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## Making sense of extreme circumstances

Andreea Gruev-Vintila

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# Making sense

of extreme circumstances  
Social representational perspectives

Habilitation thesis for the accreditation to supervise research

*Note de synthèse en vue de l'obtention de l'Habilitation à diriger des recherches*

Defended on June 4th, 2021 / Soutenue le 4 juin 2021

Andreea Gruev-Vintila

Jury

Themis APOSTOLIDIS, Professor of Social Psychology, Aix-Marseille University

Juliet FOSTER, Professor of Social Psychology, King's College London

Valérie HAAS, Professor of Social Psychology, Lyon 2 University

Nikos KALAMPALIKIS, Professor of Social Psychology, Lyon 2 University, *supervisor*

Yechezkel KLAR, Professor of Psychology, Tel Aviv University

Steve REICHER, Professor of Psychology, University of St Andrews







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I dedicate my work and who I am to Laura Muresan-Vintila and Roni Ernst-Vintila, from whom Shilgi is never far.



*Someone who does not see a pane of glass does not know that he does not see it. Someone who, being placed differently does see it does not know the other does not see it. When our will finds expression outside ourselves in actions performed by others we do not waste our time and our power of attention in examining whether they have consented to this. This is true for all of us. Our attention, given entirely to the success of the undertaking, is not claimed by them as long as they are docile. . . . Rape is a terrible caricature of love from which consent is absent. After rape, oppression is the second horror of human existence. It is a terrible caricature of obedience.*

—Simone Weil





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# Chapter 1

## People and places

The purpose of this document is to offer a picture of my fundamental and applied contributions to understand how contemporary societies make sense from extreme circumstances. I focus on two red threads, both of which are often informed by the social representations theory, sometimes the social identity theory.

The first red thread gathers my work on *how societies think* in extreme circumstances. It concerns social thinking in contemporary societies who face circumstances that appear as extreme and may polarise thinking, behaviour, and affect: collective risks (environment or health-related risks, natural hazards, vector-borne diseases, etc.), violence (terrorism, war, anti-Semitism, totalitarianism, gender-based violence, etc.). I am aware that often, focussing on such circumstances turns us away from others, because the visible silences the invisible. Social psychologists still struggle with the invisible.

The second red thread focusses on how we feel *involved* by group memberships, and how our involvement plays a role under such circumstances, especially in the polarization of social thinking and behaviour.

Drawing on both, I argue for future research that aims to add a voice towards the integration of the social representations, and social identity conceptual frameworks with a trauma informed approach relevant for a psychology of power, oppression and resistance.

The findings presented here come from a selection of my scientific papers as well as several fundamental and applied projects. As Associate Professor at the Université Paris-Nanterre's School of Social Sciences and Administration and a member of the Parisian Research Centre for Social Psychology EA 4386, I secured the support of the French National Research Agency for an international team in the XTREAMIS project on *Xenophobia, Radicalism in Europe, Anti-Semitism, Islamophobia - Deradicalization and Prevention*<sup>1</sup> and coordinated XTREAMIS' bid on a *Horizon 2020 Call*. XTREAMIS was the first social psychology-driven research project funded by the ANR on radicalisation in France after the terrorist attacks in January 2015. It brought together experts in psychology, anthropology, criminology, history, political science, education, and sociology from 17 countries concerned by violent radicalization in Europe, the Americas and Asia, in a truly collaborative research on this major contemporary challenge.

An extension of XTREAMIS, *Misrecognising Minorities in Europe: Challenges to integration and Security* MisMiE<sup>2</sup> is concerned with the acceptance of minorities in European nations, distancing from authorities, and the importance of *misrecognition* in this process. That is, to what extent do members of minorities feel that they are viewed by others as not belonging to the nation? When does this lead to a sense of estrangement whereby minority members withdraw from participation in the national community, or even become actively anti-community? My doctoral student and I are interested in the experiences of misrecognition of young Muslim French women who wear a headscarf.

In a similar vein, *H2020-REC-RDIS-DISC-AG-2017 POLROM*<sup>3</sup> is concerned with identifying the effects of political discourse on anti-gypsyism, and on negative and positive forms of collective action. It aims to evaluate and improve anti-discrimination interventions in terms of how they reduce prejudice and influence collective

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<sup>1</sup> ANR-15-MRSE-0008 [XTREAMIS](#) 2015-2017.

<sup>2</sup> Coordination: Steve Reicher, St Andrews University, and Andreas Zick, Bielefeld University, 2019-2020 (extended to 2021 due to COVID19).

<sup>3</sup> Coordination: Anna Kende, Eötvös Loránd University, 2018-2020 (extended to 2021 due to COVID19).

action for and against the Roma in Europe. In this project I am especially interested in the invisibilisation of Roma women and children.

\*

This research story is anchored in a vision of social psychology born in a divided Europe after World War II. It has three chapters.

First, *People and Places* describes how my research evolved in my successive research affiliation places, in cooperation with colleagues and students.

Second, *Thinking societies. Landscapes and mindscapes* describes the conceptual framework of social thinking and introduces the notion of personal involvement.

Third, *Responding to extreme circumstances. Social thinking and personal involvement* describes my contributions to those areas based on my published work.

Finally, *Arguing for the future*, proposes a vision of future research that adds a voice towards the integration of the social representations, social change, and social identity conceptual frameworks in a trauma informed psychology of oppression and resistance explored in research projects conducted with my doctoral students.

I defended my PhD on the social representations of collective risk in November 2005 at the Research Center for Environmental Psychology UMR 8069 at the Université Paris Descartes, supervised by Michel-Louis Rouquette.

## Making sense

Perhaps the research road in social psychology presented here is an attempt to answer the questions of a 7 years old girl who survived an earthquake in a totalitarian Eastern Europe. Once she reached safety outside, a radio reported an earthquake of magnitude 7,2 Richter degrees. The earthquake had taken the lives of 1,400 people. The strangers around her whispered about a similar earthquake that had occurred decades before - which meant, as strangely as importantly, *before* the totalitarian silence. Under the cold war censorship, it seemed quite stunning that something, even an earthquake, had existed “before”, and that people could speak about it, let alone strangers with each other. That night, the people’s whispers articulated a different order of things, something that existed “before”. Were those memories a form of resistance? Could they have helped save lives? Or did they have to be deleted, as anything pre-totalitarian? The grown-ups’ resignation and numbness seemed common strategies to navigate the landmine field of totalitarianism. Earthquakes, however, occurred despite amnesia and oblivion. Here was something, a “natural” hazard, and those whispered memories, which both escaped the totalitarian control. It was confusing. How did this *make sense*?

### Do walls collapse?

Those questions crossed Europe after the fall of the Berlin wall, with probably the biggest shift post-World War II and perhaps the largest immigration wave from Eastern to Western Europe. Crossing Europe in 1990 meant going from a “*conception autoritaire de la société et patriotique de la nation*” (Moscovici, 1997, p. 360) to what appeared to be an open society. With this wave, I moved from chemical engineering to psychology, from questions answered, to questions raised. One French university trusted my application. On 9/11/2001, I defended my graduation paper about minorities as whistle-blowers about collective risk. As I left the viva room to bring my toddler daughter home from nursery, the news broke about Al-Qaida’s terror attacks on the Twin Towers in Manhattan.

\*

I had learned about a CNRS research group interested in collective risk and crises. As opposed to individual risks (car accidents, etc.), collective risks are collectively experienced and conceived (Gilbert, 2003). They impact communities.

I wanted to understand how *social rationalities (logiques sociales)* work when *thinking societies* (Moscovici, 2001) face threat from natural hazards. How do such hazards become objects of social thinking<sup>4</sup>. I self-funded my research on seismic risk and life with my toddler daughter working as a research and teaching associate (ATER) at the Université de Bourgogne, a part-time HR chartered psychologist position with a

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<sup>4</sup> From this perspective we were far from understanding, then, how “natural hazards” affect societies in unequal, gendered ways (Noji, 2005; Enarson, & Chakrabarti, 2009; Horton, 2012; Parkinson & Zara, 2013).



chemical engineering company, teaching appointments, research internships in data analysis, and scientific translation.

## Is science social?

In the early 2000, the post-totalitarian Romanian authorities had studies showing that a potentially destructive earthquake had 96% chances to occur in the following years in the capital, Bucharest. Their data showed that Bucharest was a moderate seismicity, high risk city. The dwellers were aware of the risk and the devastating earthquakes' consequences, which occurred every 30 to 50 years, yet reluctant to engage in what authorities called "preventive behaviour", "risk mitigation", a collective effort involving "cooperating" in the paraseismic retrofitting of buildings in order to make them resist earthquakes, in sum, comply to a new law on retrofitting. The authorities viewed that an "irrational" expectation for the government to take over the paraseismic retrofitting. Those studies seemed *ad-hoc* evidence to Kahneman and Tversky's Nobel prize studies that had found that human beings appear to draw on *bounded rationality* when faced with risk and uncertainty.

Moscovici, on the other hand, thought that "(f)or people living in a culture that claims science and reason, like ours, few things are as scandalous as the spectacle of beliefs, superstitions, and prejudices shared by millions" (2013). Moscovici thought that human beings only understand their surrounding reality through *representations*, which are not necessarily illusions: those views become full elements of reality (1984b). Was it, then, possible that the *ordinary people's* view of the imminent earthquake actually depends on a social and subjective lens, rather than a scientific one? Rather than an object of scientific thinking, was seismic risk a matter of *social thinking*? In 2002 I went to Bucharest to collect data with help from Pr. Adrian Neculau from the Universitatea Al. I. Cuza in Iasi.

## Collective risk in a post-totalitarian society

Turning the *analytic gaze* (Blackwood, Hopkins, & Reicher, 2013) from the authorities to the interaction between them and ordinary people leads to applying on their mutual *relationship* what Moscovici termed *regard psychosocial* (1984, see Chapter 2). Rather than expressing an "objective truth", or being based on biased information processing, the ordinary people's thinking about earthquakes had its own purpose and explanatory meaning *in the context of their relationship with the authorities*. Did ordinary people hold their own "*social scientific theories*" about risk, rather than a "biased" scientific understanding?

It was a paradoxical situation, one that reminded me of my questions as a little girl from the other side of the iron curtain. How did people *make sense* of earthquakes? On the one hand, given the city's seismic experience, the Romanian authorities expected Bucharest city dwellers of the XXI<sup>st</sup> century to view *seismic risk* through the "objective", scientific lens of an imminent earthquakes' properties of probability, magnitude, intensity, etc. They were even ready to "accept" some degree of scientific incorrectness in the ordinary people's "risk perception". On the other hand, the ordinary people, then citizens of a society in transition ten years after the overthrow of totalitarianism, were far from behaving as the authorities expected. Their behaviour only "made sense" if one understood it in the long term, in the context of their *double bind interdependence* (Bateson, 1956) with the authorities during totalitarianism, in relation to their own identity, shared among peers, but distinct, and indeed opposed, to that of the authorities. In such a context, not only did the ordinary people's behaviour make sense, it also had a *social validity*, fit with their norms, values and beliefs. Seismic risk, then, clearly appeared a *social phenomenon* in a *thinking society*. In social identity terms, their social thinking is not the result of inevitable "cognitive bias". It is a group reaction when intergroup relations become insecure, about meaning making in the context of power relationships, about losing and seeking to reestablish power. To be even more precise, whether

seismic risk became, or did not become, a stake for collective behaviour as the authorities hoped (seismic retrofiting) depended on how people *involved*, whether and with whom they shared knowledge (the authorities? their “social fellows”, peers/neighbours?). How did ordinary people think about their situation with regard to risk? What made them take action, or, conversely, refrain from taking mitigating action? How would their neighbours view them if they “followed” the government’s instructions? Whose “side” were they to take? Was it even their business, or the government’s?

