need to explain the rationale of their claims. To the extent that the society is presumed to be legitimate, claims of social structural problems are on their own held to be irrational. If media decides to pay attention to the movement, it does so to alert the public and the other members of the ruling class about it and to legitimate the establishment's attempts to destroy the movement. Thus, media often is preoccupied with the personal biographies of the dissidents and their potential threat to the system, but not with the issues important for the movement activists themselves. Molotch (1979) also notes that assumption of the media's objectivity obscures its elite biases from the view of the public.

Among the strategies used to damage social movements analyzed by Gary T. Marx (1979), the creation of an unfavorable public image is critical and also involves mass media. Following the patterns of actions organized by specialized agencies whose goal is to damage social movements, Marx identifies only the paths by which image-damaging information can reach the public. According to his model, this type of information, real or fabricated, is either given to friendly journalists or supplied anonymously to mass media organizations. Nevertheless, this model assumes that the message originated by the anti-movement agencies reaches the public in an unaltered form. As we shall see, on its route from the sources to the public the message can be belittled or augmented by journalists, depending on their own values. Moreover, in some cases, they can supplement the agencies by gathering or fabricating this type of information themselves. Thus, albeit animated by good intentions, journalists can have an active part in the manipulation process, being in the same time its products and its tools.
A number of empirical studies have focused on the link between lack of mass media coverage and the failure of protests (Mulcahy, 1995) and on the role of mass media in rallying people to defend the status quo in response to situations defined and presented as crises (Brody, 1992; Lecount & Wasburn, 2009; Zaller, 1992).

Social movements theory underwent a major shift relying on the methodology of frame analysis developed by Goffman (1974), where the concept of frames refers to “schemata of interpretation” identifiable at individual’s level, yet constructed mainly through interaction, which allow individuals to organize and make sense of the events and occurrences they encounter. In a seminal article, Snow, Rochford, Jr., Worden and Benford (1986), drawing on frame analysis, build a conceptual approach able to link the socio-psychological and resource mobilization views of social movements. Defining frame alignment as “the linkage of individual and SMO interpretive orientations, such that some set of individual interests, values and beliefs and SMO activities, goals, and ideology are congruent and complementary” (Snow et al., 1986), the authors limit their focus to the social movement organizations and their efforts toward mobilization. Nevertheless, students of social movements are dealing with more complex processes, involving more than one set of actors. More precisely, the establishment is not an inert reality, nor is it valueless; it represents the interests of elites, who are by no means ready to accept the framework of the social movement organizations.

During the two and a half decades since the publication of Snow’s and his collaborators’ article, scholars began to consider another factor in the frame making process which accompanies the evolution of social movements. It has been observed that a framing struggle takes place between the movement demands and the structure of political institutions (Wisler & Giugni, 1996), and that the counter framing process is not simply a response to the challenges posed by social movements, but is shaped by the identities and interests of the counter mobilizing elites (Haydu, 1999). More recently, in-depth research approaches the framing / counter framing process in the making of social change (or the resistance to it) on a variety of topics, ranging from human rights to tobacco regulations and global warming (McCright & Dunlap, 2000; Fujiwara, 2005; Joachim, 2003; Roth, Dunsby, & Bero, 2003). To my knowledge, only one scholarly paper focuses on framing competition, showing the importance not only of enforcing one party’s framework, and making the strongest frame central to the discussion, but also of avoiding the opponents’ way of framing issues (McCarty, 2007).

This article will expand the existing literature by investigating the techniques of counter-framing. I will show how the use of narratives and labels, easy to digest by the neutral or already sympathetic reader of the pro-governmental newspaper, contributed to the construction of a frame supportive of the FSN. The process of aligning the frame with the identities and interests of the targeted reader had several focal points: avoiding the competing framework of the movement’s activists and opposition parties, and framing the movement itself as opposed to the readers’ interests by attaching negative stereotypes to the movement as a whole, or to its prominent activists.
Data and Methods

