

# FATIGUE

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### Introduction

This is a work in progress. This article is part of a larger Project called *FATIGUE* (Horizon 2020) which deals with the understanding of populism and illiberalism in Central and Eastern Europe. My Word Pack 2 focuses on minorities, memory, and populism. This article sums up one of the elements of the Triadic Nexus (Brubaker, 1996) that I aim at analyzing, i.e., *the Hungarian kin-state activists in Romania*. As this is a work in progress, the reader is kindly asked to assess this as a preliminary analysis, for this article will focus not only on the dimension of kin-activists but also on interviews with political elites from UDMR, inasmuch as expert interviews in the future. Also, the reader is reminded beforehand that this study presents a limitation, in the lack of Hungarian language sources, focusing instead on the Romanian sources. Herein, I want to contribute to the literature of kin-state activism by providing a comprehensive account of the kin-state activists rhetoric that is radicalizing and mobilizing ethnic communities to demand autonomy in Romania. With that in mind, I invite the reader to go through the arguments of this article in the following.

If history tells us something is that the aftermath of Wars and treaties are always changing territories. Moreover, in this process, entire ethnic communities fall as collateral victims and serve under the canon of new states. This happened to the landscape of the Balkans and Eastern Europe after two World Wars and the fall of Communism (Udrea, 2014, p. 324). The reconstruction of national borders displaced around three million of Hungarian people in the adjacent territories, i.e., Slovakia, Croatia, Serbia, Ukraine, and Romania (C.f. Brubaker, 1996). Unlike the other countries, Romania incorporates the most significant number of ethnic Hungarians outside of Hungary. Approximately 1.4 million, i.e., 6.6% in 2011 (Romanian National Census, 2011) and 6.1% in 2017 (CIA World Factbook, 2017) live in Romania. Studies showed that the demographics of the ethnic Hungarians in Romania are regressing since the fall of Communism (Horváth, 2014), but still the group embodies the largest community of ethnic minorities in the Eastern Europe (EE). Such communities are called in political science, *kin-minority groups*, or *external minorities* (Udrea, 2014, p. 324).

The ethnic Hungarians from Romania present themselves as a distinct community with a long-shared history and a memory that keeps their identity alive. The latter and the former separate them from other minorities (Hutchinson & Smith, 1996, p. 89). The claims advanced by this ethnic group against the larger society is represented by its political elite (Kymlicka, 1995). According to the taxonomy proposed by Harff and Gurr (2004), this article considers the ethnic Hungarians as *ethnonationalists*. The latter are seen as "relatively large and regionally concentrated ethnic groups that live within the boundaries of one state; their modern political movements are directed towards achieving greater autonomy and independent statehood" (Ibid, p. 18). The literature on minorities is essential for this article, as the socio-political milieu of minorities is increasingly used in the political arguments revolving around populism, mainly, those minorities that have been alienated by historical treaties.

In Eastern Europe, an example par excellence is Hungary. Herein, historical and political circumstances have separated kin-minorities from the external homeland. In 1920, after signing the Trianon Treaty for being on the side of the Central Powers, Hungary suffered its '*national trauma*' by losing two-thirds of its territory to the neighboring new states (Macartney, 1968). In time, this distress was never forgotten. Instead, the '*national trauma of Trianon*' was, and it is commemorated in Hungarian society (Kovács, 2016). In this light, the memory incentive of Trianon played well in the hands of Hungarian authorities liaising a more thorough cultural connection with its ethnic minorities. Eventually,



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Hungary reconnected with its scattered communities who encountered themselves in a foreign country, with a new ruling elite, who frequently, persecuted them, or suppressed their national and cultural identity.

In this light, loathing the persecution of the Ceausescu regime to its ethnic minorities, especially to those of Hungarian ancestry (C.f. Waterbury, 2010, pp. 44–55; Fleischman, 1989; Bottoni, 2017), the Hungarian governments started under the János Kádár regime (1956–1988), and continued after the fall of Communism in the region, to reinstate their bond with the ethnic Hungarians from Romania. They did so in the first place via irredentist and nationalist appeals. The persecution of Hungarian minorities by the Ceausescu regime became for Hungarian trans-border politics a common concern (Garton Ash, 1990, p. 50). After the fall of Communism, the diaspora politics of Hungary redrew its *modus operandi* and focused on connecting the Hungarian minorities to the idea of ‘nemzet,’ i.e., Hungarian Nation (Waterbury, 2010, p. 4). Actually, in the context of kin-state activism, “Hungary has been one of the most active kin-states in post-communist Eastern Europe” (Waterbury, 2014, p. 37). All the same, it was shortly after 2000, when a new center-right party, i.e., Fidesz, which took kin-state activism to another level vis-à-vis the question of trans-border kin-minorities. By proposing or adopting the Hungarian Status Law in 2001 (Ieda, 2004), the failed 2004 National Referendum on Dual-citizenship because of low turnout (Culic, 2006, p. 175; Udrea, 2014, p. 335), and the 2010 Non-resident Citizenship Law, Fidesz reestablished a ‘nation-building program’ around kin-state activism. Its preferred tool was granting citizenship to kin-minorities. The purpose was to redefine the Hungarian nationhood, and restoring national unity broken by the 1920 Treaty (Pogonyi, 2017b, pp. 83–86). Hence, what were once people living under the axiom ‘one people’ under Nicolae Ceausescu’s Communism (Verdery, 1993), now this community became able to reinforce their ‘nation-building’ process under the democratization process.

The series of policymaking measures enlisted Fidesz, ultimately, to benefit from its actions and obtain 95% of the votes from diaspora granting them one crucial seat in the Parliament in 2014. Consequently, that gave the Fidesz a majority in the 2014 elections (Pogonyi, 2017b, p. 3). In the 2018 elections, Fidesz again won, and 96% of the diaspora voted with the ruling party. Actually, through these series of actions, Fidesz instituted a clientelist cross-border network that ties the Hungarian minority to the Hungarian state (Waterbury, 2010; Pogonyi, 2017, p. 102). Such systems evolved through a strain of nationalist rhetoric spearheaded by kin-state activists who used the nation or ‘nemzet’ as an organic concept, once Romania acceded in the EU, and the citizenship acts lost its practical appeal to bring the communities closer to the home country. Henceforward, kin-state activists, and political actors’ roles increased.

This article argues that the Hungarian kin-activism shifted its focus from citizenship to kin-activists who are close to Fidesz, in part, to mitigate the role of Jobbik’s political actors in the region, and in other parts to capitalize politically via their right to vote. Even so, the Fidesz approach to Romania is a rational one, as both countries need to continue their trade partnerships (Pogonyi, 2017b). The citizenship acts proved their utility in the 2014 and 2018 elections when Fidesz gained one essential seat in the Parliament. Nowadays, Fidesz cannot afford to pursue autonomy demands based on the former acts because the undertakings lost its practical purpose. Hence, only two options are left on the table. One is to support the autonomy demands via democratic and international frameworks designed by the EU. The second is to support the endeavors of the kin-activists from Romania tacitly. In the past, Fidesz had many political issues with the leaders of UDMR. Hence it would be more fitting to support the actions of someone like László Tőkés tacitly. Conveniently, the latter is a Romanian citizen with a Hungarian ethnic background. Any supposition from the Romanian state vis-à-vis the actions of activists could easily be deflected as domestic issues concerning the ethnic Hungarians who are facing social inequality, poverty, demographics, or social dissimilation. Already, the low demographic among ethnic Hungarians in Romania is seen as an issue (Horváth, 2014). However, these assertions beg the question vis-à-vis the sphere of influence of kin-state-activists’, as well as their political platform and self-sufficiency.

