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MIRRORS OF ANGER: THE “COLECTIV” CASE REFLECTED IN A ROMANIAN VIRTUAL COMMUNITY (*GÂNDUL*)

1. Introduction: Solidarity, Discourse, and Interpretation

Both the national and the international media chronicled the fire that broke at the “Colectiv” Club during a rock concert on 30 October 2015 as the most resounding topic on the last year’s map of events. Its impact can be measured not only in terms of immediate victims (65 deaths), but also in terms of collateral effects such as street protests, political changes, and public scandals. In the event’s aftermath, thousands of protesters marched through Bucharest several days in a row and adopted, at the discourse level, a position against the state system. Their claims led to a change in the composition of the Romanian Government, who lost their credibility and were forced to move from a political to a technocrat legitimization. The situation also escalated to a national scandal because the Orthodox prelates’ official positions did not meet the majority’s projections of freedom. Moreover, within the public space, the 65 victims reopened the discussions about the abuses of the ex-minister of Internal Affairs, which had led, days before, to the death of a young police officer. As it was subsequently shown, the latter had been ordered to accompany the minister not on official missions but on private errands. Finally, the public and the Romanian press started a debate over hygiene standards in hospitals. Even now, 7 months later, the “Colectiv” core is still showing its irradiating power, since the new *Hexipharma*¹ case and its dramatic disclosures seem to also stem from it.

We chose this topic because it reflects the dynamic of a virtual community coagulated around a very significant social crisis in Romania. Starting from the assumption that a social catastrophe leads to a rekindling of human solidarity and a strengthening of social bonds, we decided to focus on the effects of this solidarity within digital media. More specifically, we were interested in the way newspaper readers show their social engagement and ties through their online comments to news articles. In our opinion, the online community of *Gândul* commentators may be delineated by taking into consideration three key features: 1. From a technological point of view, this community was formed on the online platform of

¹ <http://www.gandul.info/stiri/hexi-pharma-a-inctetat-productia-pana-la-rezolvarea-situatiei-privind-dezinfectantii-folositi-in-spitale-15276581>.

Gândul – a well-known daily newspaper, established in 2005, and ranked on the 9th position in the top of the most accessed news websites in Romania². 2. From the viewpoint of its contextual conditioning, we may talk about a “discourse community” that originated in the “Colectiv” tragedy and its consequences. 3. Beside the core issues relative to the “Colectiv” fire, the specific functioning of this “discourse community” also generated a wide range of other urgent social-political debates. Owing to these thematic ramifications, this specific group of online commenters may also be seen as an “interpretive community” who is able to issue its own beliefs, opinions, and ideas.

Although it does not display all of the classic features mentioned in the literature, we believe that by the strength of its social engagement, involvement and online interactions this community still qualifies as a “virtual” one in the “weak” acceptance of the concept.

2. *Virtual Communities. A New Social Contract?*

The acceleration of the social evolution brought by New Media led to a development of online communities at a very fast pace. Online communities construct a new kind of “social contract”, with flexible rules and at a significant distance from the classic sense of community³. The sociological concept of community (in Durkheim’s tradition⁴) was organized around features such as family ties, work, economic relations, geographical proximity, face-to-face relationships, moral engagement, durability, but all these traits are modified or simply overridden in the digital environment. The community is a protean concept that does not have a unique or a fixed definition; George Hillery’s efforts to inventory the meanings of this term in various domains constitute a key reference⁵. Thus, the term community “means many things to many people, and it would be hard to find a definition of community that would be widely accepted”⁶. In the same vein, this term carries a huge emotional weight, so the researchers of communities are dealing, in fact, with the “defining of undefinable”⁷. The concept of “community” suffers from four diseases: polysemy, ideologization,

² According to the ranking provided by www.traffic.ro.

³ Camelia Grădinaru, “The Potential Role of New Media in the Creation of Communities”, *Argumentum*, IX, 2011, 1, pp. 137-161.

⁴ Emile Durkheim, *De la division du travail social*, Paris, Félix Alcan, 1893.

⁵ George Hillery, “Definitions of Community: Areas of Agreement”, *Rural Sociology*, 1955, 20, pp. 111-123.

⁶ L. Komito, “The Net as a Foraging Society: Flexible Communities”, *The Information Society*, 1998, 14, pp. 97-106.

⁷ Lori Kendall, “Community and the Internet”, in Robert Burnett, Mia Consalvo, Charles Ess (eds.), *The Handbook of Internet Studies*, Chichester, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, pp. 309-325.

naturalisation and obsolescence, so that it has to be used as a weak and vague concept, but still as "one of the greatest leading principles of sociology"⁸.

By combining the terms "community" and "virtual"⁹, geographical requirements were suspended and social interactions were realizable through computer-mediated communication. Thus, there happened a shift from traditional bonds to common interest ties¹⁰. Of course, the virtual community defines its location through technology tools, which leads to the idea of a "common location", a virtual "place" where members communicate¹¹. *Usenet* is seen as the first form of virtual community, while *The Well* is viewed as an example of community, widely described by Rheingold, a pioneer researcher in this field. For him, virtual communities are "social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace"¹². Some reasons for which online communities are the "next step in the transformations of community" would be the following: de-traditionalization, dis-embedding, globalization, reflexivity, and the human need to find communion with other people through media and symbolic means¹³. Anonymity¹⁴ is also a central factor that contributes to the extension of virtual communities and a source of paradoxes (freedom of speech versus online defamation and the easiness of leaving the group).

