

## ***CZECH SOCIAL SCIENCES AND THE NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS: Dangerous Liaisons<sup>1</sup>***

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**ABSTRACT:** The aim of this study is to analyse social science approaches to the emergence of new religious movements in the Czech Republic over the past 20 years. The study focuses on how Czech social scientists have dealt with the phenomenon, or more precisely, with one of its representatives – the Czech branch of the Unification Church. We reconstruct the mutual relationship between the social sciences and one of its objects of study, based on a discursive analysis of the media representation of this group, on the one hand, and of scientific reflection of the group, on the other. These data are complemented by biographical interviews with the members of the Unification Church. Following this analysis, we argue that for most of the 1990s, the typical reaction (including that of researchers) was negative – and reflected predominantly on the intensive recruitment activities of the group. The period after the year 2000 has been, on the contrary, characterised by withdrawal from strong positions of refusal and a tendency towards a more pluralistic form of description of the group.

**KEYWORDS:** Unification Church, discourse analysis, biographical interview, double hermeneutics, metatheory.

### **INTRODUCTION: SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The change of political regime in 1989 signalled a major shift in developments within the field of religion in the Czech Republic. Because of partial liberalisation, a number of new players entered this field, especially new religious movements that were significantly different from those already operating in the field. However, parallel to this development, a number of conflicts also emerged and were reflected in the mutually reinforcing activities of the media and researchers. Thus, researchers contributed to the creation of particular representations of new religious movements, which had serious consequences for both the public image and

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self-image of the members of these movements. This study attempts to describe some aspects of the history of this ongoing transformation as well as the implications associated with it. Specifically, *we analyse the approach of social scientists to the creation, operation and development of one of the new religious movements in the Czech Republic – the Unification Church.*<sup>2</sup> Such a research project requires several interconnected research objectives. First, the objective is to describe how, over the last twenty years, Czech social sciences have reflected on the object of their study in the case of the followers of Reverend Moon, in particular, an examination of the ways in which the representation of this religious group was shaped. Second, and in relation to the first objective, we are also interested in the cognitive interests of examining this phenomenon as well as researchers' conclusions: were they value-neutral positions, or rather, were they a set of value judgments? Third, at the same time, it is also necessary to take into account how members of the Unification Church reflectively evaluate/interpret the conclusions of the social scientists as these also play a part in forming their own practices and self-image.

Why do we focus on this topic? Although the Unification Church is one of the typical research themes on new religious movements (Baker 1984; Bromley and Blonner 2012; Chryssides 1991, 1999), virtually no study explicitly addresses the situation of the followers of Reverend Moon in post-communist Europe. Furthermore, most of the information about new religious movements in Central and Eastern Europe is of a general nature (see e.g., Baker 1999; Titarenko 2010). Researchers who focus on this subject usually explore the situation in former East Germany (Arweck 2006; Usarski 1999), Poland, Russia, Belorussia, Hungary or Croatia (Borowik and Babinsky 1997; Borowik and Tomka 2001; Titarenko 2010), but so far, there is no study addressing the situation in the Czech Republic. Moreover, the main focus of existing studies is on the first decade of post-communist transformation between 1989-1999 when the relationship between the state and religious organisations began to change and new religious movements started to emerge in the region.

It is also true that some social theorists (Beckford 2000; Robins 2000) consider the relationship between the social sciences and new religious movements problematic. One of the reasons for this claim is that social scientists produce not only scientific discourse, which is not always value neutral, but they also participate in the construction of a public image of new religious movements. In this regard, they can contribute to a negative image of these movements. This study focuses on both of these aspects. It intends to expand knowledge on the situation of new religious movements in Central Europe, particularly the Unification Church, as well as contribute to knowledge of the way in which social scientists contribute to the production of a specific public image of one of these movements. Research dealing with new religious movements in this part of Europe usually does not stress this latter aspect.

The text is structured along the following parts. First, it introduces key theoretical approaches (George Ritzer's metatheory and Anthony Giddens' concept of double hermeneutics) as well as our methodological strategy, which combines the procedures of discourse analysis and grounded theory. The empirical part of the paper is then devoted to the analysis of discursive representations of the followers of Reverend Moon from the perspective of the social sciences and the cognitive interests from which they emerge, while the final sections focus on the reflection of this representation among members of the religious group and summarise the results of the research.

## **THEORY AND METHODOLOGY**

Considering the theoretical background of this work, it should be noted that one of the starting points is the field of scientific thinking usually referred to as *metatheory*. Research on how social scientists describe and conceptualise social phenomena – in our case social scientists analysing new religious movements, specifically the Unification Church in the Czech

<sup>2</sup>Because the difference is not key for the purposes of this paper, we will use the terms "Unification Church" and "Followers of Reverend Moon" interchangeably.