As the population is decreasing, the fears of risking the cultural identity of the ethnic Hungarians in Transylvania resurfaces. Moreover, in the current state, Hungary’s economy cannot afford to accommodate all of its ethnic minorities from the neighboring countries. The country was not able to do it in the past (C.f. Pogonyi, 2017b), and it will not be able to do it in the future, as the growth is forecasted to regress from “4.7% in 2018, to an average of 2.3% in 2019–23” (The Economist The Intelligence Unit, 2019). This article argues that kin-state activists risk becoming rogue actors autonomous from the influence of Budapest, as they seek to fulfill their agenda. In this process, kin-state activists might radicalize the community and thus, polarize the debate surrounding the types of autonomy the ethnic Hungarians demand. Not only that, kin-state activists polarize their society, but also antagonizes the Romanian



majority who misapprehends the significances of autonomy. As a result, this sort of political thinking creates this Manichean worldview that is so representative to populism.

This article examines what are the themes and elements of the nationalist-populist mobilization rhetoric of kin-state activists, and how are these themes used to pressure the ethnic Hungarians? It will also focus on whether the talking points can radicalize the ethnic Hungarians. Activists, via nationalist rhetoric, are likely stimulating the political and cultural identity of the Hungarian minority to focus more on Hungarian policies, rather than the domestic ones. Moreover, via populism, kin-state activists create a vertical structure of 'us' vs. 'them,' between them and the majority of the society, as much as an anti-elite view of the Romanian government.

Such rhetoric trademarks have been the rallying cry of many protests or found themselves on the banners of many festivities. Studies argued that minority's demands are driven mostly against "the privileged position of the members of the cultural majority, the public devaluation of the Hungarian identity and cultural-territorial autonomy" (Udrea, 2014, p. 332). As a result, this study wants to address the possible nationalist-populist rhetoric of the kin-state activists that stimulate autonomy demands, and which is becoming part of the individual cognitive framework of ethnic Hungarians.

Taking a cue from the works of Brubaker (2017, 2019), Hawkins (2018), and Moffitt (2016; 2014), this article will try to conceptualize the rhetoric of kin-activists through the prism of populism. In the realm of kin-activism, this paper will use the works of Pogonyi (2017b, 2017a) and Waterbury (2010; 2017) as a guide to understanding the dynamism of activists within the kin-activism process. This article wants to investigate the rhetoric of kin-activists when pursuing autonomy claims. It aims to see whether the possible populist-nationalist rhetoric is encompassing a Manichean and antagonistic approach vis-à-vis the of society in Romania and anti-elite rhetoric apropos the Romanian government.

The paper will present two main findings. The first speaks about the manner vis-à-vis how kin-state activists are structuring their mobilization strategy. This includes using a mixture of nationalist-populist rhetoric based on a 'community-building' structured around the 'us' vs. 'them' idiom to convene an anti-elite message against the government in Bucharest. Besides, the second finding will reveal that the mnemonic incentives are the most used rhetoric elements by the Hungarian minority from Romania during protests and that they act as a justification to claim autonomy.

In the following, we begin with a brief overview of the literature on populism and convene a definition, which will serve as a guide during the methodological process. We then discuss the particularities of activists in the process of kin-state activism, taking a cue from secondary literature. Moreover, we will analyze data collected from Romanian news outlets and Hungarian English news outlets that covered the rallies endorsed by László Tótkés. This study did not cover news written in the Hungarian language because of the lack of proficiency from the author of this research.

### **Defining populism: why is it important?**

Previously, academics have studied populism in Europe and the Americas, and compared events while concluding that populism cannot act on its own, thereby, it needs to host different ideologies as ideational structures (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). This, in turn, made it difficult in the past for political scientists, who, throughout the last years, were not able to find any axiomatic definition of populism (Mudde, 2017, p.28). Contrariwise, critics of the ideational approach see populism as a political strategy (Weyland, 2017, p. 55) though proven inversely by research conducted in South America to be revolving around parties and politicians' discourse (Hawkins & Kaltwasser, 2017).

Other political theorists, trying to stitch the approaches mentioned above together conceptually, view populism from a socio-cultural perspective (Ostiguy, 2017). Even if the pool of attempts when defining populism deepens, the majority of the scholars agree that this phenomenon is "about ideas in general, and ideas about 'the people' and the 'the elite' in particular" (Mudde, 2017, p. 29); or that it is a thin-centered ideology that separates people in two homogeneous and antagonistic camps (Freeden, 2003; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 5). Moreover, scores of academics attempted to see populism via a plethora of approaches ranging from political discourses (Canovan, 2004; Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014), or an ethno-perspective (Madrid, 2008), to a view that embodies a political style (Moffitt & Tormey, 2014). The political style, predominantly, concerning populism, ponder on "how politicians conduct themselves in communicating a message, but not necessarily on the substance of that message itself" (Stanley, 2017,



p. 141). Although the definition of Mudde (2004) is widely accepted among the scholars of populism, this study finds Mudde's definition not suitable for the elements of this project, as the interactions between kin-activists and kin-community are based more on the set of ideas that is part of a repertoire. It is not the ideology that is mobilizing the community, but rather ideas of the repertoire that touches upon the cultural self-esteem of the community.

As a consequence, the definition of populism whereby this study adheres is *a set of ideas that is part of a discursive and stylistic repertoire that separates the people and the elite into two antagonistic camps* (Brubaker, 2017, p. 367; Hawkins et al., 2018, p. 28; Moffitt & Tormey, 2014). Its modus operandi "involves varying elaborations and permutations of several basic elements" (Brubaker, 2019, p. 26). Populism's traits are manifold. However, this project will refer to those which are relevant to the Romanian phenomena. Though populism is regarded as "merely rhetorical" by the late Ernesto Laclau, critics would go further and argue that the populist actors, nonetheless, employ a radical language (Torre, 2007; Katsambekis, 2016; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017; Krastev, 2017). Not only does populism use radical rhetoric, but also attempts to link the latter stylistically with the people, as its elements mobilize support (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). A kin-activist like László Tóké is projecting himself always close to the people of the ethnic Hungarian community during festivities or protests. His lambasting rhetoric towards the local ethnic elites or those from Bucharest grants him a special place within the ethnic community. The elements of his rhetoric, often spoken in front of large crowds, convey an image of a charismatic leader who is appealing to the cultural identity and dignity of the ethnic Hungarians, like most of the populist actors (C.f. Fukuyama, 2018). Using simplistic rhetoric that implies autonomy claims supported by historically unjust events, Tóké's communication style attributes a heavy and meaningful emotional anchor to his repertoire. In this sense, Tóké is in the words of Brubaker as someone who is likely using populism as "a weapon of political struggle" (2017, p. 359). The struggle, as he sees it, is to regain autonomy and undo some of the Trianon injustices for the ethnic Hungarian people from Romania. All the same, the populist narratives vary in scope and purpose, yet it always assumes an embodiment of the 'people,' claiming that they alone represent the folk (Müller, 2016).