In this vein, Ivana Markovà was interested in the notion of *trust* in both the democratic and the ex-totalitarian European societies after the collapse of the Soviet bloc in 1989. She advanced that in ex-totalitarian Europe *socialization to fear* had been supported by a propaganda of fear (Markovà, 2004). Another British researcher who lived in ex-totalitarian Eastern Europe noted that “*the mechanisms of control, oppression and surveillance (...) succeeded (...) by virtue of the fundamental alteration of the social contract based on trust*” (Tileaga, 2014, p. 52).

When she was studying *trust* in the Western vs. Eastern European worlds, Markovà made an important discovery. She found two distinct *research practices* and lay views about *trust*. In Western European democracies, the relationship between democracy and political trust had led studies to draw on decision-making models, risk, cooperation and competition, cost / benefit calculation, that is, a model of *individual rationality*. There, as noteworthy examples, the Western German sociologist Ulrich Beck had defined risk society as “*a systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities induced and introduced by modernization itself*” (Beck, 1992, p. 21), and British sociologist Anthony Giddens as “*a society increasingly preoccupied with the future (and also with safety), which generates the notion of risk*” (1998, p. 27).

This Western European perspective founded by individual rationality and the antinomy between trust and risk, had almost no meaning in post-totalitarian societies of Eastern Europe, Markovà noted (2004). On that other side of the Berlin Wall, the individual rationality had been not only threatened, subverted and over-determined by the rationality of the State, but the totalitarian State itself, which rhetorically presented itself based on equality, humanity, and well-being, had shattered the very foundations of social life, identity, solidarity, and meaning, and prevented for decades the formation of anti-totalitarian *psychological crowds* (Reicher, 1984). The State, then, had become a source of mistrust and fear for the majority of citizens (Markovà, 2004). The Western European research practices on trust and risk, then, appeared as meaningless in the post-totalitarian Eastern European societies, at the foundations of which a different antinomy was at work: trust *versus* fear. One can easily understand that the social relevance of earthquakes, even imminent, but occurring in every other generation, was different than the issue of totalitarianism, and its long-term effects on people’s everyday lives.

## A theorisation of thinking societies

The question of meaning and social relations were at the core of a theory formulated by Moscovici in 1961. He was interested in how ordinary knowledge forms in societies about controversial issues, in its relationship with culture, communication and science, leading to *social representations*. He sought to understand what is a thinking society by studying “(a) *the circumstances in which groups communicate, make decisions, and seek to either reveal or to conceal something, and (b) their achievements and their beliefs, that is, their ideologies, sciences and social representations*” (Moscovici, 2001, p. 29).

Moscovici’s work founded a *social representation theory*, which views ordinary knowledge as the raw material of collective action. Social representations are a form of ordinary knowledge, defined as ways of seeing “*locally and temporarily shared within a given community, that allow cognitive appropriation of an aspect of the world and guide the action related to it*” (Rouquette, 1997b, p. 1110).

When used as a conceptual framework, this theory highlights the social psychological processes that occur at a positional and sometimes collective level, overcoming the limitations of intra- and inter-individual explanations of social phenomena (Doise, 1982; Doise & Valentim, 2015) by considering the relationships in the social system where those phenomena occur. This allows us to understand social phenomena, such as risk, in their *collective* as well as their *subjective* aspects.

## Is there a social psychology of collective risk?

Drawing on an experimental, structural approach to social representations, my PhD thesis focussed on the “*Dynamics of the social representations of a collective risk and commitment to risk reduction behaviour: the role of practices, involvement and sociability*” through empirical studies run in Romania and France. When I started it, the conceptual framework of social representations was a rather novel perspective in risk research.

In terms of fundamental research, one finding from examining collective risks as *social-scientific phenomena* was that we cannot reduce them to a “situation” to which people respond as information processing systems or as *loci* of emotions, as if they were disconnected from their social system. Studying social thinking about collective risk and threat without considering the people in their social relationships and their positions relative to one another, which sometimes include power and resistance to power, would be like studying human movements without considering gravity. My studies showed that the human response to extreme circumstances draws on social relationships and representations, which are inseparable from the *elaboration* of risk and threat as *social objects* through culture, power relations, communications of all kinds, collective memory, etc., *via* social psychological processes in which people’s personal involvement and sociability networks play a part.

On the other hand, in terms of practical implications, my research brought useful findings for earthquake risk management and communication to the general public, in terms of how to address and *involve* those at risk, based on their previous experience. My findings suggested that increasing the people’s personal involvement is an effective strategy with those who already have risk experience, but not necessarily with those who do not. In other words, if collective conduct is sought about earthquakes, a strategy consisting solely of increasing interest in (or fear of) that risk is probably less effective than a strategy that increases the people’s involvement, *after it first provides them with sufficient practical training* (simulations, etc.). Those findings interested the *Journal for Risk Research* (Chapter 3).

## Cross-disciplinarity

My PhD research and teaching experience interested two universities: the American University of Paris, and Aix-Marseille Université. In May 2006 I learned that both had ranked my application first. I knew the American University of Paris, where Dr. Marielle Gorissen-Van Eenige, neuropsychologist, had hired me to give the summer classes in cross-cultural psychology. About Aix-Marseille Université, all that I knew was that it was geographically near the Laboratoire de Psychologie Sociale (LPS), led, then, by Jean-Claude Abric. I chose Aix-Marseille Université and received tenure in 2008.

My research affiliation was with the CNRS ESPACE<sup>5</sup> research center, based in Arles and Marseille, jointly run by the CNRS with three universities in Southern France. Working in the ESPACE cross-disciplinary environment with anthropologists, biologists, sociologists, historians, geographers, mathematicians and

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<sup>5</sup> CNRS UMR 6012 *Etude des Structures, des Processus d’Adaptation et des Changements de l’Espace*.

economists was an opportunity to bring a social psychological voice to cross-disciplinary research, for example in “*Health and the Environment: managing vector-borne disease at La Réunion. The example of the Chikungunya epidemics*”<sup>6</sup>, a project funded by the French National Research Agency (ANR). This project was coordinated by ESPACE’s head anthropologist Dr. D. Bley between 2006 and 2008. It aimed to understand the representations and practices of reunionese families on matters related to health / environment, drawing on the notions of *quality of life* and *personal involvement*. Our findings interested two medical journals and a number of conferences. This cross-disciplinary work created the opportunity both for a hands-on understanding of epistemic humility, and to value the relevance of social psychology in interaction with other disciplines.

In parallel, I continued my previous research on collective risk and extreme circumstances by collecting data about the financial crisis that had started in late 2008 with the Lehman Brothers Bank bankruptcy. Considering that crisis as a collective threat, I found that its social representation was defined by unemployment, banks, the USA and speculation. With Rafael Wolter we put together a special issue of the *Cahiers Internationaux de Psychologie Sociale* that gathered different international social psychological perspectives on Crises and why lay social representations should matter.

At the American University of Paris, I had the opportunity to study the social thinking about terrorism after the 9/11 attacks using data that we collected in the boarding rooms of the Boston–Logan airport, which was the take-off airport of those attacks. I was interested in collecting similar data from European passengers and was searching for an airport related to a terrorist act at a time when the airport safety conditions had become extremely restrictive. While based in Marseille I received a security clearance to collect data in the boarding rooms of the Marseilles-Provence airport, which had been the landing airport of flight Air France 8969, hijacked by terrorists of the Armed Islamic Group (al-Jama’ah al-Islamiyah al-Musallaha) en route from Algiers to Paris in December 1994, an event vividly remembered by the citizens of Marseilles, as a pre-test confirmed. This paper interested the *Journal of Risk Research*.

While at ESPACE, I had the chance to visit the LPS in Aix a few times, once to give a talk and answer Claude Flament’s questions about the equiprobability of the praxis and attribution valencies in the Basic Cognitive Schemes model, which I had used in my doctoral research. Working with colleagues in Aix led to a research note in the *European Journal of Social Psychology* about how the Black Sheep Effect paradigm could be used to reveal a group’s normative stakes that are not explicitly disclosed.

## Psychology bubbles

In March 2011 I started to work at the Université de Reims Champagne-Ardenne. I was a researcher with the Research Center for Cognition Health, and Society (C2S EA 6291) and taught at the Psychology Department.

While in Reims I received an International Scholarship grant from the Open Society Institute to supervise the research of Meri Smbatyan, a psychologist in Armenia and a Masters student at Yerevan State University. Meri and I were both interested in the long-term effects of totalitarianism considered as a collective threat, and how the social thinking of new generations may transform, or not, as societies transit to democracy. Working with her and political psychologist Juana Juarez Romero, we put together a special issue in the *Cahiers Internationaux de Psychologie Sociale* showing how the developments in the international research about social representations contributed to understanding people’s changing visions of justice and injustice in contemporary societies.

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<sup>6</sup> ANR-ANTHROPO-MVT: *Environnement et santé : la gestion des maladies vectorielles transmissibles à La Réunion, à partir de l'exemple de l'épidémie de Chikungunya*

Working with my colleagues in Reims I contributed to the French validation of the Consideration of Future Consequences scale (with doctoral student G. Camus and his PhD supervisor Pr. S. Berjot).

## Strangers in the land of Egypt

In 2014 at the Amsterdam EASP General Meeting, in the diversity of which I had been interested since 2012 (Ernst-Vintila, Ben Alaya, De Rosa, Neculau, 2016), Pr. Yechiel Klar, from Tel Aviv University, invited me to a COST European network meeting in which historians and social psychologists were studying the social representations of history and their impact on intergroup relations. In spring 2015, shortly after the Paris terror attacks in January 2015, a COST research mobility grant at Tel Aviv University made it possible for us to apply for funding to study the “radicalisation” trends in Europe, with a consortium of European universities. In the meantime, I interviewed for two positions, one at my alma mater, Université Paris-Descartes, and the second at Université Paris-Nanterre. I chose to trust the second and coordinated the consortium’s application for a grant on behalf of the Parisian Center for Research in Social Psychology (LAPPS).

With that consortium, Pr. Klar, Pr. Reicher, Pr. Hopkins and I put together a project who won the first French National Research Agency grant and set up an international network to study radicalisation, XTREAMIS “Xenophobia, Radicalism in Europe, Anti-Semitism, Islamophobia – Deradicalisation and Prevention”, under the scientific leadership of Steve Reicher and Arie Kruglanski.

With XTREAMIS we applied for a Horizon-2020 European grant with a transdisciplinary team grounded in 17 countries concerned by radicalisation. The grant finally went to a competing project, but the core of our network came back and secured a private VolkswagenStiftung funding for the MisMIE project “*Misrecognizing Minorities in Europe: Challenges for Integration and Security*” (2019-2021) lead by Steve Reicher and Andreas Zick, which I coordinate for France.

Since 2018, I also coordinate the national team for France in the PolROM project *Identifying evidence-based methods to effectively combat discrimination of the Roma in the changing political climate of Europe* (2018-2021), funded by DG JUSTICE of the European Commission, coordinated by Anna Kende. The project focusses on identifying the effects of political discourse on anti-gypsyism, and on negative and positive forms of collective action. It aims to improve anti-discrimination interventions and evaluate how they reduce prejudice and influence collective action for and against the Roma in Europe.

## Chapter 1 - Synthesis

In the first chapter, I discuss the beginning of my research on collective risk and the use of the social representations theory. Drawing on the experiences and the behaviour of people who were victims of an earthquake that occurred in the second half of the twentieth century in a totalitarian society (Bucharest, Romania), I explore how the lay people understood the earthquake. Did they use a scientific understanding, perhaps somewhat biased, or, rather, “theories” about risk of their own? Did their understanding bear the mark of totalitarian power relations?