Republic – also falls into the sphere of interest of science about science. Like other authors (Ritzer 1988, 1990, 2001, 2008; Wallace 2000; Zhao 2001), we understand metatheory as the systematic examination of the “foundations” or underlying structures of sociological theory, which involves the study of actors who, through their epistemic actions at both the theoretical and empirical levels, generate scientific knowledge. In such a framework, it is then possible to outline at least three fundamental theoretical areas as a basis for our research.

First is the analysis of social theory formulated by Ritzer (1988, 1990, 2001, 2008). Ritzer believes that in the study of social theory, it is necessary to look at two important dimensions that determine outcome. The first of these is called *internal social analysis of theory*. It is typically focused on the analysis of different research groups, career pathways and institutional support that allow certain types of theories to arise, which, in turn, contain distinctive cognitive interests (Habermas 1987) and are characteristic by terminological, conceptual and methodological tools. The second can be called *external social analysis of theory*. It focuses on the broader cultural and historical context of the production of social theories: on a set of factors that determine what may become the object of interest in scientific reflection, what the available heuristics are, what is seen as an urgent problem or an object of such scientific interest that it is preferred over others.

In this regard, it should be noted that the current study analyses both the internal and external social aspects of studying the followers of Reverend Moon in the Czech Republic. Concerning internal aspects, the study points to a specific anchoring of the scientific discourse on the Unification Church and the authors that produce this discourse within the framework of traditionalist and pro-Catholic institutions. In the case of the external aspects, we point to the affinity of scientific discourse with the media and to its character, which resembles the discourse of the anti-cult movements. We could even say that in this case, scientific reflection permeates the public criticism of new religious movements and serves as one of the sources of its legitimisation. Thus, in the background of the research on new religious movements in the Czech Republic lie specific cognitive interests.

Also, in Anthony Giddens’ (1993) concept of *double hermeneutics*, we can find the second theoretical basis of our work. Giddens’ theory anchors the understanding of social reality, in certain forms of pre-understanding, on the basis of which it is possible to build a scientific meta-language and other forms of knowledge about a particular group of phenomena. However, the resulting semantic frameworks do not exist in a social vacuum and are fed back into the social world; they penetrate and affect the conduct of social actors and the meanings attributed to this world and actions in it. This idea is useful for us mainly because it opens up a third layer of our study: the ways in which the followers of Reverend Moon interpret how they are described in the scientific discourse, since the statements it contains create an image with which they are confronted and to which they must react either positively or negatively. This situation is subsequently reflected in their practices and the results of further scientific research.

### **Research Methods**

The theoretical foundation presented above points to a qualitative research strategy that focuses on a critical analysis of scientific and media discourse practices as well as their reflection on the part of the followers of Reverend Moon. We assume that in this way, we can reveal:

1. The institutional and organisational belonging of discourses and the authors who produce them, including the cognitive interests in their background. We also deal with the correspondence and discrepancy between the discourse produced by the scientific and media practices, and therefore, we will be able to see how external social factors influence the type of knowledge emerging in the scientific field (a dimension based on Ritzer’s theory).
2. Ways in which scientific research is reflected on by social actors, how this affects their

self-image and social practices, which are then further examined by social scientists (a dimension based on Giddens' theory).

If we want to cover all these issues, it is necessary to use data from three discursive practices: (a) scientific practice dedicated to the Unification Church, (b) media practice that also addresses the subject, and (c) the practice of members of the Unification Church that reflects (a) and (b). We must note that unlike the first two practices, the third is based on interviews with members of the organisation; it differs from (a) and (b), in that, it is not present in the form of a text but is developed through the course of our research activities.

With reference to Fairclough (1992, 2003, 2006) and other authors (cf. esp. Barker and Galasiński 2001; Brown and Yule 1983; Gee 1999; Jørgensen and Phillips 2002; Locke 2004; Van Dijk 1997, 2008), we understand discourse not only as the way of using language in a specific field (e.g., in the fields of law, politics or science) but also a way of expressing different contents based on a certain ideological perspective which provides human experience with meaning and purpose. In order to further specify our concept of discourse, we must emphasise that we will not consider discourse as composed only of those statements that are fixed in the form of texts but also those statements which are based on the utterances of individuals and on whose creation we have participated through our research activities – i.e., interviews with members of the Unification Church.