The myriad of online communities challenged the synthetic abilities of researchers who had to organize them into coherent typologies. There are virtual aggregations for nearly every interest that we can think of, from *communities of practice* to *brand communities*. Armstrong and Hegel¹⁵ condensed those options to four types: *communities of transactions*, *communities of interest*, *communities of fantasy*, and *communities of relationship*. To the affiliation criteria and technologic criteria (Internet message boards, online chat rooms, virtual worlds etc.), we can

⁸ Monique Hirschhorn, "La communauté: du concept à l'idée directrice", in Ivan Sainsaulieu, Monika Salzbrunn, Laurent Amiotte-Suchet (eds.), *Faire communauté en société. Dynamique des appartenances collectives*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2010, pp. 9-13.

⁹ R. Shields, *The Virtual*, London, Routledge, 2003.

¹⁰ B. Wellman, M. Gulia, "Virtual Communities as Communities", in M.A. Smith, P. Kollock (eds.), *Communities in Cyberspace*, New York, Routledge, 1999, pp. 167-194.

¹¹ Catherine M. Ridings, "Defining 'Virtual Community'", in S. Dasgupta (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Virtual Communities and Technologies*, Hershey – London – Melbourne – Singapore, Idea Group Reference, 2006, pp. 116-120.

¹² Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*, Boston, Addison-Wesley, 1993.

¹³ Vincent Miller, *Understanding Digital Culture*, Los Angeles – London – New Delhi – Singapore Washington, Sage, 2011, pp. 189-190.

¹⁴ Kevin Featherly, "Anonymity", in Steve Jones (ed.), *Encyclopedia of New Media*, London – Thousand Oaks – New Delhi, Sage Publications, 2003, pp. 9-11.

¹⁵ A. Armstrong and J. Hegel, "The Real Value of Online Communities", in E. Lesser, M. Fontaine, J. Slusher (eds.), *Knowledge and Communities*, Oxford, Butterworth-Heinemann, 2000, pp. 85-97.

also add the structural criteria that define *centralized communities*, *decentralized communities* and *distributed communities*¹⁶.

Constance Elise Porter¹⁷ tried to develop a typology system from a multidisciplinary perspective, using establishment type and relationship orientation as the key categorization variables. As a result, five essential attributes of virtual communities were highlighted: *purpose* (content of interaction), *place* (extent of technology mediation of interaction), *platform* (design of interaction), *population* (pattern of interaction), and *profit model* (return of interaction). Moreover, researchers have also developed criteria in order to exclude virtual forms of sociability from the category of virtual communities¹⁸. Consequently, Nancy Baym developed an “emergent model of online community”¹⁹, that emphasizes the importance of five external factors in shaping an online community: *temporal structure*, *context*, *system infrastructure*, *group purposes*, and *the traits of the members*.

The translation of the concept of community into the cyberspace brought with it other problems, so that the theoretical approaches are completely polarized. The utopians consider that the Internet provides new ways of communicating and new means for people to get together and form communities without limits, whilst the dystopians emphasize the negative effects of the new technologies (alienation, deviation from traditional communities). In this vein, the effects of the Internet on social capital turned into an important subject of debate²⁰. The authenticity of this new form of sociability was also deeply questioned²¹, organic communities remaining the gold standard of the analysis²². The online community commitment

¹⁶ Phillip H. Gochenour, “Distributed Communities and Nodal Subjects”, *New Media and Society*, VIII, 2006, 1, pp. 33-51.

¹⁷ Catherine Elise Porter, “A Typology of Virtual Communities: A Multi-disciplinary Foundation for Future Research”, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, X, 2004, 1, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2004.tb00228.x/full>.

¹⁸ Catherine M. Ridings, “Defining ‘Virtual Community’”, p. 119.

¹⁹ Nancy Baym, “The Emergence of On-line Community”, in S. Jones (ed.), *Cybersociety 2.0: Revisiting Computer-Mediated Communication and Community*, Thousand Oaks, Sage, p. 38.

²⁰ Barry Wellman, Anabel Quan Haase, James Witte, Keith Hampton, “Does the Internet Increase, Decrease, or Supplement Social Capital?”, *American Behavioral Scientist*, XLV, 2001, 3, pp. 436-455; H. Prujit, “Social Capital and the Equalizing Potential of the Internet”, *Social Science Computer Review*, XX, 2002, 2, pp. 109-115; J. Lee and H. Lee, “The Computer-mediated Communication Network: Exploring the Linkage Between the Online Community and Social Capital”, *New Media & Society*, XII, 2010, 5, pp. 711-727; E.M. Uslaner, “Social Capital and the Net”, *Communications of the ACM*, XLIII, 2000, 12, pp. 60-65.

²¹ B. Wellman, M. Gulia, “Virtual Communities as Communities”; Manuel Castells, *L'Ère de l'information. 1. La société en réseaux*, Paris, Fayard, 2001.

²² Jan Fernback, “Beyond the Diluted Community Concept: a Symbolic Interactionist Perspective on Online Social Relations”, *New Media and Society*, IX, 2007, 1, pp. 49-69; Lori Kendall, “Virtual Community”, in Steve Jones (ed.), *Encyclopedia of New Media*, Sage – London – Thousand Oaks –

and participatory capital proved that the Internet had consistent potential for the creation and functionality of virtual communities. The incorporation of new media in everyday practices led to the normalization of these "we-groups". Even if virtual communities are marked by fluidity, flexibility, weak ties, "convenient togetherness without real responsibility"²³, what happens inside them and how they shape the offline life remain core interrogations. Online connectivity is not just a metaphor²⁴, but it is also an empowered structure providing effective actions in order to solve some specific issues.

In this respect, the main tool used in virtual communities is conversation. Even new media have a discursive nature that attracts people. Wagner and Bolloju²⁵ actually characterized wikis, discussion forums, and blogs as "conversational technologies". What can we obtain when we "talk" online, using computer-mediated communication? In sum, the types of activities generally done online are knowledge transfer, sharing of information, expertise, advice, affective support, companionship, collaboration, etc. As Lévy pointed out about the "collective intelligence"²⁶, a concept that was adapted later to virtual spaces by Wasko and Faraj²⁷ there is a fundamental reservoir of knowledge embedded in communities. Thus, virtual communities are like a "living encyclopedia"²⁸, forming wide databases.