Next, I turn to the relationship between the authorities and the rest of society during the contemporary post-totalitarian period of the early twenty-first century. On the one hand, given the seismic experience of the city of Bucharest, the authorities expected citizens to perceive the seismic risk through a scientific, “objective” lens, as an imminent natural hazard requiring “rational” preparation (paraseismic retrofitting of buildings, etc.). On the other hand, the citizens were far from perceiving risk as such. Their behaviour only “made sense” if it was understood in the long term, in the context of their *double bind* with the authorities during totalitarianism, in relation to their own social identity, shared among peers, but positionally different, and in fact antagonistic, to that of the authorities. In such a context, not only did the peoples’ behaviour make sense. It also had a *social validity*, signifying to others, and themselves, that it was anchored in their own norms, values and beliefs, and preserved a (shared) social identity distinct from that of the authorities. From this perspective, the question changes from simply studying an individual and purely cognitive “*risk perception*”, to addressing the *social representation* of the seismic risk, which then clearly appears as a social phenomenon in a *thinking society*. Social thinking, then, is far from resulting from inevitable “cognitive biases”. Rather, it is an active group process when intergroup relations are uncertain. It is a process of *sense making* which creates *meaning* in a context marked by relations of power, loss and search for the restoration of a capacity to act, of resistance against oppression in a society where the State has become a source of mistrust and fear for its citizens.

In view of the above, I stress the importance of the social representations theory for the study of collective risks, because it considers common knowledge as the raw material of collective action. It allows us to understand social phenomena in both their collective and subjective dynamics, by highlighting social psychological processes that occur at a positional and sometimes collective level, overcoming the limits of intra and interindividual explanations of social phenomena. Applying this conceptual framework in my doctoral thesis “*Dynamics of the social representation of a collective risk and engagement in risk reduction behaviour: The role of practices, involvement and sociability*” yielded practical implications for risk management and communication, suggesting how to involve people, based on their previous experience. Finally, I summarize my career stages and my research about collective risks and behaviour in extreme situations.

## Résumé du Chapitre 1

Dans le premier chapitre, j'aborde mes premières recherches sur les risques collectifs, inscrites dans le cadre conceptuel des représentations sociales. À partir du vécu et des comportements des personnes victimes d'un tremblement de terre survenu dans la seconde moitié du XXe siècle dans une société totalitaire (ville de Bucarest), j'interroge la pensée de sens commun : comment les citoyens ont-ils compris le tremblement de terre ? Avaient-ils leurs propres « théories » sur le risque, plutôt qu'une compréhension scientifique « biaisée » ? Leur compréhension portait-elle la marque des rapports de pouvoir totalitaires ?

Ensuite, j'aborde le rapport entre les autorités et les citoyens de cette société dans la période post-totalitaire contemporaine du début du XXIe siècle. D'une part, compte tenu de l'expérience sismique de la ville de Bucarest, les autorités s'attendaient à ce que les citoyens perçoivent le risque sismique à travers une lentille scientifique, « objective », comme aléa naturel imminent demandant une préparation « rationnelle » (renforcement parasismique des bâtiments, etc.). D'autre part, les citoyens étaient loin de le percevoir ainsi. Leur comportement n'avait de sens que s'il était compris sur le long terme, dans le contexte de leur *double lien* avec les autorités pendant le totalitarisme, par rapport à leur propre identité, partagée entre pairs, mais *positionnellement* différente, en fait antagoniste, à celle des autorités. Dans un tel contexte, non seulement le comportement des personnes ancré dans leur sens commun avait du sens. Il avait aussi une *validité sociale*, signalant son inscription dans leurs propres normes et valeurs, préservant leur identité sociale partagée, distincte de celle des autorités. Il n'est plus alors question d'étudier une « *perception du risque* » individuelle et purement cognitive, mais une *représentation sociale*, qui le pose alors clairement comme un phénomène social dans une *société pensante*. En termes d'identité sociale, la *pensée sociale* n'est pas le résultat de « biais cognitifs » inévitables, mais un processus de groupe actif lorsque les relations intergroupes sont incertaines, de création de sens dans un contexte marqué par des relations de pouvoir, de perte et de recherche à rétablir une capacité d'agir, de résister dans une société où l'État est devenu une source de méfiance et de peur pour ses citoyens.

Compte tenu de ce qui précède, je souligne la pertinence de la théorie des représentations sociales pour l'étude des risques collectifs, car elle considère le savoir commun comme la matière première de l'action collective et saisit ces phénomènes à la fois dans leur dynamique collective et subjective. C'est dans ce cadre conceptuel que s'est inscrite ma thèse de doctorat intitulée « *Dynamique de la représentation sociale d'un risque collectif et engagement dans les conduites de réduction du risque: le rôle des pratiques, de l'implication et de la sociabilité* ». Elle suggère que la réponse aux circonstances extrêmes se fonde sur des représentations, dont le sens s'inscrit dans les rapports sociaux, indissociables de l'élaboration du risque en tant qu'*objet social* à travers la culture, les relations de pouvoir, les communications, la mémoire collective, etc. Dans ces processus, l'implication personnelle a un rôle-clé. Les applications de ces constats concernent la gestion et la communication des risques et suggèrent comment faire participer les personnes en fonction de leur expérience antérieure. Finalement, je fais une synthèse des étapes de ma carrière et de mes recherches liées aux risques collectifs et aux comportements en situation extrême..

## Chapter 2

### Thinking societies: landscapes and mindscapes

*Voilà bien, il me semble, l'une des bornes fixes de la psychologie sociale : l'articulation problématique entre l'individu et la société, entre la valeur inventée et la valeur imposée.*

Michel-Louis Rouquette

This chapter describes the conceptual framework of social thinking and personal involvement. First, I argue that this conceptual framework is useful to understand how responding to extreme circumstances is not discontinued from, and indeed belongs in a more general landscape of thinking in contemporary societies. Second, *Landscapes*<sup>7</sup> presents social thinking as a research object in the context of social psychology and reminds its theoretical grounds. Third, *Mindscapes* introduces personal involvement, an explanatory variable of social thinking, which defines a person's position towards a social object, allowing us to understand how objects are positioned in her "cognitive space", her sense of engagement or indifference towards them.

#### Thinking societies and extreme circumstances

Extreme circumstances are situations that break with and polarize a society's everyday life. They often appear as "extraordinary events", be they negative (collective risks, disasters, emergencies, terrorist attacks, epidemics, societal crises), or positive (massive crowds celebrating, as was the case in Paris in 1998 and 2018, when millions gathered on the Champs-Élysées to celebrate France winning the FIFA World Cup): "*Nous entendons par événement extraordinaire tout événement qui, se produisant de manière impromptue dans l'espace naturel, physique, social, politique, culturel, historique, symbolique, etc., génère une prise de conscience individuelle et collective, induisant des effets importants au niveau des pratiques et des représentations sociales ; cet événement est par ailleurs présenté dans les médias et discuté dans les conversations de café.*" (Orfali, 2006, p. 65).

Durkheim advanced that such events touch on a collectively emotional level. People then feel a fundamental, anthropological need to experience emotions collectively. Such *effervescence* (Durkheim, 1912) "*which, for so many, is a primary feature of collective experience*" (Reicher, 2017) impacts the event's significance. Significance, then, is not just a matter of the event itself and its objective characteristics, but, rather, a matter of sociability: "*un événement n'est pas saillant en soi ; il le devient par sa reprise dans les communications, par son incidence sur les pratiques communes, et (...) par accumulation de symboles ; il le devient parce qu'il permet de capitaliser collectivement des interactions, des enjeux et des images*" (Rouquette, 2003, p. 433).

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<sup>7</sup> Landscapes and Mindscapes was the name of Pr. Rouquette's doctoral seminar in 2006-2007, à propos Chloé Gurrieri's PhD research. I use it here to suggest that the view depends on the viewer's position. Landscape: "*a portion of territory that can be viewed at one time from one place*" (Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/landscape>).



To mark the inclusion of social relations in our analysis, here we refer to “circumstances”, rather than “events”. Extreme circumstances often give rise to an exceptional *circumstantial sociability*<sup>8</sup>, a sense of shared fate amongst people, with “strangers” bonding in short-term relationships marked by trust, respect, cooperation, solidarity, warmth. Such “*mass emergent sociality*” ignores traditional “group” boundaries, as Drury, Cocking, & Reicher (2009) found after the 2005 London terrorist bombings<sup>9</sup>, and leads to collective mobilisations, as we saw in Paris in January 2015 in response to the Charlie Hebdo terrorist attacks in Paris (Ernst-Vintila & Macovei, 2016), or July 2018 with the celebrations of the French men’s football team winning the World Cup (Reicher & Ernst-Vintila, 2018), etc.

Such extreme circumstances *involve* from the outset the society itself *as an entity*. Understanding how we make sense of such circumstances requires, then, a conceptual framework able to capture processes that occur at both the individual and the collective level. Far from the methodological individualism sometimes used to study “extreme thinking” (Bronner, 2016), we argue that the meaning and response to extreme circumstances can be seized using a *regard psychosocial* (Moscovici, 1984), in which individual thinking and behaviour makes sense *in its relation to the Others* (“*connivence*”, as Rouquette wrote; or power and resistance relations, etc.). As reminded in Chapter 1, the conceptual framework of social thinking views ordinary knowledge in thinking societies as the raw material for collective action, considering the relationships in the social system concerned by those extreme circumstances. Such a conceptual framework is helpful to understand how thinking societies respond. Hereunder, I first describe three perspectives on collective risk, which was the first object that I studied using this framework. Then, I describe the conceptual framework of social thinking.

## Approaching risk

### *The psychometric perspective*

At the time of my initial interest in the social thinking about collective risk, the theory of social representations was barely used to understand such phenomena. One major influence for me was the American economist’s Peter Bernstein book (1996). Bernstein proposed a history of risk rooted in ideologies, religions and the scientific progress of humanity across the centuries, and discussed Tversky’s and Kahneman’s prospect theory concluding that although the assumption of rational behaviour is a useful starting point, it describes people’s relationship to risk only up to a point. At that time, the dominating paradigm in risk research was the individual-based *psychometric approach* developed by Paul Slovic, Sarah Liechtenstein and Baruch Fischhoff also in the United States (Fischhoff *et al.*, 1978). This “*cognitively-driven risk psychology*” (Joffe, 2003, p. 68) attempted to explain the peoples’ selective aversion towards certain risks and their indifference towards others, as well as the differences between these reactions and expert opinions (Slovic & Weber, 2002), by providing a model of relations between risk perceptions, risk-related conduct, and the qualitative aspects of the hazards, yet without considering the *social relations* between people, as if they were irrelevant to the understanding of risk in thinking societies and especially to the social sense-making about risk. The psychometric model focussed on risk perception using an intra-individual level of analysis (Doise, 1982, see Chapter 2 here). Its general idea was that every hazard has a unique pattern of qualities which seems to determine how individuals perceive the associated

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<sup>8</sup> Sociability is understood here as “*the various manners of being linked to the social whole and by the social whole*” and the ways in which these appear in social action (« *les différentes manières d’être lié dans un tout et par un tout social* » et leurs manifestations dans l’action sociale, cf. Gurvitch, 1968).

<sup>9</sup> This was salient among the survivors and witnesses of the 2005 London terrorist bombings, as Drury *et al.* (2009) found in their accounts in the following months: mutual helping was more common than ‘selfish’ behaviour, a sense of unity existed amongst at least some survivors, arising from perceived danger, and there was a link between this sense of unity and helping, even risk-taking to help strangers.

risk. The later studies conducted using the psychometric paradigm in the years 2000 especially by Melissa Finucane, who worked with Slovic, explored the hypothesis of people's affective response to risk, and found indeed that risk response is not irrational, that emotions and reason are intertwined, and that they both play a role in risk-related conducts. It should be noted that Finucane also found that risks tended to be judged lower by men than by women and by white people than by people of colour, and that white males again stood apart with respect to their judgements of risk and their attitudes concerning worldviews (Finucane, Slovic, Mertz, Flynn, & Satterfield, 2000). Finucane termed those findings "the 'white male' effect" and suggested an explanation in terms of sociopolitical factors rather than biological factors: social roles, status differentiation, (political) values. Several scientists noted that the psychometric approach is insufficient. For example, Sjöberg (2002) noted that the results gained in this paradigm had inadequate empirical bases and lacked adequate analyses (cf. also Marris and O'Riordan, 1996). Slovic's team had attempted to integrate non-cognitive factors, such as affect, to understand risk perception (Finucane, Alhakami, Slovic, & Johnson, 2000; Slovic & Weber, 2002), but remained focussed on the risks' characteristics without placing risk, and especially *collective* risk, in the realm of social relationships, communications and cognition in thinking societies.

