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**The Discursive Construction of the Concepts of
LGBTQ and Roma People in Hungarian Online
Political Communication**

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1. Research background and justification of the topic

The research project aims to unveil and systematically compare the meaning-making tools and strategies with which Hungarian politicians discursively construct the concepts of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (henceforth LGBTQ) and Roma minorities in their online political communication.

The research is of significant importance in many aspects. On the one hand, the use of social media in political communication has been on the rise worldwide for approximately two decades (Baldwin-Philippi, 2018). Consequently, Hungarian politicians have also been heavily relying on social media, particularly Facebook, as Bene and Somodi (Bene & Somodi, 2018) noted, while a growing number of Hungarian citizens are using Facebook to obtain information about politics (Bene, 2017).

On the other hand, political actors often use minority issues as a central element of their ideology and communication. This is of particular importance in contemporary Hungarian public discourse due to the negative attitudes of Hungarian society toward minorities (see Neményi et al., 2019), which are often amplified or used by some Hungarian political parties to center their communication around minority issues (see Enyedi, 2015; Róna & Molnár, 2017). In addition, political actors in their minority-related social media communication not only portray minorities but also discursively

construct the concepts of minorities, i.e., they define and separate minority groups from the Hungarian majority population and legitimize or question existing minority definitions. Thus, it is paramount to investigate how prominent Hungarian political actors construct the concepts of minorities in their social media communication and what definitions and meanings they attach to them. As such, this research project aims to analyze and compare how Hungarian political actors portray and, thus, construct the concepts of sexual and ethnic minorities, that is, lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, and trans (henceforth LGBTQ) and Roma people on their official Facebook pages.

The distinct social positions of the two marginalized groups are recognized through the varying social attitudes toward each minority group presented in the dissertation and the different modes and social costs that self-identifying as a marginalized group member imposes on minority individuals (see Barát, 2011). Thus, rather than understanding sexual and ethnic minorities as if they are interchangeable in the public discourse, the comparison seeks to explore the minority-group-specific meaning-making tools and dimensions of social exclusion and inclusion.

The research project's conceptual framework focused on two main theoretical strands: based on the theoretical background of discourse analysis, it examined how language use, especially minority-related language use, shapes public discourse and, thus, social reality, and

by drawing on the equalization and the normalization theses, the impact of social media platforms on the political power balance. Besides the employed theoretical approaches that underpin the importance of the research project, the research topic is also justified by its contribution to the existing rich body of research on minority portrayal achieved through a comparative and discourse analytic approach, as well as a time-frame-based sampling methodology that provides a broad scope for analysis.

1.1 Meaning-making in discourse

The research project relies on a discourse analytic approach, thus acknowledging that politicians, through their language use, discursively construct the concepts of LGBTQ and Roma people in the Hungarian public discourse. It defines discourse as an interrelated set of texts (written or spoken utterances, still images, music, audiovisual contents, etc.) and their context of production and dissemination (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). As such, it perceives politicians' minority-related communication and the social and political context of their production and dissemination as a minority-related discourse.

In presenting the discourse analytic approach in general, the dissertation highlights five main aspects of its theoretical background. First, language use and, thus, discourse is *constructive*. Namely, they are not merely transparent mediums or neutral tools for

communication through which one can gain knowledge of 'real-world' phenomena but social practices that construct social reality (Gee, 2010; Géring, 2008; Wetherell, 2001).

Second, discourse is *constructed*, i.e., it "involves work" (Wetherell, 2001, p. 17). On the one hand, it is constructed from existing linguistic elements (words, idioms, etc.) (Gee, 2018). On the other hand, as an account, it is constructed by the decisions made between the existing elements and all possible phrasings and modes of speaking (Gill, 2000; Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

Third, discourse is contextually *situated* and *occasioned*, as the meaning of a given utterance is determined by the context of its use, including the material setting, textual context, the identities of those involved, etc. (Gee, 2004). It is *situated* also in terms of contexts and cultural models, as its interpretation is tied to negotiation and social interactions (Gee, 2007). Therefore, discourses are formed through social practices and interactions between social groups and actors, as well as the complex social, economic, political, historical, and cultural context and power structures in which they are produced and embedded (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Reisigl, 2017).

Consequently, *discourse is a social practice* that shapes social reality and is simultaneously shaped by it (Phillips & Hardy, 2002; Wetherell, 2001). Finally, discourse analysis is inherently concerned with *the distribution of social goods* and *power dynamics*, although

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to varying degrees and approaches per specific discourse analysis approaches (Anderson & Holloway, 2020; Phillips & Hardy, 2002).