In the analysis of the discourse presented above, we use the analytical model of Fairclough (1992), which distinguishes three important layers: (1) the level of text, (2) the level of discursive practice, and (3) the level of social practice. The broader area of social practice is briefly elaborated in the description of the group's history. Later in our analysis, we focus on the two remaining levels, those of texts and discursive practices. In examining the reflection of these two discursive practices by members of the Unification Church, we use the approach and methods of grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1990).

Furthermore, in the analysis of texts, we use the techniques of discourse analysis, which focus on the determination of the following set of characteristics (Van Dijk 2000):

1. Analysis of the evaluation of the phenomenon;
2. Analysis of interdiscursivity and intertextuality;
3. Analysis of content consistency and type of representation;
4. Analysis of the forms of presentation: the placement and organisation of sentences/statements in the composition of the text, including used vocabulary;
5. Analysis of conative elements of the discourse.

### *Research samples*

The research sample was created through text searches of several sources, namely, the National Czech Bibliography, magazine articles published in the popular scholarly journal *Dingir* and texts published on the websites of the Society for the Study of Sects and New Religious Movements and the *Dingir* journal. The main criterion for inclusion in the sample was a direct reference of the text to Reverend Moon or his followers, usually expressed in keywords or other information specifying the text. Some other texts were also included in the sample, even though they did not relate directly to the group, because they contained information necessary to grasp the context of the initially selected texts. In total, we examined 58 texts from the period 1993 to 2011.

In the case of research interviews with members of the Unification Church, a research sample was constructed using the snowball method. In the period from June to December of 2012, a total of six interviews were conducted, especially with older members of the church who were able to reflect on the entire period (or most of it) that the group existed in Czechoslovakia and



after 1993 in the Czech Republic. Unstructured interviews on the members' biographies and their relationships with the movement were conducted. In addition to records of the interviews themselves, information from the field journal was also used in the analysis.

## DISCOURSE ON THE FOLLOWERS OF REVEREND MOON

The origin of the Czech public discourse on the followers of Reverend Moon, which started to unfold after 1989, is traceable to a rather narrow group of scholars focusing on the field of new religious movements. In the beginning of the 1990s, these scholars were associated with an organisation called Society for the Study of Sects and New Religious Movements (henceforth SSSNRM). Later, in 1998, this group founded a professional journal, *Dingir*, which focused on the Czech religious scene. Scholars associated with these two closely linked organisations were in a very advantageous position to influence the wider public discourse during the 1990s because the Czech press considered them to be experts in the field. They were often asked to comment on controversial events associated with new religious movements, usually involving frequent classifications and evaluations of the social groups falling in this category. According to our data, the press did not consider other scholars or researchers to be important in the field, and for this reason, the claims of the scholars associated with the SSSNRM were treated as authoritative and were, therefore, unchallenged. Our analysis is concerned, in particular, with texts produced by this group of scholars, with the diffusion of their views to a wider discursive environment and with the later reaction of other scholars and researchers against this homogeneously shaped discourse. But before we elaborate the results of the textual analysis, we need to deal with the background of the production, distribution and consumption of these texts. In other words, we need to treat the level of discursive practice in accordance with the model of Fairclough (1992).

### *The Level of Discursive Practice*

To examine the level of discursive practice, we draw primarily from data about the organisations within which the texts were produced and distributed. These are predominantly data about the SSSNRM and *Dingir*, which were crucial for establishing the public discourse on the followers of Reverend Moon.

First, we focus on the SSSNRM, a civic association founded in 1993 (SSSNRM 2006). It has less than 20 members, mostly with academic backgrounds, and its goals are described in its official bylaws:

1. Research on sects and new religious movements in the Czech Republic
2. Providing the public with information on the research subjects
3. Providing counselling services concerning research subjects
4. Publishing activity
5. Arranging conferences and symposiums (SSSNRM 2004).

These goals are fulfilled by particular activities of the association, such as running a library or archive, or a counselling service (SSSNRM 2006). From these activities, we can highlight the organisation of seminars focused on inter-religious dialogue, which were usually also attended by members of the groups or movements concerned (SSSNRM n.d., b). According to the available information, between the years 2001 and 2006, 36 seminars were organised, and although some were devoted to groups that the SSSNRM considered to be "sects" (i.e., Jehovah's Witnesses or Scientology), none was concerned with the Unification Church or the followers of Reverend Moon.