The discursive and interpretive paradigms fruitfully contributed to the elaboration of meaning in online communities. The discourse-oriented approach claims that participants construct community-identity in a discursive manner²⁹. The language is viewed as a social practice, while the communities, as forms of life, depend on these practices. The members negotiate the topics, argue, defend or not a certain idea, and, in this process, they construct their own notion of community. The "interpretive repertoire" concept³⁰ can be applied successfully to the online

New Delhi, Sage Publications, 2002, pp. 467-469; J. Van Dijk, "The Reality of Virtual Communities", *Trend in Communication*, I, 1998, 1, pp. 39-63.

²³ Jan Fernback, "Beyond the Diluted Community Concept", p. 63.

²⁴ D.G. Kolb, "Exploring the Metaphor of Connectivity: Attributes, Dimensions and Duality", *Organization Studies*, XXIX, 2008, pp. 127-144.

²⁵ C. Wagner, N. Bolloju, "Supporting Knowledge Management in Organizations with Conversational Technologies: Discussion forums, Weblogs, and Wikis", editorial preface, *Journal of Database Management*, XVI, 2005, 2, pp. i-viii.

²⁶ Pierre Lévy, *Collective Intelligence. Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace*, translated from the French by Robert Bononno, Cambridge – Massachusetts, Perseus Books, 1997.

²⁷ M.M. Wasko, S. Faraj, "Why should I share? Examining Social Capital and Knowledge contribution in electronic networks of practice", *MIS quarterly*, XXIX, 2005, 1, pp. 35-57.

²⁸ Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community*, p. 46.

²⁹ M. Colombo, A. Senatore, "The Discursive Construction of Community Identity", *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, XV, 2005, 1, pp. 48-62.

³⁰ J. Potter, M. Wetherell, *Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitude and Behaviour*, London, Sage, 1987.

realm, because every virtual community has a database of conversations. This body of discourses can say relevant things about the nature and the dynamic of an online group. Moreover, the virtual community seen as a discursive community has the advantage of comprising difference, heterogeneity, and debate as natural characteristics of its existence³¹. The unrestricted discussion about a theme is increasingly expanding what has been called the “participatory culture”³² and the possibilities to provoke changes offline. “Discourse community” is preoccupied with the “use of discourse for purposeful social action in a public arena”³³, reinforcing Habermas’s ideas about the public sphere³⁴.

As an “interpretive community”³⁵, a virtual community shares meanings, experiences and ideas through ongoing social interaction. The members of an online group are usually involved in common activities, they have common interests and accordingly they construct and reconstruct a shared frame of reference. Thus, an interpretive group is “characterized not just by the economic background of their members, but by the common modes of interpretation of their social world”³⁶. The majority of virtual communities meet these conditions as they have their own specific rules, ways of joking, jargons, etc.

Jankowski remarked that “although the distinction between these terms is not always clear, they collectively suggest new avenues for understanding community from a perspective where use of language is central. The linguistics perspective seems particularly appropriate for computer-mediated communication because of its focus on forms of language and discourse”³⁷. In line with Jankowski’s remarks, we approach the community of *Gândul* commentators from a corpus-based, lexical perspective. The methodology used, as well as some of the results of our research are discussed in what follows.

³¹ T. Meppem, “The Discursive Community: Evolving Institutional Structures for Planning Sustainability”, *Ecological Economics*, XXXIV, 2000, 1, pp. 47-61.

³² Harry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where New Media and Old Media Collide*, New York – London, New York University Press, 2006.

³³ L. Gurak qtd. in N.W. Jankowski, “Creating Community with Media: History, Theories and Scientific Investigations”, in A. Lievrouw, Sonia Livingstone (eds.), *Handbook of New Media Leah*, London – Thousand Oaks – New Delhi, Sage Publications, 2002., p. 40.

³⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Translated by Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1989.

³⁵ Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1980; T.R. Lindlof, “Media audiences as Interpretive Communities”, *Communication Yearbook*, XI, 1988, pp. 81-107.

³⁶ Dan Berkowitz, James V. TerKeurst, “Community as Interpretive Community: Rethinking the Journalist-source Relationship”, *Journal of Communication*, XLIX, 1999, 3, p. 127.

³⁷ N.W. Jankowski, “Creating Community with Media”, p. 41.

3. Methodological Considerations

Labeled as a huge “accident”, then as a “tragedy”, and eventually as a “scandal”, the “Colectiv” case and its factual unfolding could have been analyzed only through a detailed investigation of the Romanian media that have an online component, which allows for recent information to be updated. However, since the event was reported by all Romanian publications and by television stations, a generic discrimination was necessary from the very beginning.

3.1. Categories of Online Sources

Thus, we focused on written media and discerned four categories of publications that could have fostered communities of online commentators: 1. Cultural/ Literary publications such as “Observatorul Cultural”, “Dilema”, “Cultura”, etc.; 2. Online platforms such as “Contributors”, “Vice”, “LaPunkt”, etc.; 3. Blogs; 4. Daily newspapers such as *Adevărul*, *Gândul*, *Jurnalul Național*, etc. We decided to conduct our research on a community of online commenters formed around a daily newspaper because we are of the opinion that the frequency of publication has direct effects on the community’s *size*, *variety of members* and *life span*. Starting from Porter’s and Baym’s views on the characteristics of virtual communities, our choice to focus on the community of *Gândul* commentators also took into account the site’s architecture and the editors’ own structuring of information and comments.