To define its particular approach to discourse analysis, the research project positions its approach on the key dimensions of text-context and constructivist-critical axis defined by Phillips and Hardy (2002). As such, it sees itself leaning slightly closer to approaches that emphasize the linguistic tools of discursive construction in the particular piece of text in contrast to focusing on the broader context. As for the degree to which power dynamics and ideology are in focus, the research project falls into the interpretive or constructivist side of the axis. While it acknowledges the power structures that surround the discursive construction of social reality, it focuses more directly on the processes of constructing the concepts of LGBTQ and Roma.

1.2 Political communication on social media

The research project perceives political communication on social media as a particularly important terrain for minority-related meaning-making. Hence, it examines the characteristics of political communication in social media, especially its potential effects on the balance of inter-party competition.

While scholars agree that social media fundamentally differs from traditional media in several aspects (Klinger & Svensson, 2015), they disagree on its effect on political power balances (Elishar-

Malka et al., 2020). Some argue that due to the characteristics of social media, such platforms increase the possibility of leveling the political playing field between major, established, well-resourced parties and their minor and less established counterparts, thus having an equalizing effect. Others argue for the normalization thesis when claiming that social media merely reinforces the existing political power structures (Gibson & McAllister, 2015; Jacobs & Spierings, 2016). Therefore, the research project systematically examines the distinguishing features and potential impacts of social media, especially Facebook, from the perspective of political actors and the rebalancing (or lack thereof) of political power among them.

The research project examines, among other things, the unmediated nature of social media, which allows for direct communication between politicians or political actors and citizens (Klinger & Svensson, 2015), thus bypassing the gatekeepers of mass media. This characteristic presents an opportunity for minor political actors, often overlooked by the mass media, to express their views directly to their supporters or potential voters, thereby supporting the equalization thesis (Gibson & McAllister, 2015).

Content production's relatively low financial costs have also been identified as a key factor impacting political communication on social media as an equalizing force. This observation is also supported by the network media logic theory proposed by Klinger and Svensson (2015). Namely, creating and maintaining an account

on most social media platforms is relatively cheap, as it only requires a capable digital device, Internet connection, and registration, the latter of which is free on most platforms (boyd & Ellison, 2007), while in many cases, even content production is carried out by political actors themselves (Bene & Somodi, 2018).

In contrast, others argue that the advent of paid advertisements on social media platforms and the professionalization of political communication on these sites, i.e., employing communication consultants, copywriters, professional photographers, and page administrators to respond to or remove comments, make the platforms resource-intensive (Bene & Somodi, 2018). Thus, although the cost of adopting social media platforms is relatively low, professionalized maintenance should also be considered (Jacobs & Spierings, 2016). This can leave smaller parties lagging behind major, well-resourced parties with professionalized social media communications, thus reproducing offline inequalities.

Both approaches are crucial in understanding the Hungarian context, especially regarding opposition politicians' opportunities to meaningfully bypass mass media gatekeepers and communicate independently of government communication in a media landscape otherwise dominated by the governing parties Fidesz and KDNP (Bajomi-Lázár, 2019).

1.3 Previous research findings

Among the numerous previous research projects that analyzed the portrayal of the Roma or the LGBTQ minority, those carried out in the Hungarian context, applying a discourse analytic approach, or carried out on social media content were preferred.

The analysis of the portrayal of Roma in different media has a long-standing tradition in Hungary, both in the field of communication and media studies and sociology. Regarding their approaches, most reviewed studies employed content analysis with a few exceptions. In terms of their data source, all of the reviewed research projects analyzed news media content; only one study relied on social media content partly (i.e., Glózer, 2013), while others analyzed newspaper articles, either print (among others, Bernáth, 2003; Terestyéni, 2004; Vicsek, 1997) or online (e.g., Vidra & Fox, 2014) and television programs (see Bernáth & Messing, 2012). The research project examined the characteristics and changes in the four main topics defined as typical of Roma representation in the last thirty years: "mainstream politics targeting or affecting Roma, or those that fit the stereotypes about Roma—such as crime, poverty and culture (mainly music)" (Messing & Bernáth, 2017, p. 655).

In contrast to the analysis of the portrayal of Roma, Hungarian research projects on the portrayal of the LGBTQ minority are scarce, with a few exceptions (such as Janky et al., 2018; Rédai, 2012;

Takács, 2004; Tamássy, 2019). Therefore, the research project turned to international studies, among which the discourse analytic approach (such as Clarke, 2006; Darakchi, 2019) and social media data (e.g., Chen, 2019; Day, 2018) were more frequent. The research project examined the most frequent themes regarding the discursive construction of the concept of LGBTQ people found in the reviewed studies: politics, national identity, sexuality, exotic representation, and in-group identity construction.

