THE EXCLUSIONARY MECHANISMS OF THE WELFARE STATE

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Background

- Poverty and homelessness remain persistent despite the promises of welfare states.
- In Hungary, since 2010, social policy changes have reduced benefits, shortened eligibility periods, and increased stigmatization.
- The 2018 government decree ("homelessness law") criminalizes living in public spaces, triggering constitutional and human rights debates.

Theoretical Framework

Michel Foucault's theory of power provides the conceptual lens:

- Positive power ("pastoral power"): integration, care, empowerment, ensuring wellbeing.
- Negative power: subjugation, exclusion, stigmatization, punishment.

Research Questions

- How are positive and negative forms of power reflected in media discourses about homelessness?
- What differences can be observed between government-aligned and oppositional media in their narratives?

Methodology

- Content analysis based on Krippendorff (1995).
- Sample: 60 online articles (2010–2020).
- Keywords derived from Foucault's categories: fear, exclusion, shelter, law, public space.

Findings

1. Stigmatization & Fear
Fear narratives appear exclusively in government-aligned media.
Examples: "homeless criminals", "dangerous presence in neighborhoods".
Fear → justification for exclusionary policies.
2. Physical Exclusion
Shelters and bans from public spaces = forms of control.
Government media: emphasize sufficient capacity, humane conditions.
Opposition media: highlight overcrowding, degrading conditions, lack of real solutions.
3. Legal Narratives
Opposition: critiques of the "homelessness law" as unconstitutional, inhumane.
Government: presents it as restoring order and protecting society.
4. Manipulation through Public Space
"Public space" framed differently:
Government: homeless presence disturbs others → removal justified.
Opposition: public space belongs to everyone → exclusion unacceptable.

Future Directions

Mapping power mechanisms

- Deeper analysis of how Orbán's politics reflect Foucault's concepts of power.
- Focus on state control, law, and public discourse.

Broadening the research

- Include other media (TV, radio, social media).
- Comparative study with post-socialist countries.

Opportunities for marginalized groups

- Pathways out of exclusion for homeless and vulnerable people.
- Role of NGOs, grassroots, and Housing First initiatives.
- Policy ways to strengthen inclusion and empowerment.