At the time when we started our research, the site www.gandul.info (which has been just recently restructured³⁸) conveniently gathered all the articles related to “Colectiv” under the label “Tragedia de la Colectiv” [The Tragedy at the Colectiv Club]. Moreover, the topics approached in each news report could be checked through a browser window that listed all the articles uploaded during a particular day. Another important aspect of the site’s configuration was represented by the separation between Facebook comments and *on-site* comments, which helped us detect spam messages and invalidate them in the process of corpus modeling. Therefore, the given architecture of the site definitely influenced us in choosing the platform that best fitted our research goals. The newspaper’s ideological orientation was out of the scope of our interest.

3.2. Archiving Comments. Time and Length Limits

The fire at the “Colectiv” Club burst on the night of 30 October 2015 around 22h during a concert performed by the metal band *Goodbye to Gravity*. The place was extremely crowded (over 400 people, according to official sources), and had

³⁸ <http://www.gandul.info>.

only one exit, which made it difficult for so many people to get out when the fire broke. Some of them were severely burnt and others asphyxiated. No less than 65 people died and 147 were injured. Given the fact that the fire's consequences were visible right away, our investigation focused on the comments generated by "Colectiv" articles published between 30 October and 30 November 2015.

The editors' grouping of the articles under the label "The Tragedy at the Colectiv Club" served our general sense of orientation even through this structuring contained only news and updates related to the accident, excluding materials about its consequences. In order to rebuild the complex articulations of the public debate, we had to discern what other themes stemmed from this case. Overall, the articles uploaded on the *Gândul* platform contain a mixture of factual and political information. Therefore, the news directly linked with the "Colectiv" case could only be spotted by using manual browsing because 15 days after the accident, all political messages referred back to the "Colectiv" case. Such being the case, we preferred to build the corpus using the site's search engine, which allowed for a day-by-day check of news and updates. For instance, on 30 October, out of an average news-flow of 60 items per day there are only 2 articles announcing the accident, while on the following 10 days, between 30 and 58 news items about the case were posted each day. One month later, on 30 November, there were only 4 reports mentioning the accident.

3.3. Text Processing and Analysis Tools

After having selected the news reports of interest for our research, we proceeded to the inventory and processing of the messages posted in the *Comments* section of each piece of news. For each article we created two separate files, one encompassing all *on-site* comments and one for Facebook comments, i.e. messages left by people using their own Facebook accounts (whether real or not). The files thus created were named using codes – specifying the news article to which they referred, their type (*Facebook* or *on-site*) and day of publication – and were further grouped by day of publication. All the documents were then converted into *.txt* files and subjected to a process of light editing and markup. Irrelevant and redundant text chunks were automatically removed. They included the names of pre-set buttons and commands present in the *Comments* sections, e.g. *Like*, *Reply*, *Edited*, *Răspunde* [Reply], etc., which might have skewed overall corpus composition. As for markup³⁹, the commenters' names/nicknames and supplemental coordinates were automatically marked as metadata with XML "< ... />" tags so as to exclude them from text analysis *per se* or, if the case, subject them to a separate investigation.

³⁹ T. McEnery, A. Hardie, *Corpus Linguistics: Method, Theory and Practice*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012.

The corpus thus created was analyzed using AntConc⁴⁰, a freeware analysis toolkit for concordancing and text analysis⁴¹. Since currently there are no available automatic part-of-speech taggers for Romanian whose tagging system and output be compatible with AntConc or other international corpus-analysis tools, the comments in the corpus have not been POS tagged. However, all of our analyses use a custom-made lemma list that enabled us to take into account not only the tokens (absolute number of words) but also the word-types (unique words)⁴² in the corpus.

The lemma list was adapted from the one provided by Michal Boleslav Měchura⁴³, which, originally, contained a number of approximately 35000 word-types and their forms. In addition to removing some forms which were outside the scope of our research (abbreviations of chemical elements, for instance), since some of the comments in the corpus did not use diacritical marks for Romanian, the original list was enriched with alternative no-diacritic forms for each lemma, i.e. the lemma *bolșevic* includes both forms with diacritical marks and without (*bolsevic*, *bolsevicul*, etc.). Moreover, after a preliminary analysis of the corpus, a number of 152 new lemmas and their forms were subsequently added to the original list. They mostly include relatively new Romanian words, proper names (mainly politicians) and informal terms or forms that are highly frequent in everyday speech and in the corpus at hand: e.g. *manelist* (someone who likes to listen to *manele*, a music style of Oriental origins perceived as vulgar and uneducated in Romania), *securist* (a member of the former Communist *Securitatea*), *Băsescu* (the name of the former president of Romania), *PSD* (the acronym for Romanian Social Democratic Party), *pesedist* (a member of the PSD), *popime* (pejorative term for the clergy), *rocker*, *satanist*, etc. Thus constituted, the lemma list used for this study includes a total number of 35,242 lemmas and no less than 6,829,922 word-forms.

3.4. Corpus Structure and Size

After the initial text selection and comment compiling process, the corpus comprised 2,057 Facebook comments and 14,433 on-site comments. They represented reactions, messages, and replies to a total number of 566 news reports about the “Colectiv” case published on the *Gândul* website. However, upon closer

⁴⁰ L. Anthony, AntConc (3.4.4x) [Computer Software], Tokyo, Waseda University, 2014. Available from <http://www.laurenceanthony.net/>.

⁴¹ M. Stubbs, *Words and Phrases. Corpus Studies of Lexical Semantics*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2002; M. McCarthy, A. O’Keeffe (eds.), “Historical Perspective. What are Corpora and how have They Evolved?”, in Anne O’Keeffe and Michael McCarthy, *The Routledge Handbook of Corpus Linguistics*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2010; T. McEnery, A. Hardie, *Corpus Linguistics*.

⁴² Sorina Postolea, “State-of-the-Art Text Linguistics: Corpus-Analysis Tools”, *Philologica Jassyensia*, Supplement, XIX, 2014, 1, pp. 51-59.