### *A cultural theory of risk*

From the sociological antipodes of psychometrics, Mary Douglas (1966, 1978) and Douglas and Wildavsky (1982) suggested a cultural theory of risk, which aimed to "*predict and explain what kind of people will perceive which potential hazards to be how dangerous*" (Wildavsky & Dake, 1990, p. 42). The cultural theory suggested that perceived risk is closely tied to cultural adherence and social learning: depending on whether one is socially participating and to which groups one belongs, one will focus on different kinds of risks. In sum, people "choose" what to fear and how much to fear it based on "ways of life" and group memberships. However, this theory had weak empirical support (Raynes, 1992: 84; Sjöberg, 1997) and shared with the psychometric approach its focus on risk, with less consideration to understanding social thinking about extreme circumstances in general.

### *Risks as social-environmental phenomena*

I was interested in integrating the social thinking about risk in the larger and more unified conceptual framework of social thinking. Earlier in the XXth century, the French environmental sociologist Bernard Picon suggested to consider environmental risk as socio-environmental phenomena (Picon, 1974; 2006). For example, as far as earthquakes and seismic risk are concerned, seismologists "naturally" focus on earthquakes as environmental hazards, hence considering seismic risk as a set of characteristics of the *environment* such as magnitude, intensity, etc. However when one considers the *representation* of seismic risk and its effects on social groups, seismic risk clearly appears as a *social* phenomenon, rather than a matter of (aggregated) individual risk perception (psychometric approach). The questions, then, change: how do people think about their situation with regard to risk? What makes them take action towards risk, or, conversely, refrain from taking action? Could their relations with others as sociability phenomena play a role? I argue that risk cannot be reduced to a "situation" to which "individuals" respond as information processing systems or as *loci* of emotions (Gruev-Vintila & Rouquette, 2007). As explained in Chapter 1, the social representation of risk is inseparable from its elaboration as a social object through culture, communications of all kinds, collective memory, etc. Anchoring risk in a group's culture and environment is possible when using an analytic gaze termed *regard psychosocial* (Moscovici, 1984) and a social representational theoretical ground.

The social representational framework allows us to address more than the individual cognitive representation about risk, i.e., "risk perception", etc. (Breakwell, 2001; Joffe, 2003). It also considers the two complementary conditions to which a social phenomenon is subject, namely sociability and communications

(Rouquette, 1998a). Sociability, cognitions (knowledge about risk, beliefs, etc.), and communications with social fellows are the three conditions that enable collective meaning making and sharing: who do we share risk knowledge, which knowledge and how? From this perspective, if a risk becomes an object of social representation or not (Moliner 1993), depends on whether, and how, the three conditions of sociability, of communications and of cognition meet. To be even more precise, let us say that whether a risk becomes, or does not become, a social phenomenon and a matter for social communication, depends on whether its cognition is shared among social fellows. Therefore, I suggested using the conceptual framework of social thinking to study collective risk and extreme circumstances.

### Conceptual framework: social thinking and personal involvement

The expression “social thinking” (*pensée sociale*, or *pensée de sens commun*) refers to the social nature of thinking. It indicates “both the specificity of thinking when its object is a social phenomenon, and the constitutive determination of thought by social factors<sup>10</sup>” (Rouquette, 1973, 1998b, p. 33).

This definition derives from a vision of social psychology in which cognitive activities are anchored in social relationships: power relations, identities, relative positions, etc. About this vision Moscovici wrote that “*le caractère original et même subversif de son regard est de mettre en question la séparation de l’individuel et du collectif, de contester le partage entre le psychique et social dans les domaines essentiels de la vie humaine*” (1984a, p. 13). This vision, thus, binds *the society* and the individual, questioning the positivist assumption that “objects” are independent of *who the people are* who view them.

The simple assumption in this perspective is that, just as our view of a landscape depends on where we stand, our view of a “social object”, and the thinking roads that we take, depend on our position. This “position” has two aspects. On the one hand, a “social” position, that is, our position *relative to others*, other people or groups for whom the “object” is relevant or even at stake. On the other hand, the object’s position in our “individual” mindscape, which is not independent from the first<sup>11</sup>, that is, our *personal involvement* (Rouquette, 1997a). To clarify my research grounds, I start by describing the psychosocial landmarks of this perspective in the landscape of social psychology. From there, I will describe how those landmarks lead to a conceptual tool for the study of social psychological phenomena in our mindscapes, namely *personal involvement*.

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<sup>10</sup> While people often think in social contexts, their thinking is not always influenced by social factors, nor does it always concern a *social phenomenon*. For instance, mathematical thinking, although it occurs in social settings (classroom, etc.), refers to an object which is not social, but scientific; therefore, it is not an example of social thinking

<sup>11</sup> To illustrate the first aspect, one can think of groups looking at a mountain from different sides. For the second aspect, imagine several people, a tourist who looks at a mountain from far away, a photographer focussing on a fir tree on the mountain, a botanist, a carpenter, etc. Their different views of the landscape are personal, yet socially anchored.

# Landscapes: thinking societies

## Society and people

### The debate between Tarde and Durkheim

From a somewhat French perspective, the landscape of social psychology started to form with a controversy on the nature of sociology and its relation to other sciences that took place in Paris between Gabriel Tarde and Emile Durkheim in 1903<sup>12</sup>. Tarde, on the one hand, emphasized the individual and interindividual processes in social life, suggesting that invention and imitation were central (for example in the progressive adoption of an innovation in a community). Far from being an explanatory cause, imitation was only a result of obligation, Durkheim thought. He argued that social phenomena are external to the individuals, a hotly disputed idea. His work on *The Suicide* showed that even very individual acts, such as suicide, were socially determined: he found that suicide as a social fact was related to religion (catholic vs protestant), seasons (related to the agricultural work of the time), etc. As a *social* phenomenon, then, suicide appeared as *socially* explicable, with intra-individual reasons able to explain only a *subclass* of suicides.

This double and polemic origin of social psychology still keeps the discipline in tension nowadays (Moscovici, 1972a). In the line of Tarde, many definitions of our discipline focus on the individual, as if social psychology was a *branch of general psychology* rather than a social science (Moscovici, 2001; Greenwood, 2003). For example, Zajonc wrote that "*social psychology deals with the behavioural dependence and interdependence among individuals*" (1966, p. 1). Unlike Tarde's focus on the individual, Durkheim's focus was on society, which he viewed as a *sui generis* reality (1912):

*"Society is not the mere sum of individuals, but the system formed by their association represents a specific reality which has its own characteristics (...) The group thinks, feels and acts entirely differently from the way its members would if they were isolated. If therefore we begin by studying these members separately, we will understand nothing about what is taking place in the group. In a word, there is between psychology and sociology the same break in continuity as there is between biology and the physical and chemical sciences. Consequently, every time a social phenomenon is directly explained by a psychological phenomenon, we may rest assured that the explanation is false"* (Durkheim, 1895/1982, p. 129).

The individual- and society-focussed approaches to social psychology were conflicting, but, far from leading to an impasse<sup>13</sup>, they even signed, in a way, the birth certificate of social psychology as we know it today: "*the science of conflict between the individual and society*" (Moscovici, 1984a, p. 6). At the heart of this tension we have the notion of *social representation* (Moscovici, 1961).

Moscovici understood Simmel's sociology as highlighting facts such as interactions, conflicts and associations as "*produced by society and not only within the framework of society*" (Moscovici, 1988/1993, p. 238) and joined Simmel's assumption, who "*like a doctor*", thought that no exclusive causal relationship exists

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<sup>12</sup> For an English translation: <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/downloads/TARDE-DURKHEIM-GB.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Tarde's and Durkheim's approaches complement and rectify each other under different conditions. Their background debate, though, raises the question of the status of the Subject in social psychology. Is the individual a causal instance, as in general and clinical psychology? Not for Durkheim, for whom the individual is an invention of society (much like "the citizen" gained existence after the French revolution). Is the individual, then, merely a place where "things" happen?

in any field of social behaviour (*ibid.*, p. 236 in the English edition). This lead to exploring the link between cognition and sociability:

*“poser l’existence d’un Sujet pratique, dont les activités cognitives sont à la fois motivées et conditionnées par son insertion sociale particulière<sup>14</sup>, autrement dit par sa citoyenneté au sens étymologique du terme ; et c’est donc du côté même de cette insertion qu’il convient de rechercher les principes de production et de régulation de ces activités cognitives”* (Rouquette, 2009, p. 6).

It is from this perspective that Moscovici described social psychology as “*the science of phenomena of ideology (social cognitions and representations) and of communication*”<sup>15</sup> (*ibid.*, p. 7).

#### Levels of explanation

“*What we observe is not nature itself but nature exposed to our method of questioning*” wrote physicist Werner Heisenberg (1958, p. 78). Just as in quantum physics there is a fundamental limit to the precision with which a particle’s pair of complementary properties can be simultaneously “observed” (measured) (Heisenberg’s indeterminacy principle), measurement in social psychology is a matter of focus on some aspects, rather than others, at a specific moment. From a theoretical perspective, in (experimental) social psychology the explanations of behaviour have been described by Doise (1982), as “*levels of analysis*”: the intra-personal; the inter-personal; the positional; and the ideological.

Although it concerns a vast system of world explanations, hence the place of the individual in the world, this level of analysis is the most complex and the least used, Doise noted (1982). It can also be defined as an organized set of social representations. For example, a liberal ideology covers a conception about the world, the economy, freedom of movement, a conception of the State in terms of non-intervention or intervention in economy, health, etc., and also a conception of the individual in terms of autonomy, rationality, internality, etc. Distinguishing between these four levels of analysis is interesting because they clarify the individual-collective tension which is at the heart of social psychology since the Tarde-Durkheim debate. The first two levels concern individual psychology, and indeed much of the “mainstream” social psychology nowadays. The conceptual framework of social thinking is situated at levels III and IV<sup>16</sup> (Moscovici, 1972a; Tajfel, 1972; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Greenwood, 2003; Doise, 2012; Reicher, 2014; Adams *et al.*, 2015; Kurtiş, & Adams, 2015; Ernst-Vintila, Ben Alaya, De Rosa, Neculau, 2016). As we shall see further, the four levels of analysis correspond to the levels of the architecture of social thought (Rouquette, 1998a). My work reported here most often uses analyses at level III or IV.

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<sup>14</sup> Of which personal involvement is a psychosocial reflection, as we shall see further.

<sup>15</sup> In Rouquette’s view, Moscovici’s second definition on social psychology was a “typically durkheimian” one, understanding communication as “mass communication”, with interpersonal communication as a sub-class. Social thought, then, appears as the cognitive side of social communication (Rouquette, 1998a).

<sup>16</sup> “*We believe one can realistically speak of a European trend in social psychology: its distinguishing characteristic would be the introduction of level III and IV analyses into its theoretical and experimental research. Let us nevertheless be clear from the start: the same trend can also be discerned in the U.S. The only difference is that in Europe, in recent years, some relatively high powered and prestigious people have argued for a “more social social psychology”. We have seen that Sherif and Lewin have already done so in the past, but perhaps the present circumstances in Europe are more propitious for such a message to be heard*” (Doise, 1986, p. 18).