Data
The goal of my analysis is to identify some of the mechanisms employed, consciously or not, in the process of creating and enforcing a framework supportive for the government. For this, I will analyze the content of the independent newspaper, *Adevărul [The Truth]*, which was the most widely distributed publication of 1.8 million copies, followed by *România liberă [Free Romania]* with 1.5 million (Bran, 2000). Another study shows that although the government was not able to completely eliminate the printed media representing the opposition, the latter was cornered into a small portion of the media market through discretionary allowance of money in an economy that was not yet liberalized (Gross, 1995). Being independent newspapers did not mean that they were neutral. In the early months of 1990, while *Adevărul* more or less openly supported the new power represented by the National Salvation Front, *România Liberă* openly supported the opposition and campaigned in support of the protesters in University Square. As my focus is counter-framing, *Adevărul* is the more appropriate data source.

The data set analyzed here contains all the issues of *Adevărul* between December 26th 1989 (issue 2) and June 17th 1990 (issue 145), except for issues 9 (January 5th, 1990) and 10 (January 6th, 1990), which, as well as the first issue (December 25th, 1989) were missing from the collection belonging to Yale University. My final sample contains 142 issues.

In order to address the bias disclosed in the introduction, I referred to a professional translator, Mihai Georgia of Romanian Academy, Cluj-Napoca subsidiary, who translated in English the quotes from *Adevărul* used in the present article.

Analytic Plan
I employed grounded theory, a systematic method well suited for analyzing qualitative data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In applying this method I followed the steps described by Charmaz (2006) where initial coding (examining each line of data, and defining the actions or events as they occurred in the data) was followed by focused coding, using the most significant or frequent earlier codes. The codes were eventually raised to conceptual categories which structure the themes that comprise my findings. Using this methodical approach allowed me to identify and focus on issues emerging from the data, rather than forcing the data to fit predetermined notions, as traditional hypothesis testing methods would have done. This is particularly advantageous because it allows salient issues not initially part of the researchers’ understanding to nevertheless find their way into the analysis. This yields organic results that respond more thoroughly to the data.

Findings
The analysis of the printed data from the collected issues of *Adevărul* revealed palpable means of manipulation in the press favorable to the government. The following three subsections are organized into themes that reflect the most important concerns of the newly formed ruling group, in order to maintain its power: isolating the movement and controlling the opponents by discrediting them.
Creating an Unfavorable Public Image of the Movement

During the period included in my research, the focus of the articles in Adevărul gradually changed from creating a favorable image for FSN and its leaders to damaging their opponents. Especially after the electoral campaign officially began on March 18th, the articles praising FSN reduced and the newspaper concentrated on corroding the image of the opposition. The targets included everybody who posed a potential threat to FSN: the leaders of the most important political parties, the formal leaders of the protesters, other voices questioning the Front’s legitimacy, and the protesters as a group.

Two complementary strategies were employed as means to damage the image of the movement. The first one was to avoid, as much as possible, printing the movements’ demands, and when this could not be avoided, they were presented in a truncated and distorted manner. The second and most widely used strategy was to construct a negative perception of the movement based on the use of stigmatic epithets, some of which being easily turned into stereotypes.

Avoidance of Covering Issues of Interest to the Movement

The first strategy developed gradually, after Adevărul covered extensively the first confrontation in January 12th and accurately noted all the demands of the protesters. At that time the line was not clear yet for the entire editorial staff. Thus, an article supporting the demands was published by Traian Călin Uba (I Demand Answers, January 21st: 2). However, he soon left Adevărul for the oppositions’ publications Baricada and 22.

After this event the reports of the opposition rallies were mainly negative and their demands were mentioned only in passing. Also, with only one exception, when photos of the rallies were published, the protesters’ signs were not visible. The exception, a photo published in March 27th, is likely due to the subtlety of the message, and to the context which allowed Adevărul’s editor to comment on it ironically.

The photo, captured by Sandu Cristian on Sunday, March 25th, at a rally in Piața Victoriei presents a dog with placard representing a human ear, crossed out by an X. The message is directed against the former Securitate, responsible for widespread surveillance of the people. The comment in Adevărul, “I want my bone” is a critique of the political parties, who were said only to look for the power, comparing them to dogs looking for bones.