László Tóké discourses, as we will see in the analysis of this study like to distinguish between the ethnic Hungarian community from the majority, as well as a context of elites vis-à-vis the Romanian government. The Manichean antagonism stands meaningful in the literature of populism, especially in the ideational approach advanced by Mudde (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). According to Mudde, populism, "theoretically distinguishes the people and the elite based on just one dimension, i.e., morality" (2017, p. 32). In the case of this research, on the one hand, morality resurfaces on the premises of minority's dignity (Fukuyama, 2018) and recognition of past persecutions during the time of the Communist regime (Bottoni, 2017); and current ethnopolitical issues, i.e., the demand for autonomy

László Tóké, oftentimes, makes use of strict delineations that separates the ethnic Hungarians from the majority. Essentially, Tóké's rhetoric becomes populist when representing a sort of elite in a vertical ladder, like the government from Bucharest that refuses their autonomy claims. Other times, the rhetoric abounds in horizontal and antagonistic constructions aimed against the majority. In both cases, the ethnic minority is represented "as the underdog" (Brubaker, 2019, p. 3). In this situation, Tóké appears as the man who can lead the community from the crisis and the one who can safeguard the values of the community from exogenous and antinomic factors. Moffitt argues that "populist protectionism depends on the rhetoric of the crisis" (2016, p. 366). The usage of a historical crisis represented by the Trianon treaty and constant failed autonomy attempts of the ethnic Hungarian elites and other political actors that are blocked by the Romanian government (Salat, 2014) reinforces the importance of leaders like Tóké who steer the community to achieving its autonomy goal. As appealing populism might be at this point, just by casting Tóké as a charismatic leader with a particular repertoire and a set of ideas, it is not enough in this current framework. Populism, like was argued earlier, lacks a core structure. Hence it needs to thicken. The scholarship supports that the thinning needs the addition of 'guest' ideologies to achieve its political goals. By this addition, the core of populism is thickened upgrading its status to comprise a broader set of policies, (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017; Stanley, 2017, p. 142).

In this study, the 'thickening process' results when the political actors like László Tóké associate the tenets of populism with related ideologies to satisfy the people's political demands and the quest for unresolved past-issues; and to promote a type of popular answer. Populism is likely to grasp similar ideologies like nationalism heretofore influencing the ethnic Hungarians. The encompassment of these 'guest' ideologies offers an antagonistic and ill-conceived solution to unresolved past issues, rather than "a broad menu of solutions to major socio-political issues" (Freeden, 2003, p.



96). Likewise, Kurt Weyland goes further in his analysis of populism and suggests that “populist movements are notorious for not espousing a clear, systematic, and comprehensive worldview; they avoid embracing a specific, well-defined ideology” (2017, p. 52). It is thus essential to look at the platform of kin-state activists like László Tőkés and discover the populist framework around which the metaphor elements make the ethnic Hungarian community mobilize for protests and demand autonomy. In the case of Romania, kin-state activists, are likely employing via populism a vertical relationship between ‘the people’ (e.g., ethnic Hungarians) and the elite (e.g., Romanian parties). What can be certain in this possible conceptual framework is that each phenomenon employed (e.g., populism and nationalism) creates deep identity politics. Contrariwise, the Romanian politicians’ use of nativist-populism concerning its national minority and its elites, habitually helps to build anti-elite symptoms within the ranks of the ethnic Hungarians. All these attitudes are consolidating homogeneous and antagonistic camps in which the debate is radicalized.

All of these factors act as a catalyst when deepening the cleavages between the national minority and the homeland majority in Romania. While social cleavages are expanding, demands over the autonomy of the Szekélyland (e.g., the three counties Harghita, Covasna, and Mures inhabited by ethnic Hungarians) increase. What is more, is that the rhetoric polarizes the understanding surrounding the meaning of autonomy within the ranks of the majority. That is why this project adopts the theory of populism as one of its cornerstones. Herein, populism is represented in this project in association with related ideologies by a political force to gain political platform via rhetoric metaphors. As a result, the metaphor rhetoric mobilizes the minority against the national government and the majority of society. The project cannot present a concoction of populism par excellence, but it envisages populism-nationalism as the driving force of activists. In the following, the study will argue how nationalism plays an integral part in the rhetoric of activism and kin-state activists.

### **Activism and Activists**

The literature on kin-state activism has been under the scrutiny of a wide array of scholars (Waterbury, 2010; Liebich, 2017; Tátrai et al., 2017; Brubaker, 1996). Eastern Europe, in particular, given the historical circumstances of territorial redistribution after the two World Wars, presents a fertile milieu for kin-state activism. For example, countries in the region like Romania (Udrea, 2015) and Hungary (Pogonyi, 2017a; Tátrai et al., 2017) developed their kin-state activism to reconnect with their trans-border minorities. Kin-state activism is not uniquely for Eastern Europe, as it is exemplified in studies that include regions like the Middle East (see Büyüksaraç, 2017).

In Eastern Europe, Hungary is considered as a leading state in pioneering kin-state activism (C.f. Waterbury, 2014). Scholars argue that activism deals primarily with “the expansion or contraction of mobilization resources supportive of minority’s political goals” (Waterbury, 2017, p. 228). Hungary, after the fall of Communism, has prioritized tightening their ties with the trans-border kin-minorities from the neighboring countries. The *modus operandi* of the Hungarian kin-state activism comprises policies that vary from granting citizenship to ethnic minorities, to financial projects that support the preservation of Hungarian culture and language (Pogonyi, 2017a). The purpose of the Hungarian kin-state activism project is to “restore the national unity broken from the 1920 Trianon Treaty [...] and to redefine the Hungarian nationhood” (Pogonyi, 2017b, pp. 83–86). As we will see in this study, the memory of Trianon and its scattered minorities in new nations has come to be represented in the collective memory of the Hungarian people as the ‘national trauma.’

Hence, center-right parties like Fidesz have made one of their priorities to bring ethnic minorities from neighboring countries back in the Hungarian political life. After 1956, Hungarian governments used nationalism as their primary tool to reconnect with their scattered minorities (Pogonyi, 2017b, p. 2). Even so, granting citizenship had been a powerful tool that lost much of its practical properties since the accession of countries like Slovakia and Romania in the EU in 2004 and 2007, respectively. Things look different for countries like Serbia or Ukraine, which are outside of the European Union. As a result, and because of the increasing democratization “minority political actors develop their sources of political and financial support, and become integrated and more mainstreamed into their domestic political environment” (Bochsler & Szöcsik, 2013; Waterbury, 2017, p. 230). Over the last five years, political actors like László Tőkés have amassed much political support from the Hungarian community, and also, by his association as a Fidesz candidate for the European Parliament, creating in the words of Myra Waterbury a “mobilized movement politics”



(2017, p. 230). During the same period, Tőkés's rhetoric increased in both assertiveness directed at the Romanian government and Hungarian political elites. Frequently, László Tőkés nationalistic-populist rhetoric aims at reconnecting the ethnic Hungarians with their external homeland, i.e., Hungary or with the idea of *nemzet* (nation).