The review of the previous research projects highlighted not only the most common minority portrayals regarding the Roma and the LGBTQ minorities but also pointed out gaps in the research field. That is, the lack of analysis examining minority representation in political communication, especially in social media, and the scarcity of discourse analytic approaches focusing not only on explicitly minority-related events but on wider timeframes to examine non-minority-related events' impact on minority portrayal. The research project aimed to fill these gaps.

1.4 Research questions

Stemming from these theoretical notions and previous research findings on the portrayal of LGBTQ people and Roma in various media platforms, the project's research questions focused on three different aspects of the discursive construction of the concepts of the two minority groups.

RQ 1. How does minority-related political communication discursively construct the concepts of LGBTQ and Roma people, and what are the main similarities and differences in the online portrayal of these minorities?

RQ 2. What topics and events trigger Hungarian politicians to include these minorities in their Facebook communication?

RQ 3. To what extent do the online political portrayals of ethnic and sexual minorities differ in terms of the dimensions of social exclusion?

2. Methodology

2.1 Corpus-building strategy and data gathering

To answer the research questions, 45 Hungarian politicians' 2019 Facebook posts were analyzed using discourse analysis. The research relied on Facebook posts due to Hungarian citizens' and politicians' preference for using this social media platform over any other (Bene, 2017; Bene & Somodi, 2018; Merkovity, 2014). The study adopted a timeframe-based data collection analyzing the whole year of 2019 to uncover the events and topics that trigger the inclusion of minorities in online communication. Since heightened political attention and communication have been aimed toward both minority groups from the subsequent year onwards, the study is able to present the minority-related discourse prior to this heightened political attention and communication.

Politicians from ten Hungarian political parties, *Fidesz, Demokratikus Koalíció, Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom, Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt, Lehet Más a Politika, Magyar Munkáspárt, Magyar Szocialista Párt, Mi Hazánk Mozgalom, Momentum Mozgalom*, and *Párbeszéd Magyarországért Párt*, were selected for analysis if they were among the top five candidates on the parties' party lists for the 2018 general elections (if applicable). The selection process did not consider the efficacy of the candidate's performance in the 2018 parliamentary election. Politicians who won a seat in the Parliament in the 2018 general elections as minority representatives or independent representatives, as well as the Roma nationality advocate, were also included in the analysis.

These politicians' Facebook posts were gathered from their official Facebook pages with a free data scraping software, ScrapeStrom. After each post was manually verified, the corpus consisted of 18683 unique posts. The sampling of the minority-related Facebook posts consisted of three steps: 1) a content-based selection with keywords, 2) an event calendar-based selection rooted in the public and media discourse of the time, and drawing on the articles published on the three most-read Hungarian news sites: 24.hu, Index, and Origo, and 3) an extended event calendar-based selection focusing on the most frequently mentioned minority-related events.

2.2 Steps of the analysis

The subcorpus, resulting from the previously defined sampling steps, was analyzed using discourse analysis, predominantly drawing on the methodological notions of Gee (2010), Tonkiss (2012), and van Leeuwen (2008). As the subjects of the analysis were the politicians' original textual contents, while the posted non-text images provided interpretative context for the analysis, the applied discourse analytic methods focus on textual analysis. To provide an in-depth analysis of the discursive construction of the concepts of LGBTQ and Roma people, the minority-related posts were analyzed from four aspects. These were:

1) Identifying techniques with which politicians indicated a particular post's minority-relatedness, thus separating the minorities from the majority. These include the explicit and implicit naming techniques (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Richardson, 2007; van Leeuwen, 2008) and the evoked minority-related events and well-known minority individuals connected to the concepts of minorities (Gee, 2010).

2) The voices and opinions represented in minority-related posts, especially those of minorities, to understand the nature of intertextuality in these posts (Gee, 2010) and to see whose voices are *emphasized* and *silenced* (Tonkiss, 2012), thus *censoring* certain opinions and voices (van Dijk, 2001).

3) Represented actors and agency allocation in the found posts to reveal *characterization and agency* (Tonkiss, 2012) and the nature of *social actor representation* (van Leeuwen, 2008) in minority-related posts.

4) The social roles assigned to minorities through previously analyzed meaning-making strategies and specific social practices, activities, and processes connected to minorities(Gee, 2010; van Leeuwen, 2008).