Symptomatic of this strategy is the way Adevărul constructed the Proclamation from Timișoara, first read at a rally in March 11th. In the subsequent issue of Adevărul, a first page article is devoted to the rally The Rumor—Half True; Free Economic Zone on the Bega River? by Sergiu Andon, (March 13th: 1). The author does not mention any document issued at that rally, but instead attempts to discredit selected points by presenting a distorted interpretation of them. The focus was on point 11, through which protesters pleaded for economic decentralization:

Let it be clearly stated that by „the principle of economic and administrative decentralisation” the 15000...participants or attendands to the rally understand not at all what everybody else understands, but

2 Unless otherwise specified, all newspaper articles are from 1990
want total rights, as sovereign state, for each and every county, city, communa and even village, district and street.

Another account of the rally is found in *Looking for the calm* by Dragomir Horomnea, (March 14th: 1), but again lacks any reference to the Proclamation. The first time the Proclamation is mentioned is only on March 20th, where a text from Rompres (the Romanian news agency) quotes a representative of the demonstrators, Ion Măries, protesting about the media’s “falsification, by chance or intentional, of its true objectives.” The next reference to the Proclamation, made by Marta Cuibus (March 27th: 1) simply ignores the Rompres text (*Timișoara, late March*):

*Figure 1: Photo by Sandu Cristian, March 27th*

![Photo by Sandu Cristian, March 27th](image)

Among the lines of this intangible proclamation ... some statements can be read which makes you think, volens nolens, to a Banat county in which, God forbid, some very day you should use a passport in order to enter. (*Timișoara, late March*)

Point 13 of the Proclamation, which questioned the date of December 22nd suggested by FSN as Romania’s national day, was discussed in *Adevărul*, but only on April 1st in the traditional April Fools’ article, *News of the Day* by Sergiu Andon. There we read,

> the threat of some influential circles from Gătaia according to which if the date of December 16th is not accepted [as the national day of Romania], they shall

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3 Banat is a region in the West part of Romania, where Timișoara is located.
proclaim the autonomy of the Occidental Republic of Dognecea and settle the border of Europe at Caransebeș.4 (News of the Day, April 1st: 1)

Point 8 of the Proclamation, demanding for the former Nomenklatura members and Securitate high officers be banned from running into the election for the first three mandates was considered by the protesters to be the most important demand. It is mentioned for the first time in Adevărul only on April 25th, after a deputation of CPUN agreed to talk with the protesters in University Square. More references to the point 8 can be found after the election of May 20th made it obsolete.

**Enforcement of a negative perception of the movement**

The second strategy of creating a negative perception towards the movement began by attaching negative epithets to the rallies and their participants. Labeling is generally one of the most powerful tools contributing to the framing / counter-framing processes. The first label they tried to attach to the participants, “illiterates” (No violence, January 14th: 2) had to be dropped when students and many intellectuals had joined the movement. Nevertheless, there were other labels stuck to the protesters. Realizing that the protesters had successfully reconstructed the meaning of “golani,” Adevărul avoided using the word for the next few days. The first time it is mentioned, in April 29th, Sergiu Andon attempts to minimize its importance:

It is known that the scarcist and poisonous opposition of FSN has taken over, out of the blue, skillfully speculating, the blab from one second of indignation of the president of CPUN. The reasonable people have ignored it, understanding that it was the expression of a long time teasing carried out throughout the irritating and absurd practice of the political circles which aim only grudge, dissention, grumble. (April 29th: 1)

The press attached other negative labels including gypsies, speculators, prostitutes, unemployed, hippies, and legionaries (a Nazi-type organization active in Romania until 1942). Despite the obvious incompatibility between some of these labels, they were used together, even in the same sentence: “...joining the bands of deranged, legionary and speculator elements that rally in the University Square from some time. (Protest, June 9th: 3)

The media reports from the University Square depict the rally as uncivilized, dirty, noisy, and chaotic. Interestingly, there is only one photo during the four weeks of the rally to support this depiction. Captured by Dragoș Cristescu and published in May 3rd, the photo presents a young man sleeping on the grass, while in the back are seen the legs of several people standing. The comment accompanying the picture (Figure 2) reads “a nap between two slogans.”