The literature on the nation is abundant, with scholars having different perceptions about what this concept means. In this light, the idea of nations is seen by Verdery as "a name for the relationship that links a state, actual or potential, with its subjects" (Waterbury, 2010). Verdery envisaged 'the nation' based on the relationship between two factors that engulf, 1) a citizenship relation and 2) a relation known as ethnicity (1993). In this light, it is worth stating that early Hungarian center-right populists like Fidesz, according to Waterbury (2010, p. 49) endorsed the concept of organic nation in their manifestos. Additionally, the early populists "kept alive the idea of the Hungarian nation as one 'body' artificially separated by borders" (Ibid, p. 4). These populists could attach their nationalistic policies to the trans-border minorities and thus, gain political and economic capital.

Based on this discussion, this project infers two conclusions vis-à-vis the concept of nationalism. The first speaks of nationalism as a required ideology when creating a nation or when undergoing a nation-building project, provided that the political milieu is ignoring and isolating the sense of micro-communities. Herein, the project suggests Romania as the new state, prior to Communism and throughout the regimes, which absorbed a significant number of ethnic Hungarians, only to suppress their cultural identity thereafter to the idea of 'one nation.' The second refers to the usage of nationalism by minorities in the context of democratization (their actions are protected by pluralism) to spearhead their demands for autonomy, thereby establishing their sense of community-building. In any of the two cases, nationalism acts as a building 'vehicle.' *Nationalism* is seen by Brubaker (1996) as a "heterogeneous set of 'nation' oriented idioms, practices, and possibilities that are continuously available or endemic in modern cultural and political life" (p. 10). Scholars disagree with the logic of Ernest Gellner (1997) vis-à-vis nationalism, as they propose that kin-state nationalism is actively building nations outside of their borders (Liebich, 2017, p. 4). Brubaker writes about nationalism, that it is a manner for "collective of individuals to express their strivings for autonomy and independence" (1996, p. 14).

Scholars who took an interest in ethnic minorities and nationalism argued that activism is at the center of the action. It can be thus referred as "to the resources and capacities that enable minority political organizations to develop and maintain a relevant and ongoing relationship with their constituents" (Waterbury, 2017, p. 231). As kin-state citizenship has "not contributed substantially to increased intra-minority unity" (Ibid, p. 231), the incorporation of policies between the Hungarian state and the ethnic Hungarians fell in the hands of kin activists who increased their self-sufficiency. Acting with a self-made platform based on populist-nationalist rhetoric outside of mainstream parties overextends the plethora of autonomy claims in the Romanian society. Likewise, its metaphor repertoire radicalizes both the minority and majority in two antagonistic camps. In the realm of memory studies, "mnemonic entrepreneurs are free to construct their narratives out of the available 'national' repertoire [for] if they choose elements outside this repertoire, they appear to be alien and not credible to their potential constituents" (Bernhard & Kubik, 2014, p. 23). This strengthens the decision of this study to adopt populism as a set of ideas under a stylistic repertoire process because activists convey rhetoric adapted to the 'national' framework of Romania. A kin activist purposefully integrates into one's rhetoric events like Trianon or the Communist repression, designates who had to win and who had to lose from these events, because one knows what these polarizing mnemonic cases mean for the national minority.

One such a polarizing example of a kin-state activist is the MEP László Tőkés, who is an "iconic nationalist politician in Romania and close ally of Orban" (Pogonyi, 2017b, p. 107). In the theory of memories studies, Tőkés fits the idea of "mnemonic actor interested in a specific interpretation of the past" (Bernhard & Kubik, 2014, p. 4). In the past, Tőkés, a former pastor, was the hero of the 1989 revolution from Romania. Tőkés's protests from Timisoara were the sparks that light up the revolution in Romania. After the revolution, he quit his sacerdotal mantle and entered politics.

Over the years, László Tőkés made the headlines in the Romanian media with his increasingly nationalist rhetoric and sporadic demands for autonomy. This, in turn, raised questions about his *modus operandi*. He is also known for his lambasting rhetoric against the political elites of UDMR/RMDSZ (e.g., the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania). Based on his political activity, Fidesz "removed Tőkés from the Transylvanian political stage by placing him on the Fidesz European Parliament candidate list in 2016" (Pogonyi, 2017b, p. 108). Even so, his fiery stances concerning the autonomy of Hungarians in Romania brought him notoriety and crystalized his nationalist-populist



rhetoric. The pallet of autonomy demands coming from the Hungarian political elites is already a wide one (C.f. Salat, 2014). Adding to this plethora of demands, one that subverts the democratic debates and presents nationalist and populist elements can only result in harming the progress of reaching a consensus in Romania. The discussion surrounding some autonomy in Romania is already a polarized one. Showcasing these demands under a vertical representation of 'us' and 'them' rhetoric will only play in the hands of the Romanian politicians. Subsequently, this sort of rhetoric will make politicians in Romania adopt a nativist stance to gain electorate support in response to the demands of the ethnic Hungarians.

The theory of memory complements that of populism, as it can categorize Tóké as a 'mnemonic warrior' whose rhetoric presents the distinction 'us' vs. 'them' while being the only valid version of the past (Bernhard & Kubik, 2014, p. 15). This sort of nationalistic speechmaking increases mobilization at the community level via identity-building opportunities. It also connects the minority to the kin-state activists' political platform, spreading them away from prevailing parties like UDMR. As a result, radical and polarizing demands are adopted by the community. Although many studies have been conducted on the Hungarian kin-state activism through the prism of citizenship (Pogonyi, 2017a, 2017a, 2018; Waterbury, 2010, 2014, 2016), no study reflected on the importance of in-state activists' rhetoric when mobilizing trans-border minorities via memory issues to demand autonomy. To address this research gap, this study will use the following empirical data and methods.

### **Critical discourse analysis**

CDA focuses on the relation in communication between discourse and power (Fairclough, 1989), with a particular focus on the discourse's role in power production and reproduction (van Dijk, 1994). Within a society, the leading groups have more power vis-à-vis the public domain to legitimize their discourse and turn the latter into a normalized framework. In the case of ethnic minorities, ethnic leaders signal the power struggle and the degree of power controlled by dominant groups. Discourses of the dominated challenges the dominant ideologies (van Dijk, 1994). These types of discourses are habitually introduced in contexts to filter the hegemonic control of a dominant group.

In this light, CDA will focus on the supply side in the intercultural relation between kin-activists and kin-minority taking a cue from the works of (Wodak, 2013; Wodak & Meyer, 2001). The reason why adopting Wodak's frameworks is that the kin-activists analyzed herein are coming from right-wing parties like Fidesz. This article suggests that kin-activists like Laszlo Tokes can be categorized as right-wing politicians. CDA complements populism, memory, and kin-activists theory, as its purpose is to understand through the means of language how prejudice, power, and hegemony are misused and reproduced in social relations (Martínez, 2007, p. 126). The need for 'critical' in this stage is because themes and ideological stances that are uttered by activists are brought onto light (Teo, 2000, p. 12). This analysis will look into approximately 83 media statements of Lazlo Tokes to determine which of the two issues (memory and ethnopolitical) is more present in the rhetoric of Tóké vis-à-vis supporting autonomy claims.

### **Data**

For the empirical analysis, this study used 83 statements belonging to László Tóké, and which were covered by different Romanian media outlets or online portals. The leading Romanian sources that provided the materials for analysis are Adevarul.ro, Ziare.com, ActiveNews.ro, and Antena3. Concerning Hungarian English newspaper outlets, the ones selected for this study were Hirado and HungaryToday. This study also used local newspapers from counties neighboring or Székelyland. Data were accessed, stored, and analyzed from April to May. Also, each piece of news was saved in Zotero to create a reference index for each of his statements.