Another of the SSSNRM's activities is publishing, which often takes place through the *Dingir* journal and its publisher, the *Dingir* Ltd., Company (*Dingir* n.d., d). The close linkage between the SSSNRM and *Dingir* is apparent. Almost all members of the SSSNRM board (SSSNRM n.d.,

a) are at the same time members of the *Dingir* board of editors (*Dingir* n.d., e). This linkage also signifies a substantial connection between the body of editors of the journal and particular academic organisations in the Czech Republic. It is important to note that this group of scholars is rather homogeneous in terms of disciplinary orientation. Their backgrounds are primarily in theology or religious studies, and they often utilise psychological or sociological findings.

Returning to the journal, its rules concerning the evaluation of religious groups are arguably inconsistent or, at best, ambiguous. In a text that describes the journal, its editor-in-chief holds an attitude, which can be characterised as non-evaluative:

It [the journal] does not promote or denounce religion or any of its particular forms; it tries to approach them openly and from an unbiased perspective. (*Dingir* n.d., a)

Nevertheless, in another text, the editor-in-chief lists the sources of inspiration for the journal, among which he includes the highly critical approach of Johannes Aagaard:

I must admit that I admire him and his pupils and colleagues, which are today spread across the world, for their ability of prompt critical judgement based on their knowledge of the inner workings of the studied religious groups. I am confident that after his public disputations with the representatives of Scientology and the Family, these unfortunate delegates must be convinced that someone knows their tricks and manipulation tactics better than they themselves. (*Dingir* 2000a)

Finally, in its information for authors, we find the following recommendation:

Contributions in all sections can be critical towards any religious phenomenon, but not offensive and vilifying. They can express also a wishful attitude towards any religious phenomenon, but should avoid explicit promotion. (*Dingir* 2000b)

It is apparent that the editor-in-chief tried to find a balanced position between critically engaged and non-evaluative attitudes, which would serve as a basis for establishing the journal's profile. Nevertheless, these attitudes are inconsistent and so, as we will see later, the content of the published texts does not conform to the declarations about not being "offensive" or "vilifying". This ambiguity could be the source of a double-minded logic on the basis of which the highly evaluative standpoints of scholars associated with the SSSNRM and *Dingir* were reproduced in wider areas of the Czech public discourse as objective and generally valid.

The SSSNRM distributes its texts through its website by running a library and an archive in conjunction with lecture activities as well as through the low-circulation journal, *Dingir*. The journal is distributed by selected bookstores in 14 major cities throughout the Czech Republic and the capital of Slovakia (*Dingir* n.d., b). Further, distribution is carried out through mail delivery. *Dingir* is distributed by one of the most prestigious professional publishing houses in the Czech Republic. Usually, there are four issues per year, each comprising 36 pages. The issues are thematically focused, but no issue specifically about the followers of Reverend Moon has ever been published.

At least in the early 1990s, the scholars associated with the SSSNRM contributed to periodicals of other (more traditional and established) religious groups; they also introduced the discourse on the followers of Reverend Moon (Anno Domini 1992b, 1995; Český bratr 1992). With the support of a clear statement by one of the authors (Lidové noviny 1996), this can be interpreted as an indication of personal religious beliefs and thus as a sign of the existing cognitive interests of some of the scholars.

We must also note that the scope of distribution and the target audiences were extended by the types of distribution channels to which the group of scholars managed to connect. These are the channels of the periodicals of other religious groups and, above all, the large audiences of the nationwide press.

### *The Level of Texts*

We now turn to the analysis on the level of texts. We consider the aforementioned five categories that allow us to grasp the examined discourse in some of its important dimensions. First, we discuss the representation of significant events and facts in the analysed texts. This will also shed some light on the usual content of the texts. Among important events, we look especially at visits by prominent members of the group, religious ceremonies (especially mass weddings) and conferences or seminars organised by the group. The representation of these events usually consists of a brief description of the event, accompanied by an evaluative statement (e.g., Matějka 2001; Vojtišek 1998). The purpose of these comments is to correct possible wrong/inaccurate impressions in the plain descriptions. In these comments, the author always performs the role of an arbiter judging what is true or false, what is morally acceptable or unacceptable:

*The first conference in November could be a source of illusion for unfamiliar participants or observers, not only because of its affectionate atmosphere, but also because of the texts presented. Dr. Chung Hwan Kwak, president of the IIFWP, claims in the welcoming letter that Rev. Moon always advocated the opinion that global transformation and the establishment of world peace could not be achieved through threat and the exercise of force. Rather, peace can be achieved through a change in the human heart. The idea itself is surely acceptable, though hardly for those who know that Moon's property contains weapons factories, but according to Moon's theology, the tool for unification may, for instance, be a third world war. (Matějka 2001)*