3. Findings of the dissertation

3.1 The discursive construction of the concepts of LGBTQ and Roma

Key findings on the similarities in the meaning-making strategies that politicians applied in the discursive construction of the concepts of LGBTQ and Roma people are highlighted below:

- Both minorities were scarcely mentioned in politicians' social media communication: approximately 2% of the 18683 Facebook posts were in connection with either or both LGBTQ and Roma people. Members of the governing parties rarely published posts in connection with any of the minority groups.

- Most events prompting many reactions from politicians were initiated by members of the governing parties Fidesz and KDNP or their satellite party, the radical right-wing Mi Hazánk (see Tóka, 2019). Since opposition politicians did not initiate major identifying events related to these minorities, their minority-related

communication could not be independent of the government's communication or events. Consequently, political communication about both Roma and LGBTQ people was primarily shaped by the government's actions and the reactions to them, while opposition politicians failed to step outside of the topics and roles in which the government's actions portrayed these minorities. In this context, the representation of minorities was primarily determined by the dominant political discourse, as previously noted in connection with the portrayal of the Roma by Messing and Bernáth (2017).

- Both minorities were frequently depicted as passive, silent actors. As such, the voices and opinions of minority individuals or advocacy groups rarely appeared in the subcorpus. Additionally, politicians portrayed the LGBTQ and the Roma minority as active actors only in 27% and 38% of the Facebook posts, respectively. Both minorities were often depicted in a generalized way instead of an individualized portrayal.

- The most frequently ascribed social role was that of the victim for both minority groups, although Roma and LGBTQ people were portrayed as victims of different phenomena. This social role was frequently employed with other meaning-making strategies, such as passive portrayal and the lack of minority voice representation, that portrayed minorities as helpless victims unable to assert or fight for their interests.

- The minorities' portrayal was significantly influenced by a large number of short, emotionally saturated, morally condemning,

vague posts, some of them commemorative posts, published mainly by left-leaning opposition politicians. These posts emphasized the politicians' moral evaluations of different social and political events and phenomena but did not provide information on the experiences and struggles of LGBTQ and Roma people, nor did they propose solutions to the different difficulties. Therefore, in these, the minorities appeared merely as empty signifiers, tokens of the politicians' ideological-political stances. These posts fit well into Bene's (2017) description of posts that typically go viral in Hungarian social media political communication. Thus, it can be reasonably assumed that such posts were crafted due to politicians' vested interest in creating viral posts, allowing their messages to reach a broad audience without extra financial outlay.

- Consequently, although the governing parties' and Mi Hazánk's political actions thematized the minority-related discourse in 2019, thereby underpinning the normalization thesis, opposition politicians were able to determine the minority-related discourse in terms of reactions and moral evaluations of said political actions and events and thus exploit Facebook's possible equalizing effects. These findings underpin that when larger political actors feel less inclined to use social media to express their positions (Jacobs & Spierings, 2016), Facebook serves as an equalizing force in the political playing field.

Key findings on the differences in the portrayal of LGBTQ and Roma people are highlighted below:

- The discursive construction of the concept of the LGBTQ minority was dominated by depicting them as being devoted to romantic relationships, family, and child-rearing through almost every meaning-making tool and strategy. This is in line with previous research that found the topic of family and child-rearing by same-sex parents to be important in the discursive construction of the concept of LGBTQ people (Browne et al., 2018; Chen, 2019)

- The LGBTQ minority's portrayal significantly differed between the left-leaning opposition politicians and politicians of the governing parties and Mi Hazánk. Although both constructed the concept of sexual minorities predominantly as being devoted to family and as victims, the former did so in an inclusive tone, while the latter in an exclusionary, sometimes even hostile mode.

- Through the portrayal of LGBTQ actors and voices, who appeared exclusively in a positive context in politicians' posts, the concept of the sexual minority was constructed as consisting solely of white, cisgender, upper-middle-class men.

- Other relatively isolated LGBTQ-related discourses included the portrayal of minority individuals as politically active actors, as minorities embracing their identity, and the sexual minority as a possible topic of sex education.

- The portrayal of Roma people was also divided between political actors but along different lines: between the Roma

nationality advocate, Félix Farkas, and the left-leaning opposition politicians. Politicians of the governing parties rarely posted about the Roma minority, and when they did, their portrayal was in line with that of Farkas.