The timeframe used to collect the materials is from 2014-2019. This timeframe was selected intentionally by the researcher of this study, as from 2014 Fidesz registered László Tóké on their MEP list. Also, based on the public library provided by the newspapers as mentioned above and media outlets, László Tóké appears to be indexed more from 2014, as he became more active. The search for Tóké's statements on the portals of all the newspapers mentioned above-included seed-words in Romanian and English like: 'László Tóké,' 'autonomie-autonomy,' 'Trianon,' 'protest,' 'miting.' For example, on Adevarul.ro the search results for László Tóké number 144 hits from 2014 to May 2019. Throughout this time, he was covered ardently by Romania media during 2016 and 2018. During these years, his activity, as much as his nationalist rhetoric doubled, as a result of him being stripped by Romanian President Klaus



Iohannis of the Romanian Star decoration. The translation of László Tóké's statements from Hungarian to Romanian is oftentimes in the articles stated as coming from officials.

## Findings and Discussions

The presentation of the preliminary results, without including the Hungarian language sources, is represented under four categories. The latter is inspired from the literature on populism and memory studies, i.e., a) *representation of ethnic minorities*; b) *illustration of majority*; c) *representation of political elites*; d) *representation of memory issues*. In the 83 statements compiled by this article, so far, the most significant proportions are the representation of ethnic minority, i.e., 27.71% and the description of political elites, i.e., 25.30% (see Table 1).

The average percentage of ethnic minority representation in the rhetoric of László Tóké is 7.22%, whereas the image of political elites comprises 6.02%. At the opposite pole, the representation of the majority encompasses 12.04% during the six-year timeline. Similarly, the description of memory issues reaches 12.04%. A constant in the rhetoric of kin-activists is the anti-elite representation scoring high in most of the years. Likewise, the rhetoric around the representation of ethnic minorities rose to higher percentages in 2018, as well as each of the remaining representations. In regards to media outlets and newspapers, Adevarul.ro covered more the activity of László Tóké, than the other Romanian news outlets. Clearly, the rhetoric of kin-activists like László Tóké emphasizes the difference between ethnic minorities and political elites. In some other cases, the rhetoric is confusing and creates vague contexts that do not specify a bright idea. Often the sufferings endured by the ethnic minority are somehow projected at the majority level, meaning that the latter will suffer too.

Table 1. Percentage of representations in the 83 statements of Laszlo Tokes

Representations	Ethnic minority	Majority	Political elites	Memory issues
Total	27.71%	12.04%	25.30%	12.04%
2019	1.20%	0	1.20%	1.21%
2018	10.84%	7.22%	7.22%	9.63%
2017	3.61%	2.40%	6.02%	1.20%
2016	7.22%	2.40%	6.02%	0
2015	2.40%	0	2.40%	0
2014	3.61%	0	1.20%	0

## Representation of ethnic minorities

Ethnic politics is divisive and structured around the role of majority and minority within a particular society. Racial politics is more typical for Eastern Europe than the West, as territories have been remade often during the 19th and 20th century, and thereby, communities like the ethnic Hungarians from Romania have been displaced from their home country. In this preliminary analysis, much of the coverage of the ethnic minority incorporates several themes that distinguish the representation of ethnic minorities from *'the other,'* i.e., *majority/elite* in the critical discourse analysis. Hence, the most prominent themes are related to *victimhood, fight, land, and national identity values*. Moreover, the study of the *'ethnic minority'* representation revealed a particular emphasis on the plural pronoun *'us'* and *'we.'* In the following, I will discuss the central themes that are part of the representation of the ethnic Hungarian minority in the rhetoric of László Tóké.

The first theme that is central in the above rhetoric is that of *victimhood*. Herein, the overall representation spins around the image of a community that suffered and grieves still at the whims of a sort of unjust authority. In this light, the adjective often used in statements is *'oppressed,'* creating the context whereby the ethnic Hungarian minority is





still object to harsh authoritarian treatment that is similar with that of the ex-Communist regime. In addition to the adjective 'oppressed', the rhetoric provides context vis-à-vis those who are undermined by an unjust authority. Tőkés opens his statement with a question related to the status of the ethnic Hungarians, "*do we want to be slaves or free?*" (Antena3, 2014). That is in connection with the idea of the 'people' who are oppressed while often being represented as a "*subjugated people which will never be free*" (Ibid, 2014). The context is developed in the rhetoric with the help of the pronoun 'us' projected at the community level, "*if we Magyars are oppressed in Romania, not only for us but also for Romanians will be a restriction of freedom*" (Ibid, 2014). Such paradoxical statements aim at transferring the restrictive freedom of the minority at the level of the majority, although, as we will see later, the majority is sometimes characterized as the one that is anti-Hungarian.

In other cases, the rhetoric sums up the threat of violence at the community level. In 2018, then PM Mihai Tudose made an irresponsible and off-limits statement concerning the waving of the Szekler flag, stating "*If the Szekler (ethnic Hungarians) flag flutters on the institutions there, everyone will fly next to the flag*" (Hotnews.ro, 2018b). Not only that this nativist rhetoric of the Romanian head of government caused outrage at the national level, but also played well in the hands of kin-activists, who extended the context vis-à-vis this kind of negligent statement. Thus, for László Tőkés, European fora need to find out "*what has happened and must defend the Hungarian community in Transylvania, the Hungarian people in the Szekler Land who are threatened lethally*" (Antena3, 2018b). As we observe, Tőkés creates two contexts vis-à-vis the 'people.' On one occasion, they are the community of Transylvania, whereas, on the other hand, they are the Hungarian people in the Szekler Land. Populist discourses assume many attributes when representing the people as "it can refer to the common or ordinary people, the people as plebs; to the sovereign people, the people as demos" (Brubaker, 2017, p. 3). However, the attributes of the people in kin-activists rhetoric refer to the "culturally or ethnically distinct people, the people as nation or ethnos" (Ibid, p. 3). For populist actors, the theme of 'victimhood' is essential, as they can easily cast themselves as representative and defenders of the people (C.f. Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). Scholars agree that to demand "to speak in the name of a bounded and distinct people against threatening outside groups or forces would seem to imply a politics of cultural or ethnic nationalism (Brubaker, 2017, p. 3). Moreover, this makes a case for the second theme found in the rhetoric of kin-activists, i.e., *fight/battle*.