Nevertheless, the cartoons that reproduced the stereotypes about the rally were plentiful. Two of these are particularly illustrative of the way labels and stereotypes were enforced by mass media.

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4 Dognecea is a smaller region within Banat; Gătaia and Caransebeș are smaller localities in Banat close to Timișoara.
A cartoon by Al Clenciu published in May 24th (Figure 3), represents a man and a woman wearing stereotypical gypsy attire (the man’s hat and moustache, the woman’s head-kerchief and skirts), near a tent on which it can be read “Viva point 8” in the mirror. A pair of legs can be seen in front of the tent as a sign that it is inhabited, while on its side the cartoonist placed some objects signifying dirtiness: a bottle, an empty can, etc. The cartoon’s title is “At the University”, and the explanatory caption is about the gypsies’ decision to settle there, as they are homeless anyway.

*Figure 2: Photo by Dragoș Cristescu, May 3, 1990*

*Figure 3: Cartoon by Al. Clenciu, May 24, 1990*
Another cartoon, signed by S. Novae, published in June 2nd, depicts two protesters sitting on a curb. Both have long hair and are unshaven. One of them holds a placard which reads “We either win, or die,” and the text below, presumably a part of their conversation, says: “We are not going to die; it is even worse. We will have to work.”

Figure 4: Cartoon by S. Novae, June 2, 1990

The rally in University Square was also denigrated using a series of narratives allegedly submitted by the readers. The authors, always identified by their names and other information, wrote using the first person and thereby absolved the editorial board of responsibility. This was a strategy widely used when unverifiable or particularly aggressive information was published. Thus, in Escaped after Seven Days (Radu, May 11th: 1), Constantin Dumitrache, a worker at Vulcan, narrates how he was taken by force, threatened by a “bearded, skin-and-bone man” having a “knife with a switch,” then held prisoner in the University Square together with other people and forced to chant anti-FSN slogans for a week before he managed to escape. As a reaction to this article, the same day a phone call from Lucia Demian, employed at Marmura Enterprise, who describes to the Adevârul editor P. Constantin how “a bearded man identical with the one who arrested the worker at Vulcan” attacked her with a knife in front of her apartment, demanding her signature for supporting the Proclamation from Timișoara. She was saved when the phone rang, and she simulated a discussion with her husband, asking him to call the police” (Saved by the Phone Ring, May 12th: 2).

The sense of fear was reinforced in the critical days from June 13th to 15th June when the authorities attempted to blame erupting violence on the protesters. One of the
motives frequently used in the authorities' statements was that protesters attacked the State's institutions in an organized legionary putsch. Ion Iliescu explicitly connects the protest with a legionary rebellion in his discourse in Victory’s Square on June 14th:

In this legionary rebellion endured these days by the Romanian people, some elements showed themselves dressed in legionary dress, displayed their green flag, used legionary words. (June 15th: 4)

Adevăral takes up this rhetorical construction and develops it further. One of the ingredients of constructing connections to a Nazi putsch was the use of firearms. Therefore, Adevăral publishes not only accounts of firearms found in the University’s basement (22 rifles) or buried under the Heroes Crucifix in the University Square (three pistols and ammunition)—Pistols under the Heroes Crucifix, June 16th, and another account of ammunition supposedly found in the PNTCD’s headquarters after being ravaged by the miners—“Arguments” of the neo-fascist elements: Ammunition for panic and intimidation (June 15th: 1)—but also publishes two photos in support of the articles. Surprisingly, later, Dragomir Horomnea admits the possibility that there have been no weapons (Order in the delicate matter..., June 17th: 1).

Creating an Unfavorable Public Image of the Opposition’s Leaders
The opposition leaders attacked by Adevăral can be divided into three main categories: the formal leaders of the more important political parties running against FSN in the elections, the informal leaders of the protesters, and the prominent intellectuals who spoke for the protesters (this last category also includes the most important anticomunist dissidents under the former regime).