Other very common objects of representation are Reverend Moon and his wife as the most prominent members of the group. In this context, the negative evaluation is grounded in the ad hominem argumentation. The texts often point to their substantial financial assets, which are based on the entrepreneurial activities of the leading figure of the group and which are incompatible with the traditional image of a religious leader (e.g., Reflex 2000; Večerník Praha 1994; Yamamoto 1998):

*The first building he built for his believers in 1950 in the South Korean city of Busan was made from discarded army boxes. He barely made his living as a docker. Today, he authoritatively controls the faith of hundreds of thousands of people, his church is active in more than 150 countries and he owns a worldwide economic empire and millions of dollars flow through his hands. (Reflex 2000)*

Along with his religious activities, Reverend Moon was also active economically. His success in both areas is so closely interwoven that he is sometimes referred to as a “religious entrepreneur” (Reflex 2000). Furthermore, internal problems in Reverend Moon’s family are revealed only to be contrasted with the teachings of the flawless family and the concept of “true parents” that Rev. Moon and his wife should personify (e.g., Týden 1995; Yamamoto 1998). Finally, the reader is often introduced to conflicts with the law, which the Reverend and his organisation encountered (e.g., Blesk magazín 1995; Mladá fronta dnes 1993; Svobodné slovo 1995).

In addition to these events, the texts predominantly focus on the group’s recruitment techniques as associated with manipulation. This issue is elaborated mainly in texts published in the press, which often aim to inform about possible dangers (e.g., Týden 1995; Večerník Praha 1994):

*That is the essence of all this – not to give you a minute to sort information, to get it straight, to think. This unsensational violence is called brainwashing. It works flawlessly! ... Lovebombing is a perfectly efficient and sophisticated method to transform you into a robot. (Večerník Praha 1994)*

In some articles, the practice of “lovebombing” is elaborated, while in others, it serves as a self-evident starting point. The key point here is that it is the main point put forward to illustrate the dangerousness of the group. The question of recruitment techniques is also related to the problem of motivation for membership in the group. This phenomenon is often

interpreted with the use of various metaphorical associations. One of the most commonly used is the comparison of group membership to the effects of a drug (e.g., *Lidové noviny* 1996; *Týden* 1994, 1995), which can be seen as an analogy with clearly negative connotations. In other instances, the motivation is explained by a natural human predisposition to religiosity, which is exploited by some religious groups (e.g., *Lidové noviny* 1996; *Týden* 1994). This implies a boundary between a natural expression of religiosity and its abuse. The difference between these two positions seems to coincide with the distinction between groups with which it is possible and desirable to conduct interreligious dialogue and groups with which it is not.

There are several characteristics of textual composition that are significant for our analysis. First, the form of a short and curt introduction of the group is typically found in press articles (e.g., *Severočeský regionální deník* 1995). The purpose of these texts is to generate information about the existence of a dangerous group, thus creating general awareness of the issue. This compositional form was mostly found during the 1990s when the discourse on the followers of Reverend Moon and new religious movements, in general, began to spread. Such forms typically provided information only on the name of the group, its aims and how it contacts potential members.

Another compositional characteristic occurring predominantly in the press is quoting excerpts from the teachings of the religious group without providing context or introduction (e.g., *Mladá fronta dnes* 1993; *Večerník Praha* 1994). These excerpts mostly contain very bold statements, often related to biblical figures, but which, at the same time, are not consistent with the traditional teachings of more established biblical churches. This portrayal of the group's teachings contributes to the perception of the group as something strange and meaningless.

The third common compositional characteristic, which was briefly elaborated along with representation, originates in the authors' efforts to correct the group's statements or to maintain a distance from them. A typical example of these corrections are the captions accompanying photographs and pictures or commentaries correcting statements from interviews or press conferences (e.g., *Svobodné slovo* 1995; *Telegraf* 1992). In this way, the statements of group members are precluded from entering the wider public discourse without being burdened with the evaluative comments.

It is also important to note what vocabulary is used in the analysed texts. The words employed might be linked to positive or negative connotations, a fact reflected in the overall tone of the text. Based on some of the frequently used words, we can also reveal the criteria used to evaluate the group. The most important expression, which is ubiquitous in the examined discourse, is the designation "sect". It appears that in identifying a "sect", the SSSNRM does not take into account whether the group is registered by the state and proceeds according to its own criteria. Thus, Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses are designated as "sects", regardless of their registration as churches. The fact that these groups are registered entities is also a point of criticism (Příbyl 2004). Particularly interesting in this regard is the reflection on the term "sect" by the editor-in-chief of *Dingir*. In one of his texts, he comes to the conclusion that it is not necessary to replace the term with another expression without pejorative connotations (as other scholars did with the introduction of the term "new religious movements") because it correctly refers to the rejection of the group by the majority (Vojtíšek 2004).