In the literature on populism, the *fight/battle* represents the rallying cry of political agents that are described as '*the savior*.' Ostiguy argues that "the populist politicians and parties claim, loudly, politically incorrectly, and often vulgarly, to be that (truly) authentic people's "fighting hero." (2017, p. 4) This is a consequence of the 'betrayal of the elites' vis-à-vis the aim of the ethnic Hungarian community in Romania. As we will see in the analysis vis-à-vis the role of the elite in the rhetoric of kin-activists, the elites are represented on each side of the coin, both ethnic elites, and domestic ethnic Romanian politicians. Since the desire of the community has not been granted, the populist agent steps-in the driving-seat to claim the goal and deliver promises to the community. However, before that, contextually, the political agent insists in his rhetoric vis-à-vis the acceptance that a symbolical 'battle' needs to take place to achieve the goals of the community. In the circumstance of Laszlo Tokes, the battle is often symbolically displayed as "*an intense fight*" (B1TV, 2018). A purpose is given in the rhetoric of Tőkés to the community in the likeness of "*our war from now on, we can call it our battle for autonomy*" (Antena3, 2014). In other instance, the later kin-actor implies that the community needs to accept the fight and the struggle that comes with this stage to achieve the aims "*we need to accept our fight, struggle and sacrifice*" (Adevarul.ro, 2016c). Other times, the rhetoric creates a collective context vis-à-vis fulfilling the autonomy goals reminding his community, "*let us not fight amongst ourselves, rather together*" (Antena3, 2014) suggesting a community building idiom. Populist actors project themselves as representing the 'people,' hence, the rhetoric of Tőkés is always in the first-person plural. Not only that populist actors suggest the message of 'us' at the level of community, but they also convey that the fight should be carried at the level of symbols "*we are taking a fight at the level of symbols*" (Adevarul.ro, 2015). In the literature on populism, scholars argued that populist agents focus their attention not only on the people, elite, anti-establishment but also on the symbols that constitute a danger for their political platform (Espejo, 2017; Ostiguy, 2017).

The themes of victimhood and fight are interlinked in the rhetoric of kin-activists because these provide the characters and actions used in the nefarious process of domestic authorities. Additionally, kin-activists offer the means whereby the community can surpass its victimhood status via fight/battle to reach the desired aim of the ethnic Hungarian population, i.e., autonomy. Likewise, rhetoric incorporates the ideas of *national identity values*. Herein, the theme of national identity encompasses within the boundaries of Tőkés's rhetoric the Carpathian basin and Transylvania. The



first is a reference to the borders of the Kingdom of Greater Hungary, whereas the latter is an allusion towards the ethnic Hungarians from Romania, the same who is often representing as 'us' in his rhetoric. As we shall discover later during the memory issues representation, memories of past glories often embodied by anachronic kingdoms constitute a powerful mnemonic desideratum in the rhetoric of kin-activists. For them the lands they now inhabit are under a foreign power, thus, making them unable to feel at home. "*We have to feel at home in the places where we were born, where our ancestors were born, to preserve our identity and not to become strangers in our home*" (Antena3, 2016b). The solution to regaining these crucial attributes that would make the community feel at home would be autonomy. For kin-activists, it is vital to point out, which are the values that characterize the community building idioms. The priorities summarized by the discourse as "*let us keep our identity and not become foreigners in our own home*" (Ibid, 2016).

Other elements that are fundamental in the rhetoric of Tokes implies the usage of language and particularity of the Hungarian culture. In this sense, reiterating the values that distinguish the ethnic Hungarian community from that of the majority, kin-activists separate the communities and underline the unjust treatment in comparison with the majority. Therefore, to restore balance, kin-activists demand that "*Hungarians from Transylvania want to have the right to use the maternal language and to keep their culture*" (Adevarul.ro, 2017a).

### Representation of Majority

If in the previous section, this article developed the arguments around the themes for the ethnic minority representation, in the following, this study will bring into light the ideas surrounding the image of the *majority*.

In the literature on populism, scholars argue that, *majoritarianism* is an essential component of populism, as it is used as a rhetoric element amongst populist actors because it separates "the assertion of the interests, rights, and will of the majority against those of minorities" (Brubaker, 2017, p. 365). Not surprisingly, the rhetoric of kin activists encompasses the essential distinction between the *minority* and *majority*. A feature that is more common to ethnopopulism (see Madrid, 2008) and cases like that of Evo Morales of Bolivia, the antagonism of the privileged majority at the expense of the minority is characteristic to populism. In the case of the ethnic Hungarians from Romania, the proportion between them and the majority is quite significant. Particularities of the *modus operandi* of Evo Morales and that of Laszlo Tokes are high, as the rhetoric of both condemns the privileges and actions that the majority undertakes. This, in turn, deepens the social cleavages between the majority and the ethnic minority.

The actions distinguish several elements related to the discourse of the majority, the general attitude, inasmuch as the evolution of the socio-political relation. In the case of discourse, kin-activists like to point out to the "after the anti-Hungarian discourse of the Romanian society; we do not doubt that it is our assimilation, destruction, annihilation according to the post-Trianon tradition" (Hotnews.ro, 2018a). In other occasion, kin-activists take a step forward and imply that the attitude of the society is in opposition to that of the minority. For example, therein, László Tőkés speaks at the Tusnad Summer University in the company of the Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orban about the attitude of Romania vis-à-vis the ethnic Hungarians ((Hotnews.or, 2018a).

"Romania is on an anti-Hungarian line, (...) therefore, as Viktor Orban said, we must assume the impossible, as through intense struggle and political wisdom, to achieve a change of the national minority policy both in the Carpathian Basin and in Transylvania."

The antagonism between the majority and minority is further deepened from the socio-political perspective. Kin-activists make use of conflictual situations to fill the vacuum left by political forces. Hence, kin-activists underline that the socio-political order degraded, and for this circumstance, the ones culpable are the majority who via their actions have taken the Romanian-Hungarian relations to a low with their national symbols.

"In the spirit of Timisoara, I would like to tell you that this evolution is bad about Romanian-Hungarian relations. That's not how we started 27 years ago. (...) It is offensive that Romania put its National Day on December 1, which is a pitiful one for the Hungarians in Romania. This would mean that we are second-class citizens of Romania." (Antena3, 2016a)



It is in the interest of kin-activists not only to represent the majority as being anti-Hungarian but also to crystallize the symbolism surrounding the identity of the majority, which happens to be conflictual with that of the minority. Special attention in the rhetoric of kin-activists is the national day of Romania, i.e., 1st of December. For example, László Tőkés argues that the national day of Romania is offensive and insulting for the Hungarians.

“It is offensive that Romania put its National Day on December 1, which is a pitiful one for the Hungarians in Romania. This would mean that we are second-class citizens of Romania.” (Adevarul.ro, 2016c)

The explanation provided by the kin-state activists claims that for ethnic Hungarians, the significance of the 1st of December is a day of pain (Adevarul.ro, 2018a).

“For the Hungarian community, this 100-year period is one without fulfillment. Simply, we do not have, after 100 years, what we celebrate. What to celebrate, that we lost Transylvania? Should the Romanians understand that for us it is a day of mourning, a day of pain.”

The rhetoric of kin-activists takes a jab even at the European level. Following the statements of the soon-to-be ex-president of the European Commission, Jean Claude Juncker with the occasion of Romania’s national day in 2018, László Tőkés made this statement one of his targets, reiterating the division that this day creates between Romanians and Hungarians (Adevarul.ro, 2018a)

“We cannot accept the statement of the President of the European Commission, Jean Claude Juncker, who declared in the debate on the future of Europe, even in my presence in Strasbourg, that the 1st of December, the National Day of Romania, would be a joint celebration of the whole of Europe, together with Romania. I believe it cannot be considered this day and any other historic day, which divides the peoples of the Union, which for us means a significant loss, and for the Romanians an extraordinary gain.”

The analysis of the themes indicates that the discourse of kin-activists is focused on the antagonism between the two camps, i.e., the majority and the minority. At the same time, the rhetoric presents the elements that make the majority be in antinomy with the opposition.