Leaders of Political Parties
The three most important political parties which had been constituted in Romania in January 1990 were the successors of the traditional parties active before 1947. These were the Christian Democratic National Peasant’s Party (Partidul Național Țărănesc Creștin și Democrat, hereinafter by the acronym PNTCD), the National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal, hereinafter by PNL), and the Romanian Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat Român, hereinafter by PSDR). Their initial leaders were primarily former members of the same parties before they had been banned by the communists, and were thus elders by 1990. Many of them were also former political prisoners, or had returned to Romania after a long exile. The charges leveled against them in Adevăral followed several patterns.

The major leaders of these parties, notably Corneliu Coposu and Ion Rațiu (both PNTCD), Radu Câmpeanu (PNL), and Sergiu Cunescu (PSDR) were unmercifully attacked for their ages:

The ex-PNTCD, PNL, PSDR members, princes, princesses and others threw themselves in airplanes, some hired for big money, and left for Bucharest, some cripples in crutches, other carried in the arms. (Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, January 30th: 2)
Irreverent references to the ages of the historical parties' leaders are also present in the visuals. Issue 100 / 24 April contains, on the first page, a series of photos (see Figure 5) captured by Dragoș Cristescu at an electoral rally of PNTCD, portraying exclusively elderly participants, accompanied by the commentary: “How does the old evil “EYE,” the future of the country has been heard and seen at the rally held in Piața Aviatorilor.” While the photos have nothing offensive, the comment contains both a reference to a negative stereotype, and a devaluing epithet.

**Figure 5: Photos by Dragoș Cristescu, April 24th.**

A cartoon by Al. Clenciuc (Figure 6), published in issue 74 / 22 March represents an extremely elderly politician, resembling Sergiu Cunescu, holding a discourse in which the character claims that only his party can assure a bright future to the youth.

**Figure 6: Cartoon by Al. Clenciuc, March 22nd.**

The exile of these leaders under the communists was also used as an argument to deny their merits. The logic was that instead of staying in Romania to help the people, they emigrated west seeking better (read: luxurious) lives. The same logic was used conversely to legitimate the former communist activists, i.e., that they suffered here with the
people, rather than leaving their country. Those using this argument did not mention that the political leaders they attacked were effectively forced to leave the country for political reasons, nor did they observe the struggle against Ceaușescu’s dictatorship that they conducted in diaspora. They also did not notice that the former Nomenklatura members did not actually suffer with the people, as they belonged to the ruling elite and if they helped anything, it was the oppressive apparatus, not the people. The first article which brings in this theme, Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (January 30th: 2), wrongly accuses Corneliu Coposu (a brilliant figure of PNTCD) of deserting his country:

Noica and Țuțea [Two important Romanian philosophers imprisoned as political dissidents] were eating mere bread with water, Arghezi [Romanian writer who cooperated with the communists] was selling cherries, when Coposu and other political deserters used to drink their coffee with croissants in the coffee houses of Paris.

In reality, Corneliu Coposu never left Romania. He spent 15 years in detention (1947 to 1962), followed by two years of forced residence in Bărăgan. After being released, he was employed as unskilled worker on various construction sites, and was subject to continuous Securitate surveillance.

Later, Dumitru Tinu accused the politicians returned from diaspora of “forgetting even the Romanian language” (Observing with only one “eye”, April 25th: 1).

A third category of charges consisted of direct insults, some of them extremely offensive, with reasons that were loose or absent:

Between the numerous symbols encountered yesterday in the Victory Square I have also seen a group of young people who brought in a car a coffin on which it was written: „Prepared for Mr. Coposu”, which were received with cheers by the people. (The People Does Not Pay Back, January 30th: 2)

Similarly, there were numerous attacks justified by ordinary circumstances, for example that Corneliu Coposu and Ion Rațiu visited the Bellu Catholic Cemetery (Electoral speeches in cemeteries, March 29th: 1), Ion Rațiu moved into a big house in Bucharest (Welcome comrade Rațiu, April 4th: 1). A short and extremely offensive article aimed at establishing a parallel between Radu Câmpeanu, prominent PNL political figure, and Nicolae Ceaușescu:

After forwarding his candidature for the presidency elections, Mr. Radu Câmpeanu wanted to visit the place where in his youth he had been imprisoned, placed in the building of the former CC [the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party]. His wish, of real sentimental significance, has reminded me of the period in the past when another young revolutionary [Nicolae Ceaușescu] used to visit, together with his followers, his former detention place situated in the old prison of Dofiana. (Our people leave, our people replace them, April 21st: 2)
Besides the open attacks on the leaders, a serious accusation was leveled at the three historical parties generally that recurred from February to June and was always accompanied by a promise of publishing proofs that were never given. In brief, the parties were accused of supporting the anti-FSN protests by paying the protesters. In the first place this suggested that protesters were not of their own commitment to the cause, but because somebody else was bribing them. Adevărul’s editors did not directly assume the responsibility of this claim, but rather suggested it came from eye-witnesses. Generally, witnesses’ names and other identifying information, like the workplace, age, or residence, were specified. Thus, Virginia Mușatescu, clerk at IAFEA declared:

These gentlemen want to sell our country to strangers, to capitalists, and here is how they act: yesterday they have given to some dirty ones some 200 lei [the Romanian currency], a packet of Kent cigarettes or several dollars. How come that they want to sell our country? (The People Does Not Pay Back, January 30th: 2)

In the same issue, other anonymous accounts, reproduced by Lelia Munteanu offered more details:

Do you know that yesterday, at Favorit, in Drumul Taberei [a place in a district from Bucharest called „The Road of the Camp”] there were some people with money who bribed the people there to rally against the Front?... And last Friday, at the University, a woman was giving some 200 lei and a bottle of champagne to everybody who wanted to oppose the Front? (They Chocked Back Their Anger, January 30th: 3)

The information was hardly true, especially if one considers another passage from the already mentioned article The People Does Not Pay Back by Ion Marin:

...I have seen someone who said in an undertone towards those who were waiting in a store for the boxes with bread to be unloaded: „What has the Front given to you?” And as an answer, he was on the brink of being lynched by the housewives. (January 30th: 2)

While unsubstantiated, the idea that protesters were bribed was, nevertheless, very powerful, and soon turned into a stereotype. It was reinforced by later accounts, among which two stand out.

In the article Politics and Pullovers, unsigned, Nete Elena, peasant, narrates:

A gentleman approaches to us and hands us a paper, just under our nose, telling us, giggling: come on, sign there, put there your address, and you will get each a pullover and 500 lei. We are looking puzzled at the paper and we recognize the picture of that old man which we see sometimes on tv. (Politics and Pullovers, April 5th: 1)
Yet the most powerful and detailed account was published by Marta Cuibuș in issue 114 / 12 May. Here, 13-year-old Mihaela Dănacu states:

At our place, in Cernica, a gentleman Nitu, and I don't know how, Valer or Viorel, stepped out of an ARO [Romanian jeep car]. He told us he was from PNT. He told us to come in the University Square on 22, at 15,30, and he would reward us. He gave mother seven green papers. On the first there was 50 written in all corners and it was marked with an „S“ cut with two parallel lines. (And Dincă, and Iuga, everybody was advising me..., May 12th: 1)

Those bribed supposedly were to stay in the University Square and chant anti-FSN slogans. However, despite the fact that her efforts to describe the $50 bills were more like that of a five-year-old child, who does not know money, Mihaela made a mistake: the dollar bills did not have the dollar sign printed.

The second step, after the idea that protesters were bribed was well established, was to construct the historical political parties as the ones who did the bribing. This idea was developed through innuendos, for example, in the article Yesterday in University Square, May 25th, where Anica Florescu and Ilie Ștefan referred to protesters as “Mr. Rațiu’s employees”. This rhetoric peaked in June 15th, when, attempting to blame the protesters for the bloody events which occurred in June 13th to 15th, editor in chief Darie Novacănu refers to indisputable proof they possess of big amounts of money invested in the movement (The Knights of the Apocalypse, June 15th: 1). He also states that they did not previously publish the proof because “the apparent calm would make it unbelievable,” but forgets to explain why they still had not published them by the time this later article was published.

Informal “Street” Leaders
The informal leaders of the protesters in the street were more ruthlessly attacked than the leaders of the opposing political parties. The favorite targets were Dumitru Dincă, the most active organizer of University Square, Doru Braia, a journalist recently returned from exile in West Germany, who had been expelled by the Romanian Government, on April 2nd, 1990, without any clear reason. Interestingly, Marian Munteanu, the students’ leader, was attacked only twice.