Other words which are found to have a close connection with the followers of Reverend Moon are "manipulation", "threat" or "alien". Based on these reference points, we can create four binary oppositions, which express the criteria for the evaluation of the group:

- sect – church
- manipulation – reproduction
- threat – safeness
- alien – familiar



By recurrent uses of these terms, the group is differentiated from traditional and well-established churches whose main strategy for maintaining continuity is reproduction and not intensive recruitment discursively associated with manipulation. These churches are deeply rooted in the history of the geographical area and are thus considered familiar. Their presence also usually does not spark feelings of threat or insecurity, quite the contrary. These binary oppositions illustrate the associated meanings of the basic difference between “sect” and “church” in the case of specific groups in the Czech public discourse.

Calls for future action or documentation of past actions often constitute parts of the analysed texts. We consider these manifestations to be the conative elements of the discourse. Through these elements, we can relate texts and other accounts of communication to social action. Calls to action can be explicit or implicit. This means that action can be encouraged either directly or through an indirect reference in the text. The injunction may or may not be present. Below are examples of both strategies:

*What can I say? Perhaps only that if you ever encounter a similar group and you have doubts about it, do not rely only on the information presented to you. Ask your relatives, friends or an expert in religious studies. You can also contact the Society for the Study of Sects and New Religious Movements, which you can find at ... (Severočeský regionální deník 1995)*

*Mrs. Hak Ja Han's stay in Prague, one of many on her world travels, will apparently go by without disturbance. Evidently, not many suspect who is actually organising the conference. Even [quoted person] rejected the unambiguous connection to the Moonies. In Bulgaria, the parents of children that joined the Moonies were more radical; they blocked the airport and made Mrs Hak Ja Han's visit impossible. (Mladá fronta dnes 1993)*

Another text points to the commitment of the SSSNRM whose members were not only sought by journalists, but, as it seems, sometimes actively used the press to disseminate information:

*The following information is intended for anyone who has received an elegant invitation with the following text: [...]. The Society for the Study of Sects and New Religious Movements considers it its duty to inform the public of what it really means. (Lidová demokracie 1993)*

Many other texts point to other SSSNRM activities that were already listed in the section dealing with discursive practice (e.g., Fišerová 2000; Škodová 2000). We can reiterate that among those, we focus on publishing activities, counselling, or organising events for inter-religious dialogue. All these areas of conduct are underlined with the distinction between acceptable and unacceptable groups and suffer from contradictions stemming from the ambiguous criteria for dealing with new religious movements.

The discourse examined here exhibits inconsistency in several respects. Apart from the basic contradiction between declarations of not being “offensive” and the content of published texts, there are also other partial inconsistencies. First, there is that between reports of declining membership requirements on the part of the group and simultaneously repeated claims of threat based mainly on the intensity of these requirements (e.g., Severočeský regionální deník 1995; Týden 1995). In some cases, the reports of reduced membership requirements are used as an argument aimed at criticising the followers of Reverend Moon (Yamamoto 1998). This type of inconsistency is especially present in the discourse during the 1990s. After the turn of the century, the reduced requirements began to reflect positively, and a more relaxed attitude towards the group emerged (Reflex 2003). Also, during the period, isolated texts that loosely

formed a fragmented opposition to the then dominant discourse emerged.<sup>3</sup>

The second inconsistency in the discourse can be found in repeated statements in which scholars associated with the SSSNRM emphasise that they are not part of the anti-cult movement. In some of the texts, they are proud to challenge “sect bashers” (Hošek 2006), or they elaborate on the opposition between the “academics” and the “anti-cult movement” with the result that the dichotomy is, according to them, simply not applicable to the Czech context (Vojtíšek 2001). They conclude that none of these positions is theirs, with the implication that they have chosen a third path balanced in between the previous two. This can be perceived as a direct consequence of the double-minded logic underlining the attitude of the scholars towards the new religious movements. Their declarations are, however, not necessarily met by the content of the texts produced within their discursive practice. All this culminates in calls to exclude the followers of Reverend Moon from the inter-religious dialogue:

*The problem is that in academic circles and in the experiences of many affected parties, the Moonies' organisations are considered, with absolute validity, to be the tools of a dangerous destructive cult. [...] Therefore, it is proper to ask if, in such a case, it is naive to think of any contact on the level of a real dialogue. (Matějka 2001)*

Finally, to summarise the main content of the discourse produced by the scholars associated with the SSSNRM and *Dingir*, we can condense this discourse into a few interrelated statements:

The Unification Church is a sect.  
Sects are manipulative.  
Manipulation constitutes a threat.  
This threat is unfamiliar.