## Society and representations

### The social construction of reality

Moscovici (1961) pointed to the fundamental hold of social factors and institutions on social thinking. His princeps study about the social representations of psychoanalysis in mid-XXth century French society found that psychoanalysis was given contrasting meanings by groups that had different positions and perspectives: the communists and the catholics. While communists gave psychoanalysis a political significance, catholics were understanding it from an essentially moral ground. Just as the view on a landscape depends on the viewer's position, both groups expressed views about an essentially "different" object, and both were presuming that theirs was the truth.

Much of the social psychology developed in this vein showed that knowledge and reasoning depend on social positions and "ideologies", and that the social construction of reality is socially determined. Importantly, it operates through assimilation<sup>17</sup> rather than accommodation<sup>18</sup>. (Rouquette & Guimelli, 1995). However, if we admit that any reality is the result of a social construction, as post-modernism admits, why should the reality built by science be understood differently? Is scientific reality a "myth" among others? Does "*anything go*" (Feyerabend, 1975)? The social thinking conceptual framework clarifies that a specific social construction of reality is always related to a specific social state. When that state changes, the social construction of reality necessarily changes. For example, the Earth was [conceived as] flat until the needs of navigation required that it be conceived as round. Such clarification, which goes against Feyerabend's take, has three strong implications. First, it means that, in human history, truth does not simply "pop up". Second, concerning the collective-individual debate, it implies that social representations are obviously "localized" in individual minds, but collectively produced. Third, if the social construction of reality leads to relativism, the only way to avoid relativism ("anything goes", "science as a myth") is to show that it leads to dead ends, as it was the case, for example, with the belief in a flat Earth that stood until it was contradicted by navigation (*reductio absurdum*), and to highlight **invariants**. These three implications are all foundational to the structural approach to social representations, as we shall see further.

### An invariant: social representations as fundamental categories of sociability

In analogy with the *categories of understanding* as conceived by philosophers (time, space, etc.), "*il existe un nombre d'idées fondamentales indépendantes de toute vie sociale que l'on peut nommer catégories sociales*" (Bouthoul, 1966, p. 50). Indeed, Moscovici (2001) viewed social representations as a fundamental phenomenon of social life (see further).

## Social thought: an architecture

Kahneman and Tversky (1982) have argued that the ordinary people's "bounded rationality" is most often due to a limited application of scientific thinking, rather than a disability, or a lack of available information.

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<sup>17</sup> Assimilation consists in interpreting new events in the light of already existing thinking patterns. For example, the *anchoring* AIDS in the representation syphilis at the beginning of the epidemic, or, the assimilation of a local crisis as part of a larger world conspiracy as new events of a "*déjà-vu*" category. The underlying process of a *déjà-vu* effect in social thinking possibly relies on a *confirmatory canvas*: if categories are stubborn, facts are even more so. However, when faced with the obvious, social thinking rarely creates new categories. Rather, it makes the old ones looser, that is to say, more welcoming, in order to allow them to absorb novelty and "exceptions".

<sup>18</sup> Accommodation is the reverse process: changing one's cognitive structure to incorporate a new event that does not fit in the existing categories.

Indeed, one basic premise is that social situations call for rules of thinking that are different from those of science- as we saw with the ordinary Romanian citizens' not engaging in scientific reasoning about earthquakes and paraseismic retrofitting (Chapter 1).

Such rules aim to reach a "social truth" in a given configuration of social relations, rather than scientific truth. Rouquette suggested to term this process "social thinking" ("*pensée sociale*", 1973). When people use social, rather than scientific rules of thinking, as it is actually the case most of the time in everyday life, conversations, collective remembering, rumours, crowds formation, this is because social life favours this alternative type of thinking, whose nature is social, rather than purely cognitive or scientific. To say it simply, when people are in social contexts, they use social thinking, as opposed to scientific thinking.

Scientific thinking is characterised by four simultaneous features: canonical logic in reasoning; testing theory against facts; strong institutional regulation; reproducibility. Social thinking, in contrast, has other constraints, but not these. This is not to say that it has no rules or nor logic, but they are different (Rouquette, 2009): social thinking essentially rests on what "makes sense" from a social standpoint, rather than a scientific one.

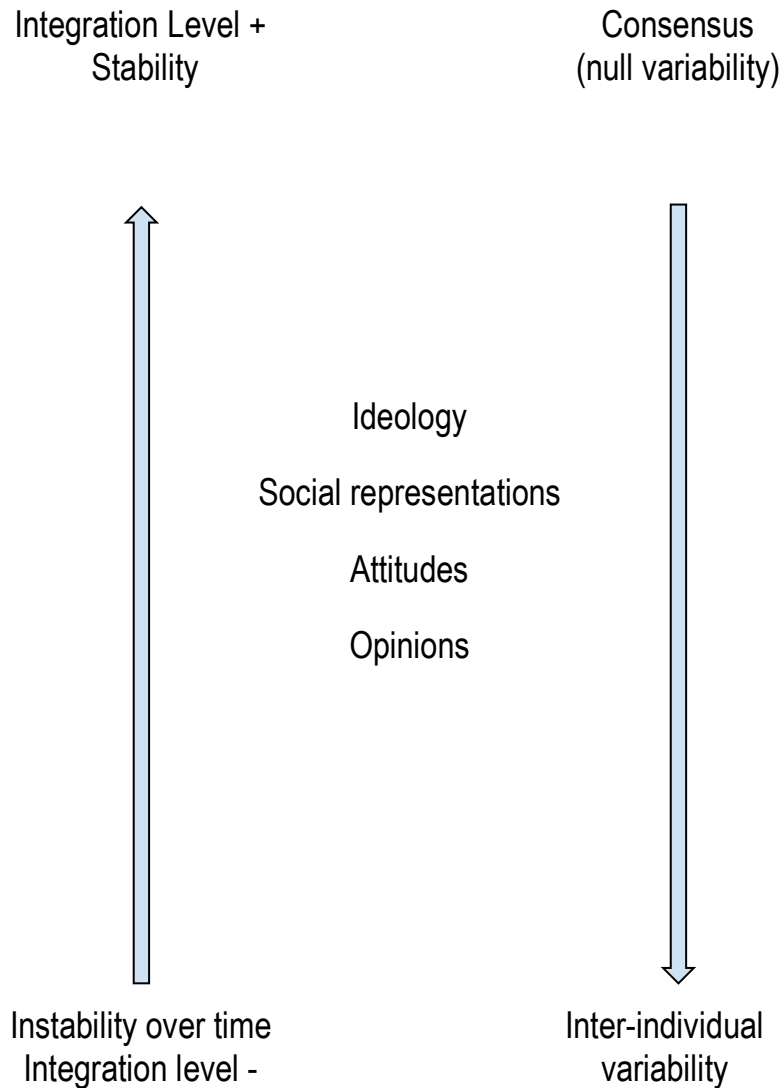
Both types of thinking have their own coherence and validity criteria. The first aims for "truth" ("epistemological validity", Leyens, Yzerbyt & Schadron, 1996), while the second is a matter of *social validity* in a historical fabric of shared vs. conflictual identities, imposed fidelities, etc. Rather than expressing an objectively valid truth, social thinking uses a social validity, often driven by a perceived consensus and an ingroup connivance, that grants its practical value and its explanatory meaning for a group, and makes them consistent with the group's norms, values and beliefs. This congruence is possible precisely because social thinking draws on such values and beliefs without the aim to challenge or falsify them (confirmatory thinking, assimilation rather than accommodation), as scientific thinking would. In the social world, then, rather than cognitive processes "with a bias", people use processes whose nature is social, termed *social-cognitive processes* (Rouquette & Rateau, 1998; Rateau & Moliner, 2009; Rateau, Ernst-Vintila & Delouvé, 2012). They use social thinking, yet they are not individually accountable for "producing" it (Rouquette & Rateau, 1998, p. 23). Rather than psychologic, the processes of social thinking are socio-logic.

Social contexts, then, "require" social thinking just as scientific contexts require scientific thinking. Researchers on social thinking argue that the social conditions under which people think, act as "constraints" (Rouquette, 1998), especially when they are deeply *involved* (shared or conflictual identities, imposed fidelities, group membership or adversities, shared memories as "historical pool" of cognitive resources, etc.). Those constraints, just as railroad switches on their thinking "routes", take them on the avenues of social thinking, rather than the paths of scientific thinking. In other words, when people are *involved* by social circumstances (Flament et Rouquette, 2003; Guimelli, 2002), the purpose and processes of their thinking switch to social, rather than scientific.

### *Levels of social thinking*

Social thinking, then, is not driven by merely "cognitive" processes with more or less "biases", nor is it simply a "situational" outcome that draws on a random catalogue of opinions, values, norms, representations, ideologies, etc. "*Under the diversity of contents and circumstances, under the apparent disorder of forms*", Rouquette wrote, social thought has "*an objective rationale, closely related to the fundamental characteristics of society as an prime datum*" (1998a, p. 52). Stating that social thinking has a socio-logic rationale implies that it has a double organization, *both* social and cognitive. One should then understand how this double structure affects the expression of social thinking by *socialized*, relational individuals (Rouquette, 2009).

Rouquette (1996) suggested an architecture of social thought that orders the set { *Opinions, Attitudes, Social Representations, Ideologies* } based on two criteria: variability and lability. In a given social set, Opinions are more diverse and prone to change than Attitudes, which are more dispersed and modifiable than Social representations, with Ideologies being the most stable and consensual. (Figure 2.1).



**Figure 2.1.** The generic model of the architecture of social thought.

In this architecture, the higher levels are resources (and, as a consequence, “constraints”) for the lower levels of social thinking. “If *witcraft* is a basic form of thought, then we can expect private thinking to be modelled after public argument”, wrote Billig (1991, p. 141). An ideology produces a coherent system of social representations, which drive attitudes, reflected in everyday opinions. Attitudes, then appear as a specific occurrence of a social representation (or of combined or coalescent social representations).

This model proposes “a hierarchy of embedded reasons, in which the coincidence of opinions finds a reason in an attitude, the coalescence of attitudes draws on a social representation, and a particular universe of

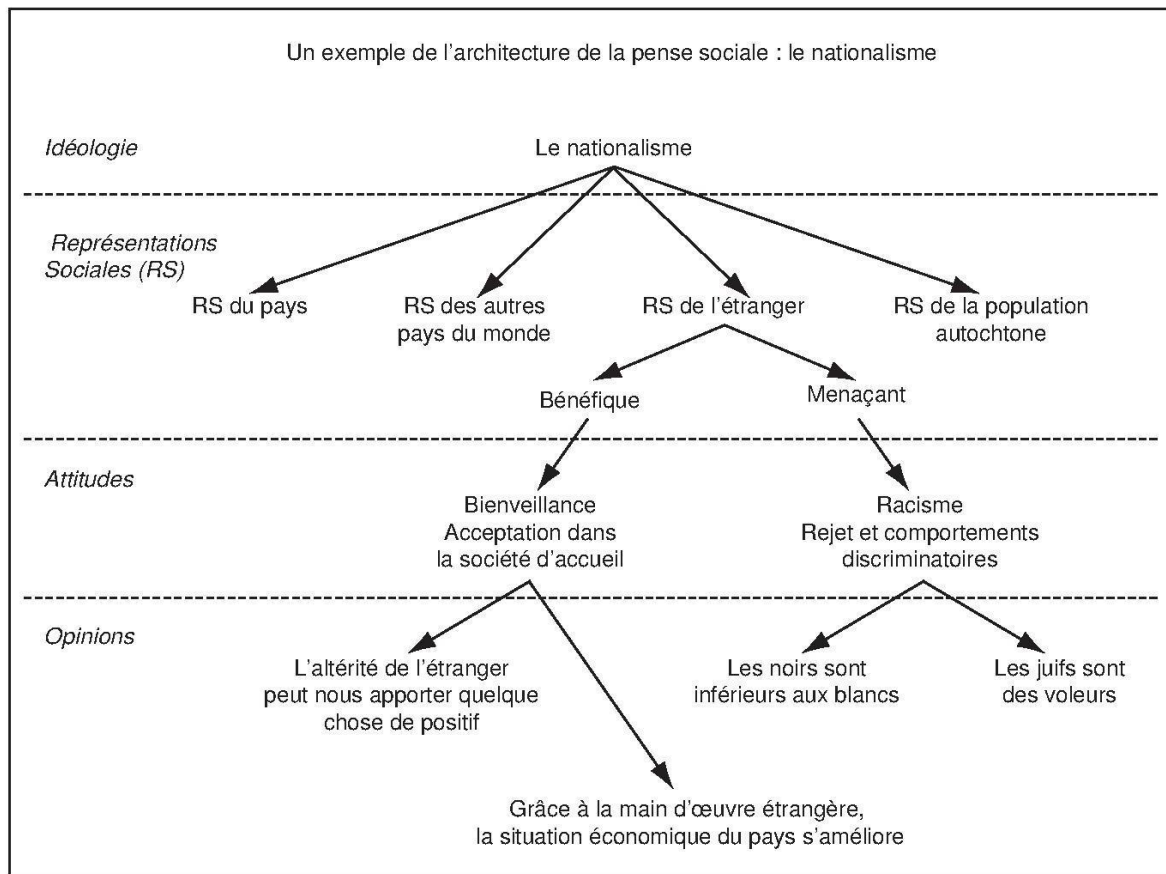


*social representations on a more or less diffuse ideology*" (Rouquette, 1996, p. 52). The rationale of this hierarchy is the socio-logic at play in both the socio-genesis of social thinking and the embedment of its levels.