- In the portrayal of Farkas, Roma individuals and organizations were individualized and portrayed primarily as artists, especially musicians and theater artists. This portrayal strengthened a long-standing stereotypical portrayal of the minority (Bernáth, 2003; Messing & Bernáth, 2017; Munk, 2013; Terestyéni, 2004). According to Messing and Bernáth (2017), this is an essentializing portrayal, as it assigns intrinsic and instinctive qualities to Roma people, even if in a positive context. Farkas also depicted the minority group as politically active by the recurring mention of rural Roma self-government representatives.

- Opposition politicians constructed the concept of Roma predominantly as victims, especially victims of physical abuse or fate, and as workers and professionals. In these inclusive-toned Facebook posts, generalized minority portrayal was more prevalent.

- An isolated discourse in the opposition's online political communication depicted the Roma as criminals through the individualized portrayal of a well-known Roma politician, Flórián Farkas. Although previous analyses of Hungarian media have also found portrayals of Roma people as engaging in election fraud (Terestyéni, 2004) and corruption and embezzlement (Glózer, 2013), this project's findings show somewhat of a difference. Notably, this

isolated discourse employed an individualized portrayal instead of a generalized one and focused on specific cases of corruption and embezzlement instead of portraying Roma people in general as aggressive or threatening to the majority of the population.

3.2 Events sparking minority-related political communication

- Although fewer LGBTQ-related events were mentioned in the politicians' posts, these sparked just as many Facebook posts as Roma-related events mentioned in a higher number. Hence, a lower number of LGBTQ-related events entered the threshold of Hungarian online political communication, but those that did sparked many Facebook posts; meanwhile, politicians addressed numerous events related to the Roma yet failed to elicit a widespread response from fellow politicians.

- The findings underscored that politicians, instead of providing an independent content flow, predominantly disseminated, commented on, and reacted to news published in the online news media, even if only to express their contrary opinions. As such, the content flow could not bypass media gatekeepers, therefore questioning one of the main assumptions of the equalization thesis (Jacobs & Spierings, 2016; Klinger & Svensson, 2015).

- The portrayal of minority groups was heavily influenced by certain exclusionary key events, i.e., prevalent meaning-making tools, throughout the year. These were initiated by members of the

governing parties or their radical right-wing satellite, the Mi Hazánk party. Namely, László Kövér's speech established a particular social role for LGBTQ individuals in the context of family life, while the leaked video of János Pócs and Mi Hazánk's anti-Roma demonstration depicted the Roma as victims of potential physical harm. These events and other inclusive-but-turned-controversial events provided an excellent breeding ground for opposition politicians' short, morally condemning, vague posts previously introduced; as such, they offered a topic for opposition politicians to comment on in an attempt to produce viral content (Bene, 2017).

- Politicians rarely connected non-minority-related events to the minority groups analyzed, therefore sharply separating the concepts of minorities from other public issues and events and creating segregated discourses (van Dijk, 2001). The scarcity of posts connecting minority groups to the European Parliament elections and the Hungarian municipal elections of 2019 exemplifies this. In this regard, other than very few cases, neither politician considered LGBTQ or Roma people crucial members of the political community to address in their political campaigns on social media directly.

3.3 Dimensions of social exclusion in the online political portrayal of minorities

A key finding of the research was that the politicians' language use constructed the concepts of Roma and LGBTQ minorities in different social dimensions:

- The concept of Roma people as an ethnic minority was constructed in politicians' minority-related discourse based on its relationship to Hungarian society and nation. Accordingly, both the racist, anti-Roma, and the anti-racist, minority-inclusive minority-related political communication, through the applied meaning-making tools and strategies, defined the ethnic minority through their exclusion from or inclusion into the dimension of the nation.

- At the same time, the concept of LGBTQ people as sexual minorities was constructed based on their relation to the family. As such, both the manifest or latent homophobic and the sexual minority-inclusive minority-related political communication defined sexual minorities through their exclusion from or inclusion into the dimension of the 'family.'

- In the case of Roma, the governing parties legitimized the exclusion of the minority group from the definition of nation tacitly, while in the case of the exclusion of LGBTQ people from the definition of the family, they also actively perpetuated the discriminatory discourse through their language use.

- Interpreting these results in the broader context of the Hungarian political discourse, such as in light of the Fundamental Law (Magyarország Alaptörvénye, 2011) that describes the family as the foundation of the nation and the social and family policies of Fidesz, which have been widely criticized for discriminating against the Roma (see Lugosi, 2018; Szikra, 2014), it can be concluded that the governing parties of Hungary, through policies, excluded Roma people from the definition of family as well as the LGBTQ people from the definition of nation.

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