## **Representation of political elites**

The populist theory is defined by the representation of some elite (Canovan, 1981; Mudde, 2004). According to Brubaker, “in the vertical register, ‘the people’ are defined in opposition to economic, political, and cultural elites” (Brubaker, 2019, p. 16). Herein, the analysis of the critical discourse analysis of kin-activists reveals that the rhetoric frames the elite under the *mélange* of the three criteria argued by Brubaker.

In the rhetoric of kin-activists, as we will see in the analysis, comprises all the variables that affect the ethnic Hungarian community and their socio-political aims, i.e., autonomy. In various instances, the elite embodies the Romanian government, and its representation is under the cultural, political, and economic variables. However, the discourse extends beyond the homeland majority’s elites. The populist discourse of kin-activists often includes the ethnic political elites (e.g., UDMR) who had failed to deliver the promise of autonomy. These elites are crystallized as those who had betrayed the purpose of the community via political association with the domestic political elites, which are characterized as “the enemy.”

The central themes surrounding the political elite representation comprises ‘authority provocation,’ ‘attacks on minority’ and ‘betrayal of our politicians.’ The authority provocation is most of the times underpinned as ‘the other’ in the discourse. In the literature on populism, “elites are always ‘othered’ in some way in populist rhetoric – always constructed as outside as well as on top – but they are not still represented as ‘foreign’ in a nationalist sense” (Brubaker, 2019, p. 21). In László Tőkés rhetoric, the elites are signified as ‘foreign,’ thereby in opposition with the values of the ethnic Hungarian community, and who are acting provocatively (Adevarul.ro, 2016a).

“The Romanian Government is provoking the Szeklers and Hungarians through anti-Hungarian measures in recent years, through draft anti-Magyar laws, atrocities against young Hungarians in Târgu Secuiesc or mayors of the biggest Szekler cities.”



Herein, the socio-political dimension of the elite is carefully represented by the discourse of the kin-activist, via a series of examples that centers on the antagonism between ‘us,’ as the ethnic community, and the Romanian government, as ‘the other.’ The hostility summarizes attacks and provocation coming from the domestic elites on several levels, with a dramatic emphasis on the word ‘atrocities’ contextualizing the situation of the young Hungarians. Other times, the focus in the rhetoric is on the political elite who prevent the process of autonomy. Here too, the discourse takes a stance at representing what would the autonomy discussion mean at the level of territorial redistribution, and who is preventing the claim of autonomy of the minority (Antena3, 2014).

“Our warfare now can be called the battle for autonomy. Some think only of the Szeklers and forget the other parts of Transylvania. We need to talk about all of Transylvania, about Hungarians, but also about Romanians because together with Romanian citizens we have to fight for the autonomy of this region, held by the leadership of Bucharest through the imposed prefects.”

Herein, one can observe the focus in the rhetoric is on the collective struggle of the community “battle for autonomy.” In addition, the claim seems to shift the focus from the regional context of Székelyland to that of whole Transylvania, reflecting again on the loss of the Hungarian people via the Trianon treaty from 1920. The discourse, however, contains other ideas that cement the representation of political elites who prevent the autonomy from becoming a reality. The political elites are represented in the above as someone corrupt, a common theme in the theoretical framework of populism (C.f. Ostiguy, 2017). The ‘corruptness’ of the elites is highlighted through the ‘imposed prefects’ who are part of the corrupt system. The pureness of the people is not very crystallized, as the rhetoric takes a more general stance, involving the majority in the process of reaching autonomy.

Another theme that is highlighted in the discourse of kin-activists are the attacks that the political elites vis-à-vis the ethnic minority. Often the politicians are linked with the Communist past that caused much distress to the ethnic Hungarian community from Romania. For activists, politicians adopted “*an anti-Magyar hostile atmosphere used by obscure politicians of the national-communist type on the occasion of the Centenary*” (Adevarul.ro, 2018a). Not only that the elite are represented as having a hostile attitude vis-à-vis the ethnic Hungarians, but the rhetoric constructs the radical premises of the sort of view that is reminiscent of the Communist period when the Ceausescu regime persecuted and attempted to assimilate the ethnic Hungarians under the ‘one people’ ideology (C.f. Bottoni, 2017). The attacks of the political elites are described as ‘*dirty coming from a part of the Romanian political class.*’ Here, it might be a reference to right-wing politicians adopted by PSD. From 2015, PSD-ALDE alliance absorbed right-wing members from former right-wing parties like PPDD and the infamous Greater Romania Party (PRM, and paradoxically, the rhetoric against minorities autonomy demands changed, even though the Hungarian Democratic Party is part of the ruling coalition. In the past, the former right-wing elites absorbed now in the PSD party were vocal against the ethnic Hungarian community demands.

These selected elites desired from the very beginning to weaken the Hungarian community, “*the Romanian political class from the very beginning led to a tired policy of the Hungarian community*” (Adevarul.ro, 2018b). The discourse also wants to point out that the corruptness of the elite is located in Bucharest, and that has seduced some of the Hungarians from the community “*The division comes from Bucharest through our Hungarians who have socialized with Bucharest politics*” (Adevarul.ro, 2015). This links this analysis with the second theme of the political elite representation, i.e., *betrayal of our own political elite*. It is common in the literature of populism, that the self-entitled ‘savior’ to criticize conventional and mainstream parties, even those that one may be linked in one way or the other. Nonetheless, the radical discourse of populist actors underlines the criticism and betrayal of the elite on every level. In this article, the betrayal of our political elites is embodied by UDMR. This political faction is underlined as one movement who “*sabotaged the autonomy during the last 27 years [and] who have had a misleading policy*” (Monitorul de Cluj, 2017). The betrayal is further of the ethnic political elite and framed as being “*part of the Romanian politics*” (Adevarul.ro, 2016b).

Contrarywise, the rhetoric of kin-activists presents redemption elements to the betrayal of their political elite. As a result, UDMR is asked to break any relations with the Romanian political elites from PSD. UDMR is suggested that it “*should break the agreement of parliamentary collaboration with the Social Democrats.*” As a further part of the socio-political solution in the discourse of Tokes is “*to associate with us, Hungarians: with the Szekler and Hungarian Councils and with the parties national; not with our enemies*” (Hirado.hu, 2019). Other times, the discourse of kin-activists considers that a trans-border political relation is a solution to the Szekler autonomy issue. Tokes, a MEP on the Fidesz



lists believes that “*We believe that, by allying UDMR with the Hungarian government and FIDESZ, there is a positive change, but UDMR cannot fulfill the defense mission of the Hungarian community if it does not change*” (Adevarul.ro, 2017b). Therefore, hope is presented by a shift from ethnic elites like UDMR to trans-border elites from the external country, who share not only the cultural values but also the political identity of the ethnic community.

## Representation of Memory issues

Memory represents an essential theme in the rhetoric of kin-activists. Most of the hits are seed-words like *Trianon* (7) and *Communism* (5) were recorded in 2018. Hence, the themes represented in this category are the memories of *Trianon* and *Communism*. There is no coincidence vis-à-vis this increase of seed words like *Trianon* in 2018, as the latter represents the Centennial of Romania, an event that is still producing discomfort for kin-minorities, and a critical *raison d'être* for the political platform of kin-activists and a mobilization tool. Kin-activists connect the unresolved past issues with the collective consciousness of kin-communities. Specifically, anchoring people in the distant past, whereby historical problems are unresolved is of interest to kin-state activists who employ mnemonic manipulation to create friction among people and extend their political platform (Bernhard & Kubik, 2014). Kin activists' communication appeal “is motivated by contemporary political considerations” (Verovšek, 2016, p. 530). These concerns refer to the unchanging political milieu of Romania – one that is still considered post-communist, whereby the elites in power would not allow the ethnic minority the right to self-determination.