⁴³ www.lexiconista.com.

inspection, some of the comments in the original set were actually spam messages advertising various websites or companies. Subsequently, the texts were further processed so as to remove these spam comments that could have skewed our final results. The final composition of the corpus by number and type of comments is shown in *Table 1* below:

	Facebook comments	On-site comments
Initial	2057	14433
Spam messages	-214	-23
Final	1843	14410
Total no of comments:	16253	

Table 1: Corpus composition by number and type of comments

As shown by the table above, the preferred type of expression and interaction within the *Gândul* Virtual Community was on-site commenting under the protection of anonymity. A far less consistent number of users posted messages from Facebook accounts, assuming a clear (even if possibly fake) identity when posting. Since we assumed that this distinction may have also led to different lexical choices, we built two different subcorpora for each comment type: a Facebook subcorpus (henceforth FSCorp) encompassing all Facebook comments and an on-site subcorpus (OSCorp) encompassing all on-site comments. The two subcorpora make up our overall comment corpus (henceforth CCorp).

In terms of lexical content, the 16,253 comments posted as reactions to the articles referring to the “Colectiv” case on the *Gândul* website encompass 1,138,892 tokens. As Stubbs put it, “each word-form which occurs in a text is a word-token”⁴⁴, so this figure represents the total number of words (repeated or not) present in the texts. However, using the lemma list described above we were also able to count the approximate number of lemmas, or unique words, i.e. word-types used in the CCorp and its two subcorpora. The table below presents the corpus structure and size by type of comment, word-types and word-tokens.

	Word-types	Word-tokens	Type/Token ratio (%)
FSCorp	14,297	140,021	10.21 %
OSCorp	46,301	1,115,431	4.15 %
Ccorp	43,578	1,138,892	3.82 %

Table 2: Corpus structure and size by subcorpora, types, tokens and type/ token ratio

It should be mentioned that the type/ token ratio shown in the table above includes both *grammatical words*, whose role is to “glue texts together by

⁴⁴ M. Stubbs, *Words and Phrases*, p. 133.

supplying grammatical information”⁴⁵ and *content words*, which “carry most of the lexical content, in the sense of being able to make reference outside language”⁴⁶. Even if it is the smallest subcorpus, FSCorp is the most varied in terms of lexical content. On the other hand, the type/ token ratio for the CCorp shows that, overall, mainly due to the composition of the OSCorp, there is little lexical diversity in the comments at hand. In turn, this may suggest that most of the commentators approached and discussed a relatively small number of recurrent themes, using similar vocabulary and expressions in their messages.

4. *Discourse Diffusion of Anger:*

Topics of Debate within the Gândul Virtual Community

Various social actors (public figures, celebrities, politicians, authorities, opinion leaders, journalists, and ordinary people) processed the “Colectiv” tragedy in different ways. For instance, politicians dealt with the information provided by the mass media according to their electoral or ideological interests. The expedient appointment of technocrat instead of political ministers had a boomerang effect that forced political leaders to express either personal or party positions, and ultimately embrace the theory of a fresh start, styled as “the restart” of Romanian politics. Paralleling the political leaders’ insistence on the *tabula rasa* image (breaking with the old way of doing politics), the society started to speak about “the moral reformation” of the entire Romanian nation.

In fact, we started from the assumption that the public debate developed a tendency towards diffusion, while the original trigger (the fire) had sometimes only a feeble connection with the comments or their ensuing claims. Online conversations (not all of them developed into real themes) spread according to a “reticular” pattern of dispersal. The lexical analysis of the corpus helped us identify and group several thematic cores present in the messages posted by *Gândul* commenters during a span of a month. In chronological order, they are the following:

4.1. *Human Solidarity and Compassion*

One of the understated themes in the comments refers to human solidarity and compassion. It emerged in the first messages posted to the news announcing the fire, as people started right away to express their condolences and empathy for the victims and their families. This topic may be seen as the referential frame that

⁴⁵ M. Scott and C. Tribble, *Textual Patterns: Key Words and Corpus Analysis in Language Education*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins, 2006, p. 23.

⁴⁶ M. Stubbs, *Words and Phrases*, p. 40.

provided the background against which all the other debates developed. Due to its nature, it is rather diffuse in comparison with the other subjects approached, materializing in generic and rather sparse references that do not coagulate into full-blown topics. In fact, human solidarity and compassion are some of the main social emotions leading to a sense of community.

The analysis of the most frequent lemmas in the corpus makes the importance of this theme quite obvious. The word-type *om* [man] has the greatest number of occurrences in the CCorp. It emerges no less than 3,978 times, its most used form being the plural *oameni* [people], with 1,871 instances. It is not by chance that the words and expressions epitomizing the human being are the most frequent in our database. To this we could also add at least a part of the occurrences of the word *Dumnezeu* [God], that has 2,022 tokens in the CCorp and was often used in such expressions as: *Dumnezeu să-i odihnească* [May God rest their souls] or *Dumnezeu să-i ierte* [God bless their souls]. These set phrases, which are pervasive in the corpus and accompany a large part of the comments, are also an expression of compassion and solidarity.

4.2. *The Orthodox Church and Its Position in Society*

A day after the accident, the Patriarchy released an official message of compassion, calling for donations (of both “blood” and “money”) to the benefit of the victims of the fire at the “Colectiv” Club⁴⁷. In spite of the message’s smooth tone, the commenters punched back with over 100 posts. Among them, there are some of the original versions of phrases that would soon turn into slogans. For instance, someone who called himself *Tribunul* [The Tribune] posted the following: “Inceteaza cu constructia de biserici ca nu folosesc nimanui. Constrieste spitale, bani ai destui, ca murim pe capete in caz de dezastru”⁴⁸ [Stop building churches cause they serve no one. Build hospitals instead, you have enough money, don’t you see we’re dying in mass in case of disaster?]. Due to the position that the Orthodox prelates were now expressing, the role of the national church was seriously shaken. Both the protesters and the commenters launched a comparison between the number of churches and the number of hospitals in the country, together with the catchphrase *Vrem spitale, nu catedrale* [We Want Hospitals, Not Cathedrals], which, in the CCorp is present 39 times in the comments generated by 14 news reports. This shows that the Orthodox Church already had a precarious status in the perception of Romanians, in spite of its ranking in the top position among the most trusted institutions in the country⁴⁹. The theme of the Orthodox Church’s role in the Romanian society soon became a

⁴⁷ <http://www.gandul.info/stiri/apelul-patriarhului-daniel-dupa-tragedia-din-clubul-colectiv-14868919>.