Strategies similar to those used to attack the political party leaders were also used against the street protest leaders. But attacks on these protest leaders also included the disclosure of private information about their personal lives or information gathered from their school or employment records. An example of questionable authenticity concerns what Adevarul claimed to be one of the many complaints addressed to the prosecutor’s office, which incriminated both Doru Braia and Dumitru Dincă of threatening and attempting to bribe a citizen. It was not, however, made clear what they wanted from the supposed victim (April 4th: 2). On the next day a brief resume of Doru Braia was published, including, among other accusations, that Doru Braia used his social connections to do his compulsory military service in the Navy, rather than another branch of service—though nearly everybody tried to avoid the Navy (April 5th: 3). They also claimed he was a Securitate informer under the code name “Octavian Cotescu,” and that he had raped a
priest’s minor daughter in Germany. Photocopies of his transcripts from high school also were published (April 11th: 3).

Similar accusations about Dumitru Dincă are to be found in another issue:

The CAR [House of Mutual Help, a department of putting money in each month, in order to obtain credit when needed]—bookkeeping Department from The Prefabs Enterprise Militari addresses, by Mrs. Zahiu Georgeta, to Mr. Dincă Dumitru, the requirement to come as soon as possible and to pay his loan made 4 years before. Mr. Dincă left the enterprise without any liquidation record (as well as he left his home, where a wife and four children are waiting for him) and he is debtor by the approximate amount of money of 20,000 lei (Urgent Invitation for Dincă Dumitru, April 26th: 1).

Besides these leaders, many other individuals who had been seen in University Square experienced the same treatment. In some cases, disclosing private information was combined with the usual strategy of outsourcing responsibility to readers who wrote letters or had called the newspaper. Because of the rush to publish unsubstantiated disreputable information not checked thoroughly enough if checked at all, even the wrong people were sometimes attacked. For example, in May 12th, among other opinions expressed by people who called the newspaper, we read:

A lady from Bucharest tells us that, in her way through the University Square, she found a badge with the word “GOLAN” [hooligan]. On the back of the badge: “Iacob Marian Ion, phone number: 205640/26; The Petșchicioia Popular Council(??) [The Town Hall of Petșchchioia], phone number 150943 and Ion Crețu, phone number 480975.” (May 12th: 3).

Dumitru Manole, the journalist in charge of covering, called the municipality of Petșchicioia and talked to a secretary, who told him about Marian Iacob:

Iacob Marian is a native, of age 34, jobless, identically with the badge worn. He brags himself in the village that he was an actor (!) and that he took part in a stunt men association. Most likely, he belonged to the stunt people in the square. (May 16th: 5)

Finally, Marian Iacob decided to visit the newspapers headquarters and talk to Dumitru Manole:

In his discussion with us, M.I. wanted to state: “I am not involved in any political party and I have never been in the University Square, I have not even passed by there.” He then proved to us with documents that he had been a performing weight lifter, asked to join The Association of Professional Stuntmen from Romania, was casted in various parts in 8 Romanian movies. Consequently, the village of Petșchchioia
could be proud of him...... Then came the opinion of the gentleman from the town hall from Petrâchioaia. We find out that he is actually the very godfather of Mr. M. I. Too bad, godfather! (May 30th: 2)

Notably, the newspaper does not apologize.

**Prominent Intellectuals and Former Dissidents**

While most of the intellectuals and former dissidents joined the protests and therefore were blacklisted by *Adevărul* only by mid-April, Dumitru Mazilu had become main character of the January 12th rally. Consequently, he was the first to be charged by an offensive open letter entitled *Answer the Questions!* and signed by Petru Mușina as “representing several militaries” (January 14th: 2).