These considerations call for three clarifications. First, as mentioned above, the four levels in the model of the architecture of social thought correspond to the levels of analysis in social psychology identified by Doise (*cf. supra*). Second, as we see in Figure 1, the higher the level of social thinking, the higher its stability over time and consensus (ideologies). Conversely, the lower the level, the more diverse its expressions, individual positions, and the higher its variability over time (opinions). Finally, the levels are "hierarchical" because the higher levels allow for the "integration" of lower levels (Rouquette, 1998a).

This means that a transition from a lower to a higher level (e.g., from social representations to ideology) is more than an inclusion, it is an *integration* - in the mathematical sense. This means that two social representations elaborated by distinct but coexisting social groups in a given population at a given time are *integrated* with respect to their *common* ideology which is that of their society. Likewise, the transition from a higher level to a lower level (e.g., from ideology to social representations) is to be understood as a *derivation* - also in the mathematical sense: *deriving* an ideology with respect to two social objects generates two social representations that are necessarily related.

In this model, "*by definition, with each step up, one gains in generality*" (Rouquette, 1998a). Correlatively, "*the weight of the heritage, that is to say, the weight of productions acquired from history, increases, and, as the long term perspective tells, ideologies (...) are much more stable than the opinions of the moment*" (*ibid.*, p. 52). Ideology forms a system of generic ideas that ultimately justify taking stands based on values seen as universal and obvious in a culture. At a specific time in history, then, social representations of different social objects draw on the same pool of resources (those "*generic ideas*"), which make those social representations relate with each other, that is to say, strictly speaking, it *integrates* them into the same family, in which the ultimate "reason" is ideology. For example, the French representations of "health" and the "economy" draw on the same pool of notions: capital, dynamism, balance, vitality, protection, etc. (*ibid.*). Similarly, the social representations that form different subcultures within a culture are related to each other, although the attitudes that they respectively guide (produce, justify, etc.) are different.



**Figure 2.2.** An example of the architecture of social thought that draws on a nationalistic ideology (*apud* Baggio, 2011).

Figure 2.2. shows an example of the architecture of social thought in which a coherent system of social representations (of the State, of foreigners, on the State natives, etc.) draws on a nationalistic ideology. Those representations drive the attitudes towards foreigners (racism, xenophobia, *misrecognition* of people with immigrant background, refugees, etc.). Those attitudes are reflected in opinions about daily matters such as the “utility” of foreign workforce to improving the country’s economy, stereotypes (non-European refugees viewed as less smart than Europeans, etc.).

#### *Implications of the architecture model of social thinking*

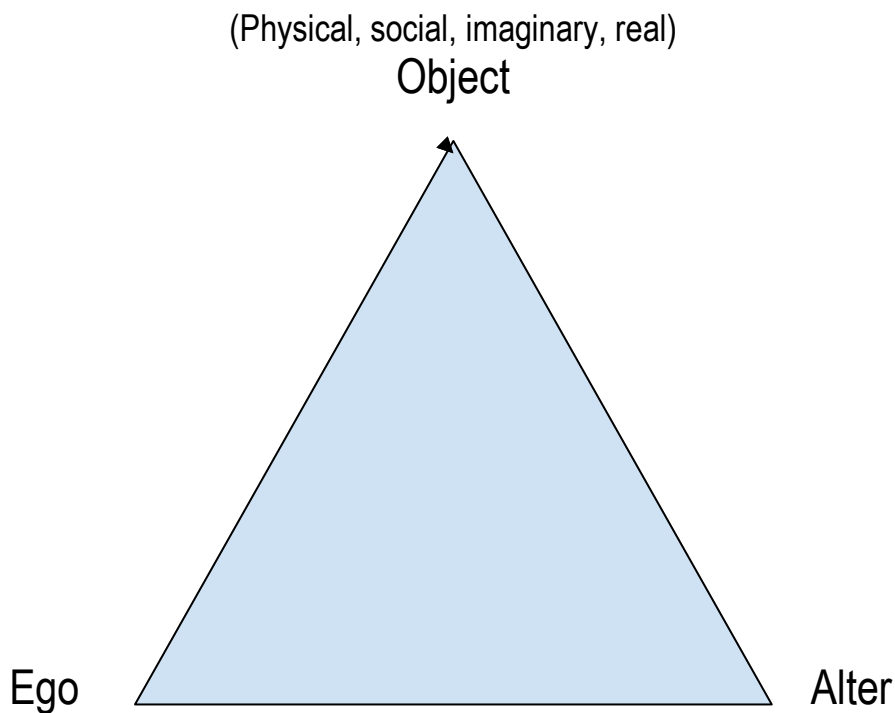
A concrete example was analyzed by Kalamalikis (2007) about the (deliberate) use of an ideology (myths, antic history) as a resource for the contemporan justification of Greece refusing for many years to recognize its neighboring republic under the name "Macedonia", a name over which Greece claimed an exclusive cultural and historical ownership. The argument used by Greece to claim those “identity rights” drew on the mythical history of the region and the leading figure of Alexander the Great, Importantly, one country’s claims over the name of another cannot be conceived in the same way nowadays and in the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries, before the existence of legal rules about names and territories (Rouquette, 2007). This example illustrates how a change in ideology marked by new “institutions” (national territories, law, etc.), impacts social thinking by changing its pool of resources.

The practical consequences of the architecture model of social thinking are possibly the most important. For instance, one does not build a social representation “bottom-up”, by changing people’s opinions, no matter how many; one does not transform a social representation, and even less an ideology, by interventions on attitudes, but, rather, by setting forth an alternative representation (which, in “structural” terms, means that

people change “groups”, not representations, more precisely, they change their identification), or by introducing a change in the environment which makes the first representation obsolete (think of the effectiveness of laws restricting the public spaces where smoking was allowed had in the fight against tobacco by changing the social practice and norms - an effectiveness that information campaigns could not claim). The determining role of social practices in the dynamics of social representations will be addressed further.

## Le regard psychosocial

As mentioned above, the research on social thinking stems from a vision of social psychology that questions the binary distinction between the individual and society. It also questions the binary relationship between a Subject and an Object. Moscovici explained thoroughly why the latter binarity reduced psychosocial phenomena to psychological phenomena, and social phenomena to individual phenomena (1984a, p. 8). He suggested that *social* psychology should replace such binary relationships with a ternary one: Individual subject - Social subject - Object, or Ego - Alter - Object (Figure 3).



**Figure 2.3.** *Le regard psychosocial* (Moscovici, 1984a).

Such a ternary relationship means that an Object is seized through each person’s (Ego) interaction with the Other (Alter). In other words, an Object is “built” in the interaction between an Ego and an Alter. This is called *generic thinking*, from “*genesis*”, or, rather, *socio-generic thinking*, to account for the social nature of the process. A person’s *perception* of an Object, then, depends on her *relationship* with the Other - be this Other similar (social comparison) or different (social recognition, Moscovici & Paicheler, 1973<sup>19</sup>). The example that Moscovici gave (1984) is that of Proust’s Narrator, who observed each character (Swann, Odette, Charlus, Albertine, etc.)

<sup>19</sup> In a social recognition paradigm, this involves considering the Other in her personal and positional difference, i.e., recognizing her different “position”, perspective, voice, etc.

while also observing the historical events around them (the Dreyfus Affair, World War I), in a story in which each character and event “*ne prennent sens qu’à travers cette unique “recherche”, à travers le “monde”, en somme la “société” de chacun. Ou, pour reprendre le langage scientifique, à travers les sujets sociaux qui sont, chez Proust, “Du côté de chez Swann, Le côté de Guermantes, Sodome et Gomorrhe. Voilà donc chaque personnage réfracté et observé dans un cercle d’hommes et de femmes qui révèlent les facettes successives. On le suit, par ailleurs, d’un cercle à l’autre, de la rue au demi-monde, du demi-monde au monde, et chacun décompose et recompose l’individu selon ses conventions. Le Narrateur le regarde selon les siennes, mais il le voit aussi comme les autres le voient et à la façon dont ils réagissent par rapport à lui”* (Moscovici, 1984a, p. 11)<sup>20</sup>.

## Mindscapes: Social representations and personal involvement

### Social representations

The conceptual framework of social representations is a theory of both social knowledge and social change (Howarth, 2006). It studies social thinking. A classic topic in anthropology (cf. Lévy-Bruhl’s *pensée naïve*), social thinking and its determination by the social relationships and the history of social groups are the focus of only a minority of studies in social psychology, in spite of the exceptional relevance of this discipline for this line of research. It is a form of thinking that is collectively elaborated and shared by the members of a social or cultural group. In developing the conceptual framework of social representations, Moscovici aimed not for a “theory of social representations”, but for a theory that allowed us to understand thinking societies. The French term *représentation sociale*, which he coined in 1961, covers both the products and processes that are characteristic to social thinking. While Moscovici never formally defined social representations, he clarified their understanding as collective elaborations “*of a social object by the community for the purpose of behaving and communicating*” within a social group (Moscovici, 1963, p. 251), aiming “*to make something unfamiliar, or unfamiliarity itself, familiar*” to that group (Moscovici, 1984a, p. 24). As we saw above, unlike scientific thinking, which is based on formal logic, social thinking depends on people’s social positions, which drives their *personal involvement* with regard to objects (Rouquette, 1997). In fact, social representations are not so much interested in the representations of objects themselves as they are in “making sense”, that is to say in the argumentative logic and rhetorics about those objects, which give them social life.

The conceptual framework of social representations “*has reached the farthest in understanding how and why social groups build collective visions of their social environment, which then come to influence their reasoning modes*” (Rateau & Moliner, 2009, p. 7, our translation). This framework is relevant for the study of social thinking about extreme circumstances for at least two reasons: “*the first is the idea that all knowledge are expressive, insofar as they seek to represent subjective, intersubjective and objective worlds; and the second is*

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<sup>20</sup> It is in this sense that studying “attitudes” without asking what people perceive as norms in their community is missing an important part of the phenomenon. It is precisely to cover such a gap that when studying those towards multiculturalism, Guimond, Streith, & Roebroek (2015) conducted a representative survey in France in which they also questioned the participants’ representations (“perceptions of the norm broadly shared”). Their results revealed a significant difference between personal attitudes towards multiculturalism (i.e. the French are personally favourable) and the perceived social norm (they think that the majority of French people are opposed), which made the authors conclude that studies are needed to understand collective (social representations) beliefs and their consequences, because, even when wrong, they still guide behaviour.