⁴⁸ Here and henceforth, quotes from the CCorp given as such, grammatical and spelling errors included.

⁴⁹ <http://www.inscop.ro/aprilie-2016-increderea-in-institutii/>.

leitmotif of the subsequent comments. This is also apparent in the composition of CCorp, where the lemma *biserică* [church] and its forms are mentioned 3,186 times, being the second most frequent word-type in our database.

Being one of the favorite topics of this interpretative community, the need to reassess the social role of the Orthodox Church turned, in the days following the fire, into a conflict between the Orthodox establishment and the so-called “hooligans”, i.e. the people who challenged its role, who, in turn, were labeled as *atei* [atheists], *rockeri* [rockers], *sataniști* [Satanists], and *drogați* [junkies]. These words and their derivatives count over 2,200 mentions in the comments. The lexical family of the common noun “Satan” (*satanist*, *satanic*, *satanism*) is quite productive, counting on its own over 1200 occurrences.

4.3. The “Restart” of Romanian Politics

As this virtual community grew and gained in discursive consistency, the mere expression of one’s anger progressively turned into radical stances about the ethic of public behavior. At the same time, the dissatisfaction with the current state of public affairs visible in the online comments converged with the series of street protests happening in the aftermath of the fire, most of which were also mustered by online sources. Soon, a demand to “restart” the Romanian political class and the Romanian nation’s mores took hold in the public sphere. Commenters (e.g. oPUSDEY, on 4.11.2015) also undertook the neologism “restart”, and used it in relationship with terms such as politics, institutions (the Parliament), nation: “Intregul lant de infractori in frunte Daniel continuat cu guvernul corupt si incompetent in frunte cu infractorul Ponta si de ce nu adunatura de ticalosi din Parlament ar trebui RESTARTAT. Este timpul de schimbare dupa 25 ani de jaf nemasurat la adresa poporului” [The whole chain of criminals headed by Daniel, continuing with our corrupt and incompetent government headed by the criminal Ponta and why not the bunch of rascals from Parliament should be RESTARTED. It’s time for a change after 25 years of boundless theft against the people].

The fact that state affairs and politics were a consistent topic of reflection is illustrated by other frequent word-types in the CCorp: *stat* [state] (1,691 occurrences), *Ponta* [Romani’s prime-minister at the time] (1,235 occurrences), *guvern* [government] (1,151 occurrences), *PSD* (914 occurrences), *Iohannis* [Romania’s current president] (873 occurrences), *politică* [politics] (866 occurrences), *Băsescu* (693 occurrences), *politician* (684 occurrences).

In the public statements that he made during the crisis, President Iohannis launched the slogan *Nu putem lăsa corupția să se întindă până ucide!* [We cannot let corruption spread until it kills!], abbreviated as *Corupția ucide!* [Corruption

kills!]⁵⁰, which was taken over by commenters and counts 32 occurrences in our database. This is indicative of a new way of perceiving corruption, which is now envisaged not only in an abstract, moral framework, but also in relation to its ultimate, concrete and possibly fatal consequences. Therefore, it is not by chance that the verb *a ucide* [to kill] and its derivatives appears 529 times in the corpus. However, the debate over “corruption” was anticipated by the wide use of the word-type *ban* [money], with 1,952 tokens. Additionally, the lemma “corruption” and its derivatives are used 1,213 times, while its lexical sphere (Romanian words for “bribe”) unfolds through the use of such words as *șpagă* (581) or *mită* (80). In this context, the Government changed, and several top figures of Romanian politics were pressed to withdraw.

A broader admission of other political paradigms as virtually feasible for Romania, chiefly monarchy, also started to emerge. King Mihai I also voiced the powerful slogan “Timpul României voastre a început” [The time of your Romania has started]⁵¹. The public statements released by Romania’s Royal House revived the memory of the events leading to the ’89 Revolution, which, in turn, generated a phenomenon of “memory resonance”⁵². The martyrdom of the Colectiv “hooligans” and the new protesters’ claims recalled the general demand for freedom expressed by the former hooligans of the ’89 Revolution. In the media, the street turmoil following the fire was packed as a new Revolution initiated by the children of the former anti-Communists. This was also fashioned as the “crusade of the children left behind” by parents constrained to immigrate in mass after the Revolution in order to provide basic subsistence means for their families. In fact, the word-type *copil* [child] in its plural form, either articulated or not *copii/ copiii/ copiilor* [children/ the children/ children’s], is present in our corpus 927 times, while its singular forms are present only 193 times. In addition, word-types such as *familie* [family] and *tânăr* [young], whose meanings are also related to community, may be found 565 times and 1115 times, respectively. Just like in the case of the word-type *child*, there is a predominance of plural over singular forms (1010 vs. 105 tokens).

4.4. Nationalism, Xenophobia, and the People’s Heroes

The talk about Romania’s political situation and government got intertwined with other, peripheral topics, as the general anger caused by the fire and its victims brought to the surface not only overt dissatisfaction with the “system” but also

⁵⁰ <http://www.gandul.info/tragedia-din-clubul-colectiv/iohannis-mesaj-la-doua-zile-dupa-incendiul-din-club-colectiv-nu-putem-lasa-coruptia-sa-se-intinda-pana-ucide-14870177>.