“After Trianon, after the communist-nationalist dictatorship and after regaining of power by the post-communist forces, can we allow us to be relaxed, to be opportunistic, to seek all sorts of balances, pseudo-equilibriums and to say that do we need small steps because we can only go that way? Can we be content with this after all these years? After all these decades that we have lived in pain and with very, very much passion, in this context can we still allow this? After the anti-Hungarian discourse of Romanian society, we do not doubt that it is our assimilation, destruction, annihilation according to the post-Trianon tradition” (B1TV, 2018a).

In the realm of memory studies, “mnemonic entrepreneurs are free to construct their narratives out of the available ‘national’ repertoire [for] if they choose elements outside this repertoire, they appear to be alien and not credible to their potential constituents” (Bernhard & Kubik, 2014, p. 23). This strengthens the decision of this study to adopt populism as a set of ideas under a stylistic repertoire that separates the people into two antagonistic camp process because activists convey rhetoric adapted to the ‘national’ framework of Romania. A kin activist purposefully integrates into one’s rhetoric events like *Trianon* or the Communist repression, designates who had to win and who had to lose from these events, because one knows what these polarizing mnemonic cases mean for the national minority.

“For the Hungarian community, this 100-year period is one without fulfillment. Simply, we do not have, after 100 years, what to celebrate. What to celebrate, that we lost Transylvania? The Romanians must understand that for us it is a day of mourning, a day of pain” (Adevarul.ro, 2018a).

For the most part, populism is fundamentally nostalgic “disliking the present and immediate future; it seeks to mold the further future in accordance with its vision of the past” (Wiles in Ionescu & Gellner, 1969, p. 167). The nostalgia of the Hungarian people, and especially of those ethnics dispersed in the far corners of the ex-empire is the anachronic depiction of the Greater Hungary (e.g., the parts administrated by the Hungarians during the Austro-Hungarian Empire). The notion of a Greater Hungary signifies the land that incorporated all the nowadays scattered Hungarians, while the memory of 1920 *Trianon Treaty*, augmented as a national trauma, denotes the event which segregated communities from the homeland (Csepeli & Örkényi, 1996; Dani, 2016; Jordan, 2010). Other intellectuals argue that the symbiosis between memories and populism is about cajoling vast echelons of the societies via enticing stories that reflect the past under a “golden age” metaphor period. The latter was a *passé* when the societal and financial discrepancies were less visible than nowadays (Harari, 2018). In the case of Hungary, it is “memories of past greatness” (Waterbury, 2010, p. 4) that connects the Hungarian state with its scattered ethnics. In support of these claims, kin-activist employ a reminder in their discourse the past glories whereby the ethnic communities were living. Hence, “that community, which for hundreds of years or a thousand of years flourished during the Hungarian Kingdom, or that of the Transylvanian Principality” (Antena3, 2018a).



All these have come to mean a great deal for the ethnic Hungarians, especially for those in Romania because “it highlights the processual character of memory strongly limited by previous commemorative projects” (Jasiewicz, 2015, p. 5) Laszlo Tokes reminds that this nostalgia needs to be commemorated “we need to commemorate” (Adevarul.ro, 2018a). This allows kin activists to dissipate content and minorities to internalize links and find meaning in their collective past.

## Conclusions

In this article, I have provided a preliminary analysis of kin-state activists rhetoric exemplified in newspapers and media outlets from Romania. In this study, I focused entirely on the discourse of kin-activists like Laszlo Tokes in Romanian, with the hopes that in the future I will add more names in September when I will start my Secondment at Corvinus University. The preliminary results indicate that the discourses of Laszlo Tokes spiked in 2018 when Romania celebrated its Centennial, although his discourses fluctuated during previous years, especially before his election as a MEP in 2014. Also, the results of the data reveal an ascendant trend during the Tudose incident when Tokes’s rhetoric increased in media coverage and criticism.

The overall results revealed that the most common form of representation disclosed by the rhetoric of kin-activists is that of minorities and the image of political elites. Memory issues have an important role in the discourse of kin-activists as they link past unresolved problems with the current socio-political situation of ethnic minorities from Romania. While the relation between political elites and minority is emphasized as conflictual and antagonizing, not that much emphasis is attributed to the relationship between the majority and minority, despite its ‘us’ vs. ‘the other’ context created. The representation of the ethnic Hungarian minority is essentialized in the discourse as being the victim of the hands of an authoritarian and corrupt elite. The characterizations of the elite are under the framework of corruption and that of Communism-nationalism of previous regimes.

The rhetoric of kin-state activists can be integrated into the structures of populist radical discourse. Kin-activists employ a nationalist-populist stylistic repertoire that separates the community in a vertical ladder, ‘us’ Vs. ‘them.’ Kin-activists carefully designate the contextual framework vis-à-vis the differences between the majority and minority, with the latter being under a community building idiom. Additionally, kin-activists discourse does not stop at depicting as ‘the other’ only the domestic political elites. They also focus on the ethnic political elites, which they plan to replace in the socio-political milieu. For kin-state rhetoric, the ethnic political elites have been tarnished by the corruption of the elites from Bucharest. The latter is symbolically depicted in the discourse as ‘the enemy’. Moreover, it the place that corrupted the ethnic elites and the hotspot, which continues the nationalist-communist policies against the ethnic Hungarians.

Memory is an essential theme in the discourse of kin-activists, as they seek to anchor the community in the past that presents a pallet of unresolved issues, and thereby to act as a powerful catalyst when demanding autonomy. The discourse surrounding the autonomy demands of kin-activists do not give coherent ideas related to what type of autonomy is desired. The focus is demanding autonomy because on past injustices polarizing thus the debate. Naturally, the major mnemonic themes employed by kin-activists gravitate around Trianon and the communist regime of Nicolae Ceausescu. The first represents the major thematic element of the discourse of kin-activists for it is designated as the prime source of past and current socio-political issues of the ethnic Hungarians. The second is described as an additional nefarious element that tormented the ethnic community, and which continues nowadays under a new form of the elite.

This study has several limitations. The first and most important is the lack of sources in the Hungarian language and addition of more names to analysis. The addition of the Hungarian sources would not only enrich the possible results but also highlight how kin-state activists express themselves differently in the Hungarian language in opposition to the Romanian language. Another limitation is that I did not thoroughly examined the symbolism from the discourses. I focused on the known vernacular stereotypes employed in the analysis of right-wing politicians’ discourses. Another limitation is the lack of previous researches that focused on the rhetoric of kin-state activists through the lenses of populism. Another study is in the process by the author. The study focuses on how Romanian newspapers and media outlets radicalize even further the interpretation of the kin-activists like Laszlo Tokes’ discourses.



The current study points out the need for future research in three aspects. The first focuses on the difference of rhetoric of the ethnic political elites like UDMR and expert interviews vis-à-vis autonomy demands from above-mentioned kin-state activists László Tőkés. The second study will focus on the propensity of kin-state rhetoric that is internalized, interpreted, and displayed by kin-minorities during festivities and protests — the third aims at measuring the level of populism at the kin-community level via online and door-to-door survey.

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