## MEMBERS OF THE UNIFICATION CHURCH

This semantic content expanded from the domain where the discourse was originally established and spread to other public discursive practices because of the close connection of the scholars, media and other religious groups. Thus, we can claim that a small group of several individuals initiated and, for the greater part of the 1990s, had a key influence on the public discourse on the followers of Reverend Moon.

In this section, we address the question of how members of the Unification Church react to the interest of social scientists and the media in their activities. For the last twenty years, the members of the Unification Church have been the subject of many research projects. When we contacted the members of the church for the first time, it became apparent that the research findings were not always endorsed by the representatives of the movement, which led to a certain level of caution from its members when in contact with academics. It is important to note that the church is not a completely isolated group. It organises a fair number of events either directly or through one of its associated organisations. These events play a pastoral role in bringing new members to the group and achieving the aims of its “mission”, that is, to achieve worldwide and society-wide peace through well-functioning families. Members' level of commitment towards the church has been evolving and seems to be arriving to a

<sup>3</sup>In contrast to the discourse described above, which is mainly characterised by a negative evaluation of certain religious groups, there is no independent discourse that opposes it. We can find only isolated individual texts that either do not fit into the described discourse (e.g., Garčárová 2011; Kratochvíl 2006; Lužný 2004a) or are explicitly opposed to it (e.g., Lidové noviny 1997a; Lužný 2004b; Nosková 2009). This difference is reflected at the level of discursive practice as well as at the level of texts. The authors come from a different academic environment (institutionally and geographically), publish in other periodicals and are not closely connected to the media. Because of the scarcity of these texts and their fragmentation, we cannot generalise their common characteristics. It can only be said that they all appear after 2000 and draw attention to issues that were obscured by the discourse of the 1990s. Generally, we can say that the discourse on the followers of Reverend Moon, which was hegemonic in the 1990s, was criticised by a few Czech scholars after 2000. However, this opposition has not been strong enough to be manifested in other areas where the discourse on the followers of Reverend Moon is reproduced, especially in the media.

point where work for the church takes place only during free time. Based on our research experience, we can claim that most of the members have a tertiary level education.

The level of education and commitment to the group can influence members' reflection on both scientific and media discourse, which represent them. In accordance with Giddens' double hermeneutics, we can assume that based on this reflection, the movement is taking measures that affect other research investigations and the relationship with the producers of media content. This hypothesis was supported by several cases that we encountered.

The then national Czechoslovak leader's comments on his negative experience from the 1990s are summarised as follows:

*In 1990 [they called me], we know that you are here, this and that, bring us [your] materials... Expecting fairness, I provided it... but unfortunately, those experts have very distorted views on everything... When I protested [against the interpretation of the teachings of the church], he said he understood it that way. So my experience has not been good.*

This member of the church was, regardless of a declared willingness to answer our questions, cautious about the purposes for which the research findings were to be used as well as about the members of the research team. In another case, we even encountered a situation where any cooperation with us was strictly prohibited. This was a result of a recent experience with a student writing a thesis dealing with cases of apostasy in the Unification Church (Beláňová 2011). Although the thesis passed with a very good grade, members of the church perceived it as biased, which still causes mistrust of young researchers.

Given the offensive and often aggressive rhetoric from many sides, members of the movement are forced to position themselves against it and tend to evaluate every statement on the positive/negative axis. This leads to a situation in which an otherwise neutral result of scientific discourse can be construed as negative. We are thus witnessing the reality that members of the movement have become accustomed to the situation that any mention of their activities automatically involves an evaluative standpoint, and thus, assessing otherwise non-evaluative statements from scientific discourse causes problems. The negative experience with the social scientific field from the 1990s was also transferred to the assessment of media coverage. This is due to the fact that the press has chosen to consult mainly the scholars from the SSSNRM, whose conclusions, as demonstrated here, cannot be described as non-evaluative. A comment, which we encountered several times during the interviews, reflects the fact that the media constantly reproduces the same statements; or from the standpoint of interviewed members, the media reiterates what has already been written earlier, specifically in the 1990s.

At present, the most important event covered by the media was the death of the founder of the movement, Reverend Moon, in September, 2012. One of the informants' comments on the situation are as follows:

*Even now that Reverend Moon has died...there were questions and long articles in newspapers; when I looked at what these people wrote in the nineties, they are the same... In my opinion, it is impossible to write the same things written twenty years ago.*

In a September interview, immediately after the announcement of the death, one respondent spontaneously expressed that nothing has changed since the times of communist rule and that newspapers always present the same viewpoints.