⁵¹ <http://www.gandul.info/stiri/mesajul-regelui-mihai-i-catre-tinerii-protestatari-timpul-romaniei-voastre-a-inceput-14878029>.

⁵² Aleida Assmann, *Impact and Resonance: Towards a Theory of Emotions in Cultural Memory*, Plenary lecture at Södertörn University May 18, 2011, Huddinge, Södertörn University, 2011.

hidden demons. Nationalism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism surfaced in the most inappropriate contexts, such as, for instance, the comments to the news announcing the offer of help coming from Israeli hospitals or to the reports that analyzed Raed Arafat’s handling of the crisis. In the corpus, the offensive appellation *jidani/ jidov* [jew] emerges more than 30 times, whereas *evreu* [Hebrew] and its derivatives are mentioned 80 times. Similarly, the commenters directed their xenophobic anger towards Raed Arafat⁵³ as well, who was called several injurious names such as *palestinianul* [the Palestinian], *teroristul* [the terrorist], *cioara* [the crow/negro].

On the other hand, continuing the series of deeply polarized viewpoints expressed so far, special stress was laid on “national heroes”, i.e. the victims of the accident, the martyr saviors or the doctors who treated them. For instance, the fourth, the sixth and the seventh most frequent lemmas in the CCorp are *România* [Romania] (2,819 occurrences), *țară* [country] (2,280 occurrences), *român* [Romanian] (2,243 occurrences). Additionally, the type *popor* [people] is also quite frequent (1141 occurrences). More specifically, the collocation *în România* [in Romania] may be found 647 times in the comments to 196 news reports; this construction signals the virtual community’s tendency to re-spatialize online interactions. Thus, within the collective mindset, the process whereby a given territory is assigned to a specific community spreads from the particular (the club and Bucharest) to the general (the entire country). This is also apparent in the numerous collocations formed by the word-type *țară* [country]: *în țară* [in the country] (389), *țara asta* [this country] (310), *din țară* [from the country] (276).

4.5. Public Policies: Smoking in Closed Areas, Emergencies, and Natural Disasters

In close relationship with the third theme (i.e. the “restart” of Romanian politics), a debate over the precariousness of the national policies regulating national healthcare, the emergency response system, the people’s protection against fire and in case of disaster, and even smoking in public areas involved a large number of commentators. Some of the points raised by the messages posted on the *Gândul* platform were addressed and more or less dealt with during the weeks that followed the fire (the issue of emergency situations as well as the law regulating smoking in public areas), whereas others gained critical mass only several months later (the hygiene in Romanian hospitals and the professionalism of medical staff). Consequently, references to *spital* [hospital] (1790), and *medic/ doctor* [physician] (678/ 290) are rather bivalent. The noun *urgență* [emergency]

⁵³ Raed Arafat is a Syrian-born physician of Palestine origin, well-known and very active in the Romanian public sphere as the founder of Romania’s first responders’ system (SMURD). He was awarded Romanian citizenship and was appointed deputy-minister in the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

(214) as well as collocations such as *de urgență* [urgently/ emergency] (160), *medicină de urgență* [emergency medical care] (16), *situații de urgență* [emergency situations] (16), which are pervasive in the corpus, are other proofs in this respect.

Along with the discussion about new health policies, the community of commenters insisted on the idea that Romanians need even more regulation in all public matters. Thus, the frequency of the type *lege* [law] (1051) is enhanced by the following collocations encompassing modals such as *trebuie să* [must] (1380), *nu trebuie să* [must not] (136), *ar trebui să* [should] (375), *nevoie să/ de* [need to/ of] (61/ 526). Here are some verbs associated with the modal *trebuie să* [must], forming 3-word clusters: *trebuie să plece* [must leave] (33), *trebuie să plătească* [must pay] (29), *trebuie să moară* [must die] (24), *trebuie să răspundă* [must be made responsible] (18), *trebuie să dispară* [must disappear] (16), *trebuie să desființeze* [must abolish] (10). In the same manner, the conditional *ar trebui* [should] forms 4-word clusters such as: *ar trebui să existe* [there should be] (10), *ar trebui să facă* [should do/ make] (9), *ar trebui să aibă/ ar trebui să avem* [should have/ we should have] (7/ 5), *ar trebui să dea* [should give] (7), *trebuie să înceapă* [should begin] (4). Additionally, the noun “law” forms several collocations that show the wide range of policy-related issues discussed by the commenters, as in the following examples: *legea electorală* [electoral law] (13), *legi strâmbе* [ambiguously-formulated laws] (7), *legea partidelor* [law of political parties] (7), *legea strămoșească* [law of the land] (6), *legea bugetului* [budget law] (5), *legi clare* [clearly-formulated laws] (5), *legi speciale* [special laws] (4), *legea salarizării* [payroll law] (4), *legea lustrăției* [lustration law] (4), *legea pensiilor* [pension law] (2).

Along with a tendency to impose the reign of law/ justice over other state institutions, the fire enhanced a state of affairs that was perceived as urgent by the entire virtual community. Thus, the word-type *urgent* [urgent/ urgently] (296) defines all sorts of situations, from “urgent prosecution”, “urgently send to prison”, “urgently resign from public office” and... “urgent need for exorcism”.

Just like in the case of the talks about corruption and the current state of affairs in the country, the discussions about state policies and laws soon turned to marginal topics, and one of them was smoking in closed areas. Some commenters established a link between the fire and the lack of regulation that allowed the people in the club to smoke indoor. Even if the tragedy was not caused by smoking, people saw this as yet another issue to be included in the list of things that had to be urgently solved. The word-type *fumat* [smoking] and its derivatives – *fumător* [smoker], *a fuma* [to smoke], *anti-fumat* [anti-smoking], etc. – counts 120 occurrences in the CCorp.