*the idea that different forms of knowing can coexist fulfilling different functions and responding to different needs in the life of communities*" (Jovchelovitch, 2006, p. 4).

Because cognitive processes are *determined* by social factors (relationships, positions, power, historical heritage, etc.), this framework mostly addresses the positional and ideological levels.

## A "phenomenon"

Moscovici proposed to "consider as a *phenomenon* what was previously seen as a *concept*" (2001, p. 30), pointing to social representations as a fundamental category of sociability (Rouquette & Rateau, 1998).

The concept itself came from Durkheim's *collective representations*, on which Moscovici had a different view. In fact, he argued, social psychology "*must consider it from a different angle*" (Moscovici, 2001, p. 30). While in sociology those representations appeared as the result of an "*immense cooperation that spans not just in space, but also in time*" (Durkheim, 1912) and were seen as explanatory devices (with a theoretical function much similar to that of an atom in traditional mechanics, or genes in traditional genetics, known to exist but no one "bothered" with "*what they did or what they were like*" - *ibid.*), he argued that "*social psychology is and must be preoccupied solely with both the structure and the dynamics of representations*" (Moscovici, 2001, p. 30).

In Moscovici's view, Durkheim's *collective representations* were conceived as static, like "*a thickening of the fog, or else they act as stabilizers for many words or ideas*" (*ibid.*, p. 32), describing "*a whole range of intellectual forms which included science, religion, myths, modalities of time and space, etc.*" *ibid.* p. 30). Moscovici, however, argued that *social representations* should be seen as "*specific ways of understanding and communicating what we know already*", which "*create both reality and common sense*" (*ibid.*, p. 32), and "*dynamic structures, operating on assemblies of relations and of behaviours that appear and disappear together with the representations, just as the word "neurotic" disappearing from our dictionaries would also banish some feelings, a certain type of relationships towards a particular person, a way of judging him and, consequently, of judging ourselves*" (*ibid.*, p. 32).

Marking the difference between Durkheim's static perspective and his own dynamic perspective, Moscovici used the term *social*, rather than *collective*, to qualify the nature of the representations with which he was concerned. *Collective representations* are consensual in societies across different groups, while *social representations* are simultaneously characterized by intra-group consensus and intergroup differences.

This change in perspective has several implications. First, Moscovici argued, studying social representations should go beyond a "*mere shift from the emotional to the intellectual level, and they should not be seen as solely or anti-behavioural*" (2001, p. 74): their processes are significant as they reveal their content and social logic: "*how we think is not distinct from what we think*" (*ibid.*, p. 74). Second, their study should capture the complex human milieu in which the social representations were created, hence to include not only experimentation, but also "*revert to observation methods*", to "*preserve some of the qualities of experimentation, while freeing us from its limitations*" (p. 75). Third, their theory should include comparative studies of their accurate descriptions (p. 76) - which implies reliable comparison methodologies (cf. *infra*).

## Definitions

Durkheim thoroughly distinguished between individual and collective representations (1898). Moscovici dedicated papers to describing social representations. It is admitted that representations that are called “social” share a number of properties:

- First, they are *shared* in a community, as a consequence of actions and interactions (including, primarily, historical heritage)
- Second, they are *socially elaborated*, especially through communications (both private and media)
- Third, they are *socially differential*, that is, they stem from, and maintain, intergroup differences. To say it simply, different social representations means different groups.

Social representations can be understood as functional views of the world, integrating an object’s characteristics, the group’s values and norms system, and the people’s previous experience. They are not mere reproductions, but reconstructions of a social object; nor mere (distorted) reflections, but *refractions* that follow their milieu’s *constraints* (norms, values, etc.).

By introducing *time* in the definition of social representations (“temporarily” shared), Rouquette provided a dynamic perspective pointing to the fact that what we call a social representation (as “product”) is actually a *state of a representation* observed under specific conditions (at a given time, in a specific community), thus a *moment* in a dynamic *process*. That process occurs on a historical, rather than psychological timescale. *Historicity*, then, is an important property of social representations, one that is “sufficient to set them apart from *individual* representations” (Jodelet, 1988; Rouquette & Rateau, 1998).

## Two properties

### *Historicity*

Social representations are part of history and play their part in it. They carry the conscience of a society, anchored in its own history and in culture, which makes them anything but universal. Our values and way of seeing the world become “ours” through socialization, a heritage that comes with our formal and informal education in families and schools, our material environment (working tools, buildings, roads, works of art), the institutions (especially laws, jurisprudence, etc.) (Rouquette & Rateau, 1998).

On the one hand, historicity means that social representations are a product of history. Their content is the result of a slow elaboration process fueled by the profound movements of society, its production modes, its organization (*ibid.*). Rouquette and Rateau (1998) illustrate by the example of the “ideal group”, an object of social representation often used in the experimental and structural studies, and which allowed their theorisation to advance to where it stands today. (White male) researchers operationalised this “ideal group” for decades as a masculine, likely Christian, white, gang (“Pierre, Olivier, François, Jean-Jacques et Marc”). As an object of social representation, its defining (central) elements were found to be “friendship” and “equality”. This representation, Rouquette and Rateau argue (1998), may be dated back to the French and American revolution, but inconceivable in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Similarly, they note, the current social representation of “hygiene” owes to the Pastorian revolution its ideal of preventing disease; before Pasteur, hygiene was merely a “*pratique de bienséance*”.

On the other hand, historicity means that social representations have a history: a past, a present and a future. They should be understood and studied as dynamic forms of social thinking: whatever content and structure we capture “now” is just a representational “state” that results from the past and is on its way to the future, which means that it will change (slowly, under specific conditions), merge with other representations, or disappear. Such dynamics span over generations. History, then, is a precious resource for research on social representations because it allows their diachronic studies (their dynamics), in addition to their synchronic studies (their “statics”), which is where sociology helps.

### *Alterity (Otherness)*

Conceptually, the notion of alterity, or *otherness*, refers to a fundamental anthropological and philosophical distinction between the same and the other (Jodelet, 2005). An often quoted formula is that alterity means that “*the social representations of the ones are not those of the others*” (Rouquette & Rateau, 1998, p. 15). Here, the distinction between “the ones” and “the others” refers to a social (or ideological) positioning criterion, rather than a psychological one (introverts vs. extroverts). As we saw in Moscovici’s (1961) studies, the communists’ and catholics’ visions of psychoanalysis were irreducibly specific (Rouquette & Rateau, 1998): while communists gave it a political significance (accusing it of distracting the workers from their legitimate social class demands), catholics understood it from an essentially moral ground, which condemned “instincts”. Hence, because of alterity, social representations are best revealed in polemic relationships : « *le conflit, qui implique toujours une revendication d’identité, les conduit à s’expliciter et à radicaliser leur expression* » (*elles ne se déforment pas, elles se « dépouillent* »), montrent l’essentiel (Rouquette & Rateau, 1998, p. 18).

### Four functions

The phenomenal role of social representations in societies is arguably due to their four functions:

- *Knowledge*  
Social representations allow groups and people to understand and explain reality in a way that is compatible with social and cognitive constraints (existing norms, previous knowledge). They make sense and enable social communication - which are the essence of social life (Moscovici, 1984).
- *Identification*  
As systems of meaning, social representations allow groups and people to know who they are and the significations of their identity, safeguarding group distinction (shared identity, group consensus, intergroup difference) in a way that is compatible with their historical and social experience. For example, for victims of collective trauma (the Holocaust), the meaning of trauma relates to the construction of a transgenerational collective self (Hirschberger, 2018). Social representations “position” a group in society and play a role in group and intergroup relations (Doise, 1973), in the recognition, identification, categorization, inclusion and exclusion of group members, and social control. The identity function of social representations is key for socialization. The relations between social representations and identity phenomena are at the heart of social psychology, arguably because identity is a particular social representation that guides individual and collective action (Chrysochoou, 2003, 2016).
- *Action guidance*

As interpretation devices, social representations are critical guidance devices for people's actions. They specify their action goals and the purpose in a given situation, provide anticipations and expectations, and define a range of acceptable vs. forbidden behaviours compatible with social rules and relationships.

By *defining a situation's purpose*, they also elicit the cognitive processes accordingly and define which relations are relevant. For example, task representation determines the type of cognitive process, and also the way in which a group structures itself and communicates (Abric, 1971). In the same vein, Codol (1959) showed how a person's representation of herself, of her group, and of the other group determine her behaviour in a given situation.

By *providing anticipations and expectations*, the representations act on reality (Elcheroth, Doise & Reicher, 2011) by selecting and filtering information in a way that makes reality conform to our prior representation ("*assimilation*", *cf. supra*). Studies show that, rather than following an unfolding interaction and being updated, a representation precedes and determines that interaction. In conflictual interactions, for instance, a partner's behaviour is interpreted in a radically different way (cooperative or competitive) depending on the participant's prior representation (Abric, 1987). The existence of a representation that precedes the situation itself leads most often to cases where "the die is cast" in advance, conclusions are drawn before the action even starts, all of which make circular reasoning, confirmatory thinking, and paradoxical confirmation a regular feature of social thinking (which is another illustration of social thinking using assimilation, rather than accommodation).

Finally, as representations are *social*, they reflect social rules and relationships, hence they define a range of compatible behaviours. Kahn, Klar, Roccas (2017) showed that different group representations prescribe different behaviour: a tendency to perceive their group as a trans-generational entity is related to the willingness to endure more ingroup suffering and even self-sacrifice. Drawing on Bauer's (2002) eminent work on the Holocaust, Klar, Schori-Eyal and Klar (2013) showed that for contemporary Israelis, the *Never Again* imperative derived from the Holocaust invokes behavioural prescriptions: (1) never be a passive victim; (2) never forsake your brothers; (3) never be passive bystander; and (4) never be a perpetrator.

#### - *Justification*

Social representations also drive social thinking *after* the action, allowing their holders to explain and justify their stands and behaviour, by thus giving them a meaning consistent with socially relevant constraints. For example, Doise (1973) showed that intergroup representations serve to justify one group's behaviour towards another group. Depending on the type of relationship and its evolution (cooperative vs. competitive), the representations about the other group change: competing relationships lead to representations that attribute to the other group features used to "justify" a hostile behaviour. This gives social representations a key role in maintaining intergroup relations.

## Social representations and social practice

As far as social representations are a framework for judging and acting, analyses need to consider people's behaviour and social practice towards the represented objects.

There is consensus on representations as "guides for action". Relevant representations, as we saw, guide, justify and grant behaviour and social practice. What we do (and what we do not do) arguably depends



on our beliefs. Symmetrically, what we do under the pressure of the circumstances, or as a result of changes in the environmental constraints, can lead to an adaptive modulation of our representation (for a variety of examples, see Abric, 1994). On the other hand, representations guide not only the action (by selecting and ordering “relevant” action criteria, for example), but also the choice of events to which a person responds in relation to the represented objects, as we shall see in the section dedicated to *personal involvement* (actions “can be initiatives or reaction to particular classes of events” - Duveen & Lloyd, 1990, p. 132) and illustrated in our work about the social representations of terrorism (Chapter 3).

Two questions arise. First, what is social practice? Second, what is its status relative to social representations?

Few if any definitions of social practice are operational in social psychology. Within the conceptual framework of social thinking, Rouquette (2000a) declined this notion according to four aspects: practice as moving to action; recurrence; “way of doing”; and “deliberated” action. In all cases, social practice covers at least two aspects: the existence and the frequency of behaviour. Often, social practice is understood as “binary variable presence / absence”, that allows us to distinguish two distinct states in the same population (Flament & Rouquette, 2003).

The relationship between social representations and practice is key for both theoretical and practical reasons: it could have implications for interventions on collective behaviour, public policies, etc. Any action that would not consider the central core of the relevant social representations can only meet strong resistance, miss its goal or exhaust its inadequate means (Rouquette, 2000b), as was the case with the first French campaigns against AIDS (Morin, 1999).