Although the members of the movement seem to be more cautious when approached by social science researchers, the vast majority of them willingly participate in research activities. They actively seek and support the participation of researchers who express interest in their events. They are aware that their faith is currently perceived as eccentric and causes much controversy. However, part of their mission is to spread the ideas of the founder of their movement, and scientific reflection is seen as one way of contributing to this goal.

## DISCUSSION

We now return to the goals set at the beginning of our text. First, it is necessary to reiterate that the image of the followers of Reverend Moon, which was produced by the Czech social scientists, was not very favourable. It contributed to an increase in tensions between the religious group and its environment rather than mediating or moderating such tensions. This has occurred because the discourse on the followers of Reverend Moon was introduced in the Czech context in the 1990s by scholars associated with the SSSNRM and *Dingir*. From this area of discursive practice, it spread to the Czech press and was treated as authoritative.

It is characteristic for this discourse to establish a strict dividing line between legitimate religious groups and dangerous “sects”. The Unification Church and “sects” in general are typically subject to negative evaluation, which also spreads to other areas of discursive practice. We believe that the source of this situation can be found in the ambiguous rules about representing religious groups, which, on the one hand, declare the absence of offensive and vilifying statements, but on the other, accept very critical and negatively evaluating texts. This double-mindedness is also reflected in the title of the Society for the Study of Sects and New Religious Movements. For a while, this organisation was seen as a public arbiter deciding whether particular religious groups were acceptable or not. It is only after 2000 that opposition to this dominance has been found in a few texts (e.g., Lužný 2004) which draw attention to topics that would not fit into the discourse of the 1990s. However, this opposition cannot be considered as constituting a coherent and distinctive discourse. Rather, it is comprised of a few individual texts responding to a given state of affairs.

Concerning the second aim of this text, we should note that in the case of research focused on the Unification Church, strong cognitive interests are definitely present, which fundamentally limit the findings and their objectivity. The reason is that the followers of Reverend Moon are, from the outset, labelled as an illegitimate and dangerous group. Most social scientific practice is then reduced to a confirmation of this particular image. With this in mind, it is important to state that the scholars associated with the SSSNRM and *Dingir* did not adhere to some of the rules they set for themselves – i.e., not to refer to religious groups in an offensive and vilifying way. The result is that their critical position could not meet the requirements of critical theory (Habermas 1987) because even though this kind of research program integrates a critique of social conditions into its research, this critique must always be based on generally valid criteria. Such an element, however, is absent in the discursive practice of the examined group of scholars.

Finally, we were interested in how the members of the Unification Church perceived the findings on and meanings of their group by Czech social scientists. In other words, how do they interpret the image that is ascribed to them by the discursive practices of the Czech social science discourse? In this context, we should note that the followers of Reverend Moon do not endorse the claims of this discursive practice, and they adopt a rather critical stance towards the methods and findings of the social sciences. This is reflected by the fact that members are very cautious with researchers and express concerns over research findings. Members of the movement have become accustomed to the evaluative attitude of researchers to the extent that research findings are automatically judged by their evaluation criteria. They have a very similar experience with media representation, which illustrates the interconnection between the media and a certain cluster of scholars. At the same time, the members of the Unification Church confirm our assumption that opposition to the discourse of the 1990s did not gather enough momentum to spread into other areas of discursive social scientific practice. The case of the followers of Reverend Moon in the Czech Republic is thus well suited for observing the effects of double hermeneutics according to which previous scientific findings significantly influenced the current subjects of social science research.



## CONCLUSION

In this study, we tried to reflexively grasp the practice of Czech social sciences in relation to one of its research subjects, new religious movements, represented in this case by the Unification Church. We have pointed out that the existing heuristics is burdened with specific cognitive interests and that the research findings contribute significantly to increasing tensions between the group and its socio-cultural environment. Thus, further research in this area should take these conditions into consideration, not because the heuristics drawn from the tradition of Critical Theory is unacceptable in the study of new religious movements, but because if it is to be used, it must be based on generally valid criteria. Simultaneously, it must be taken into account that the followers of Reverend Moon are affected by previous social scientific practice and that this fact will significantly affect the findings of any further research because these actors interpret their position and form their opinions with regards to what has already been written about them. We believe that this kind of research contributes to a better understanding of the development and contemporary situation of new religious movements in the Czech Republic. It can also be seen as a first step in a much more ambitious research project focused on the relationship between the social sciences and new religious movements in Central and Eastern Europe.

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