5. Conclusions

The present paper investigated the rise of an interpretive community formed around a social crisis as well as its characteristics in terms of *purpose* (content, theme), *place* (platform, technology), and *discourse* (linguistic articulation of ideas and interactions stemming from them). We had a look at the group of commenters active on *Gândul* website and at the way they reacted to the news reports about the “Colectiv” case. Although it does not display all of the classic features of a virtual community, we believe that by the great amount of posts and interactions, this community is representative of the way in which the great themes of the Romanian society are digested and verbalized by Romanians through computer-mediated communication. We were able to see that this particular online grouping of people did not generate brand new topics and that it was contaminated by themes born out of offline protests. We could also observe that, even though transferred to virtual space (which made it virtually open to all non-Romanian visitors), this community kept its national homogeneity, and reinforced it through discursive means. Hence, this virtual community extended former debates on social issues, as well as the mentality traits of the Romanian people, being an amplifier of street voices. Due to its new online profile, this form of community based on posting and sharing of comments was looked at as a “deviation” from the traditional understanding of community. This was an important argument for its linguistic, corpus-based analysis, which helped us identify common conversation *loci* using word and collocation frequencies.

Both the monitoring of the news reports themes (through archive browsing) and corpus analysis (with AntConc) revealed a reticular diffusion of core debate topics. The virtual community active on *Gândul* platform discoursed about a variety of interconnected subjects, from the strict facts concerning the “Colectiv” tragedy to its possible political, social, legal, and ethical effects. Hence, we identified 5 prevailing topics of debate, which expressed, even if in a diffuse manner, the feeling of anger and frustration decanting in Romanians after the ‘89 Revolution: 1. *human solidarity and compassion*; 2. *the Orthodox Church and its position in society*; 3. *the “restart” of Romanian politics*; 4. *nationalism, xenophobia, and the people’s heroes*; 5. *public policies: smoking in closed areas, emergencies, and natural disasters*.

Focusing on a tragedy that acted as a trigger for all the hidden monsters of the Romanian collective psyche, we believe that our study may be subsumed to the metaphor of the “mirror”. This mirror of anger reflects not only the common people’s discontent with the actual state of affairs in Romania, but also with a wide range of issues traditionally perceived or communicated in a particular, tendentious manner or even swept under the carpet.

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MIRRORS OF ANGER: THE “COLECTIV” CASE REFLECTED IN A ROMANIAN VIRTUAL COMMUNITY (*GÂNDUL*)

(*Abstract*)

The present paper investigates the emergence of an interpretive community brought to the fore by a social crisis as well as this community's characteristics in terms of purpose (content, theme), place (platform, technology), and discourse (linguistic articulation of ideas and interactions stemming from them). We focused on the group of commenters active on *Gândul* website and on the way they reacted to the news reports about the “Colectiv” case between 30 October and 30 November 2015. The 16253 comments inventoried formed a corpus of approximately 1.13 million words. The specificities of our object of research enabled us to apply a methodology based on new media approaches, lexical semantics, and corpus analysis tools. The interpretation of data led to the delineation of five topics of debate within the community's interactions: 1. *human solidarity and compassion*; 2. *the Orthodox Church and its position in society*; 3. *the “restart” of Romanian politics*; 4. *nationalism, xenophobia, and the people's heroes*; 5. *public policies: smoking in closed areas, emergencies, and natural disasters*. We found out that the tragedy acted as a trigger that rekindled the people's interest in some previously untapped or less tackled problems of Romanian society, which are dispersed within the corpus in a reticular form. Therefore, the five mirrors of anger reflect not only the common people's discontent with this precise case, but also with the actual state of affairs in Romania.

Keywords: virtual community, human solidarity, discourse diffusion, online conversation, corpus analysis.

OGLINZI ALE MÂNIEI: CAZUL „COLECTIV” ÎNTR-O COMUNITATE VIRTUALĂ ROMÂNĂSCĂ (*GÂNDUL*)

(*Rezumat*)

Studiul de față investighează emergența unei comunități interpretative care se conturează în contextul unei crize sociale și se definește din perspectiva scopurilor comune (reflectate în conținuturi și teme), a locului comun (aceeași platformă, aceeași tehnologie de postare a mesajului) și a discursului comun (mod de articulare lexicală a ideilor, interacțiuni lingvistice asemănătoare). Ne-am focalizat cercetarea asupra grupului de comentatori de pe *Gândul.info*, comentatori care au reacționat la știrile despre cazul „Colectiv” între 30 octombrie și 30 noiembrie 2015. Cele 16253 comentarii au format un corpus de aprox. 1,13 milioane de cuvinte. Particularitățile obiectului cercetării noastre ne-au permis

să combinăm metode din new media, semantică și analiză de corpus. Interpretarea datelor a dus astfel la definirea a 5 teme care au marcat interacțiunile intra-comunitare: 1. *solidaritate umană și compasiune*; 2. *Biserica ortodoxă și rolul său în societate*; 3. *„restartarea” politicii românești*; 4. *naționalism, xenofobie și eroii neamului*; 5. *politici publice: fumatul în spații închise, situațiile de urgență, dezastrele naturale*. Ceea ce am descoperit este faptul că tragedia din clubul Colectiv a funcționat ca un impuls pentru readucerea în atenție a tuturor temelor insuficient dezbătute în societatea românească; dispersia și varietatea temelor abordate de aceste mesaje reprezintă așadar o simptomatologie a lipsei de transparență, a curenței de dialog la nivelul întregii societăți. Ca atare, cele 5 „oglinzi ale mâniei” reflectă nu numai nemulțumirea comunității în legătură cu modul în care s-a tratat, punctual, cazul Colectiv, ci o nemulțumire generalizată asupra situației României în general.

Cuvinte-cheie: comunitate virtuală, solidaritate umană, propagare de discurs, conversație online, analiză de corpus.