Except for this attack on Mazilu, the charges against intellectuals and former dissidents tended to be more pretentious because they were generally held to be respectable members of the community. The late-joining of the movement by the intellectuals created a new problem for *Adevărul*, who then had to deal with how they had previously portrayed the movement as uncivilized and uneducated. This was a problem overcome in one example by Magdalena Boiangiu:

> Various newspapers tell us that the speakers from University Square are homeless, with a confused family situation. And if people with academic titles and exemplary fathers join them, this would mean that their—everybody’s— ideas will be better? (*The Denial of the Individual*, May 13th: 1)

Approaches to the construction of images of the intellectuals generally proceeded with more care and involved a different set of methods and rhetorical constructions, more subtle than the usually straightforward journalistic style:

> Whoever will be in charge to teach people democracy when, except for some statements straightly insulting, for some vague advices and for a lot of callings in the streets, our brave intellectuals—top cultural leaders—are not giving them anything. (*Monologue and Incitation*, May 3rd: 1)

Generally, the articles in this category began by pretending to praise the target, but the real purpose of the article was betrayed by the use of adversative conjunctions, like “except that”: “I fairly understand Mr. Iuga’s detention wound and I am able to admire him until sunrise. Except for the moment when he shows his wound in public, using it like a compressed air weapon. It does not shoot, but it fairly stinks.” (*Democracy in the sheep’s season*, February 6th: 1).

In another article we read: “unfortunately, people endowed with moral purity, as Ana Blandiana, have committed the error of mistaking the high temperature which melts the gold of moral virtues with the flat and inconstant flame of cigarette lighters...” (*Street’s Dictatorship*, May 23rd: 1).
A courageous attempt to denigrate all the former disidents, mentioned and charged one by one, proved beyond the author’s powers. Cristian Tudor Popescu concludes his article inconsistent with some of his charges:

Ana Blandiana, Aurel Dagoș Munteanu, Radu Filipescu—didn’t want, or couldn’t join the new political structures, leaving, the first two the FSN, the last the Republican Party....

Dorin Tudoran—came, saw, left.

Mircea Iorgulescu—only left.

I continue until eventually I say to myself that it should have been better if, after The Revolution, their portraits had been honorably placed in the history book, and everybody should have minded his or her own business.

Conclusions

The analysis above leads to several conclusions which can be generalized to other confrontations between social movements and the power structures, both understood in the broadest sense employed by the literature.

First, framing is a continuous and adaptive process, involving at least three actors (namely the social movement organizations, the elite interested in preserving status quo, and the individuals or groups targeted by the frame alignment). The success of a frame alignment depends on the receptivity of the public, and can be secured by making one party’s own frames more visible and by hindering the opposite frames from the view of the public. In my case study, it is noteworthy the way *Adevărul* avoided the framework of the opposition in the case of Proclamation of Timișoara by referring to it in few instances, and always in a derogatory fashion.

Second, frames are never fixed. They adapt continuously to the real world, the more successful being those frames which can be more easily aligned with individuals’ interests. If alignment is at stake, cohesiveness is not important, and the lack of it can easily be passed unnoticed. It is the case of the initial framing of the protesters as illiterates, which had to be switched to a more complex frame as soon as the intellectuals joined the movement. Although successive frames were incongruous, even contradictory, in the main narrative employed, they shared the same logic of alignment with the identity of the targeted audience.

Third, once started, framing and frame alignment evolve in a spiral. “People of good will” undertake the themes consciously brought in by those who had an interest, and further develop them, though not necessarily with malicious intentions, to defend the community from those they perceive as a threat. This can slip out of the control of those who created it, as happened in Bucharest with the second miner’s invasion (on February 29th), when the authorities did not want the miners to come to Bucharest, but they were unable to stop them.

Fourth, the role of controlling the mass media in enforcing a certain framework cannot be overstated. Although this is nothing new in the sociological literature, as revealed by the review of literature, the conclusion of previous studies is strengthened by the particularities of the case I presented here, due to the de facto state monopoly on mass me-
dia, and the discretionary distribution of resources to the newspapers dependent upon their support for the government.

Future research should address the process of counter-framing by analyzing the interplay between the frameworks of opposed interest groups, in the making (and continuous remaking) of their strategy of frame alignment. Students of social movements still need to learn what types of frames are more important for the outcomes of the movements, what aligning strategies are more successful, and what strategies are used to make the opposed framework ineffective.

References