Is practice an “independent variable” that affects representations or is it the other way around? Is their relation “circular”? Are they simply “correlated”? To answer these questions, Rouquette (2000a) suggested considering a temporal dimension. In studying social representational and practice change, he distinguished between diachronic change (a change in a group’s practice/representations over time) and synchronic change (a difference between two groups’ practice/representations at a given moment). The first one reflects a time evolution based on *social-cognitive dynamics*, while the second reflects a social and cognitive intergroup difference at a given time (as in Moliner’s study of the representations of a “company” held by executives and workers, for example, 1993b). Considering the social-cognitive dynamics, Rouquette suggested that social representations act as *conditions* (*constraints*, as opposed to *determinations*) for social practice, while social practice is a *transforming agent* for social representations, “*until otherwise proven*” (Rouquette 2000a, p. 137). Thus, “*social representations guide action, but the action that confirms them; on the other hand, only the action that challenges them can eventually transform them*” (Rouquette, 2000b, p. 20).

Representational and practice transformation is then “*ultimately due to history, rather than to decontextualized, monological variables*”, hence an “*essential need to reform methods*”, for instance by using history as resource (Rouquette 2000a, p. 140; Rouquette, 2003; Ernst-Vintila & Klar, 2016; Reicher 2008), and by having “*studies on current social representations contribute to a history of the present time*” (Rouquette 2000a, p. 140; Moscovici, 2013).

In the last decades, research conducted within the structural approach to social representations examined the relations between social representations and social practices and provided empirical and experimental evidence for the major role of social practice in the making and the transformation of social representations. Before I describe how my research contributed in this area (Chapter 3), I want to recall prior studies that considered how social practices and their institutionalization impact social representations both in their dynamics and in their structure, showing that they determine how an object is represented.

### *Social practices "trigger" social representational dynamics*

Social practices "trigger" of social representational dynamics (Flament, 2001, p. 50). For example, a trigger in the transformation of the nurses' social representation of their professional identity was a change in professional practice - new procedures enabled them to initiate by themselves a number of patient care acts in addition to those prescribed by a doctor ("*rôle propre*" vs. "*rôle médico-délégué*" redesigned roles for nurses: decision-maker vs. caregiver, in the changing landscape of a health care system becoming more patient centered) (Guimelli & Jacobi, 1990). Other studies showed that a change in hunting practice due the need to adopt "ecological hunting" led hunters to gradually transform their social representation of hunting because elements such as "territory management" and "territory" gained an increased importance in representational field (Guimelli, 1998). The hunters had to rethink chasing when changes in the natural environment (scarcity caused by animal disease) lead them to chase differently. Similarly, in a Gypsy community, a change in practice from nomadism to sedentarization led to a change in how the Gypsy self-identity was viewed (Mamontoff, 1996).

When a transformation in the environment leads to a change in social practice, these studies show that people "rethink" objects. Thus, when a change in the environment requires social practices to "adapt", social representations may evolve because the object is re-thought.

### *Social practices impact the social representational structure*

Other studies presented evidence of how social practices impact the social representational structure. In a study about the social representations of "crowds", Rouquette (1994) found that participants from urban and rural areas, because of their difference in "crowd practice", hold distinct social representations of the "crowd". Indeed, while in both groups the representations were organized around two descriptive elements ("*masse*", "*cohue*") that were consensual between groups (as both groups came from the same society), a difference appeared: the rural participants activated specific elements, with a negative connotation, such as "riots" ("*émeutes*") or "danger", corresponding to the modulation of their representation according to their own experience of crowds. Other studies showed that law enforcement personnel and special educators who engaged in repressive vs. preventive practices towards young offenders ("deviants") had distinct social representations of offenders: while both groups shared two central beliefs ("personality weakness" and "socialization weakness"), their social representations showed specific elements which varied according to their repressive vs. preventive practices. In the first case, the element "entrenched deviance" was over-activated ("internal" determinants), in the second case "being rehabilitable" ("external" factors) (Guimelli, 1995). Fraïssé (1999) studied the social representations of "natural medicine" (a form of alternative medicine which involves naturopathy, homeopathy, herbalism, acupuncture, diet, lifestyle, etc.). More recently, Lo Monaco (2008) focussed on the young adults' alcohol consumption practices and found two distinctive (positive vs. negative) social representations of wine among consumers and non-consumers ("festive" vs. "dangerous" wine), both of which shared a central element, "alcohol".

### *The social representational dynamics depends on how social practices are institutionalised*

Finally, studies showed that the social representational dynamics depend on how social practices are *institutionalised*. For example, studies on health psychology showed that the social representations of AIDS and smoking depend on how the social practices were institutionalized in both cases, for instance by their respective laws and legislative corpus (Morin & Apostolidis, 2002).

## The structural approach to social representations

Since Moscovici's theorisation (1961), several approaches were developed to study social representations. For example, Denise Jodelet and her group, working in Paris and extensively in Latin America, used an anthropological perspective (Kalampalikis & Apostolidis, 2016). In Geneva, Willem Doise and his group worked around social representations as "organising principles"<sup>21</sup>. In London, Gerard Duveen and Robert Farr developed a genetic approach. In France, beyond other contributions, *l'Ecole du Midi* (Montpellier and Aix-en-Provence) promoted a structural, experimental approach.

The structural approach views social representations as an organized set of cognitions shared by the members of a social group about a given object (Flament, 1994). It led to advanced formalisations (Abric, 1976, 1987; Abric & Flament, 1996; Garnier, 2015; Moliner & Abric, 2015; Rateau, Moliner, Guimelli, & Abric, 2011). One of its most substantial contributions is to consider that each representation is a system organised around a *central core*, or *structuring core* (Abric, 1987), an *invariant* in representational genesis and dynamics processes. A first-order approximation of their structure is in Figure 2.5 (one should take this planetary-model with the same caution as Bohr's model of the atom).

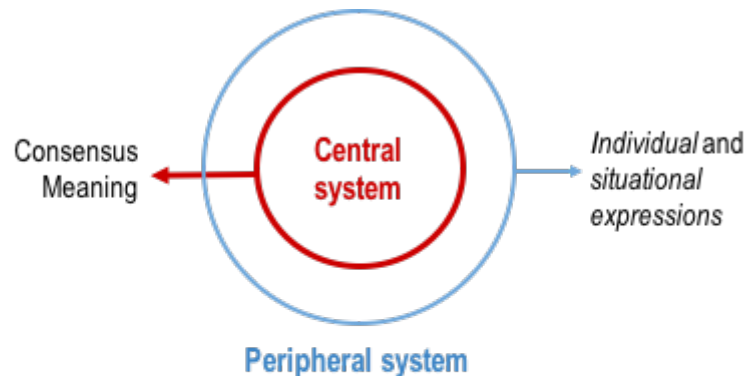


Figure 2.5. A structural model of a social representation.

### The central core

The central core is determined by the nature of the represented object, the group's relations to it, and the value system that forms the group's ideological environment, drawing on collective memory (Abric, 1993, 2001). The central core is the fundamental part of the representation, and the most resistant to change. Its elements define the representational object in a "non-negotiable" way. They have two key functions:

- A generative function: they give and transform the meaning of representational elements

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<sup>21</sup> In this approach, social representations are defined as « *des principes générateurs de prises de position qui sont liées à des insertions spécifiques dans un ensemble de rapports sociaux* », ces principes organisateurs constituant « [...] ces schèmes [qui] organisent les processus symboliques intervenant dans les rapports sociaux » (Doise & Palmonari, 1986, p. 89).

- An organizing function: they relate the other elements and determine the type of relations between them. Their connectedness is key in the representation. As we shall see, it is finely measurable (cf. *infra*, BCS model).

The central core, as we see, provides the representation with its significant properties (meaning, consistency, etc.). Any change in the central core, whether in its content, or in its structure (in the type or in the organization of the relations between its elements), produces a complete representational transformation (Abrie, 2001). Thus, knowing the representations content and ignoring their structure is insufficient for comparisons, because two social representations can have the same content, and radically different structures (different central cores).

### *Normative and functional dimensions*

The central core has two dimensions, based on the normative and/or functional type of its elements and relations (Abrie, 1976; Guimelli, 1998a; Rouquette 1994b). When they are normative, it means that the instrumental relationship with the represented object is subdued, reflecting a reduced or simplified social practice (Guimelli, 1995). The representation's normative dimension is a framework for the social evaluation of the represented object (Guimelli, 1998a). In contrast, an instrumental link with the represented object activates the functional dimension. Elements that are both normative and functional ("mixed" elements) are involved in both judgements and action (Guimelli, 1998a).

According to the central core theory (Abrie, 1976, 1987), all representational elements are related, but they do not have the same status. Some, by their symbolic properties, determine the meaning and organization of others. They are linked to historical, sociological and ideological conditions (Rouquette & Rateau, 1998) that form a group's global social context (Abrie & Guimelli, 1998; Deconchy, 2002). These elements, called central, are consensual, stable, symbolic, and give meaning and coherence to the other elements, called peripheral, which are the operational part of the representation, and related to people's immediate context (Abrie & Guimelli, 1998).

### The peripheral system

The peripheral elements are organized around the central core and have a role in making it concrete in everyday circumstances, acting as "bumpers" for the central core (Flament, 1994), when external constraints question the latter's coherence (for example, a change in social practices, in the environment, etc.). The peripheral elements have long been considered secondary relative to the central elements, although their importance was evidenced by Flament (1994a, b) and especially Gaymard (1999, 2014, 2015), who worked on conditionality and legitimate norm transgressions. Gaymard challenged the theoretical "border" between the central and the peripheral representational systems, working with a definition of the peripheral elements as schemata prescribing behaviour, drawing on their property to indicate what behaviour is normal (acceptable, recommended, vs. unacceptable, disapproved, etc.) in a given situation (Flament, 1994a). Gaymard showed their role in legitimating circumstantial transgressions in a system of social norms that works alongside the system of legal norms. In fact, peripheral elements regulate the information taken from the environment, which can sometimes challenge the central core, by conditionally integrating challenging elements. Unlike the central elements, the peripheral elements may vary depending on individual and situational circumstances - for example. In fact, they act as an interface between the central elements and people's everyday experiences, and so enable the representations' adaptation and contextual flexibility, preventing it from being constantly challenged by everyday changing circumstances.

Thanks to them a representation maintains its central consistency and stability, while taking different appearances, depending on individual experiences and the immediate context. Such different appearances translate to differences in the peripheral systems, and eventually to different behaviour depending on the circumstances.

## Social representations as double systems

Viewing representations as social-cognitive systems means considering both their elements *and* the relations between those elements. As *systems*, they have structural properties and obey a set of rules. This perspective allows formal comparisons between representations, with the help of specific methodologies, that we shall see further. Their structure, as we see, consists of a *double system* (Abric, 1994): a consensual, stable *central system* made of a limited number of interrelated elements; and a peripheral system with interindividual, situational flexibility. While the former are consensual and provide the peripheral elements with meaning, coherence and stability, the latter are the operational part of the social representation, which reflects the interindividual variability and the prescriptions for actions related to the object of the representation.

*The central system* is socially determined, meaning that it is determined by the *global social context* (Abric & Guimelli, 1998): the historical, sociological, and ideological conditions that define a groups' norms in a given social system. As discussed, such common basis provides group homogeneity and a range of compatible (acceptable, convenient, forbidden) behaviour.

The central core is relatively independent of the immediate context in which a person uses or verbalises a social representation. Its dynamic evolution in time is very slow. When all the conditions are met (existence of alternative social practice; a change in the environment perceived as irreversible), its transformation occurs on a historical (rather than psychological) timescale (Rouquette & Rateau, 1998). Studies show that it takes at least one generation (Moscovici, 1997; Guimelli, 1998; Ernst-Vintila, Smbatyan, Havarneanu, Juarez-Romero, 2014).

*The peripheral system* relates to individual characteristics and the immediate context. It allows the integration of differences in people's everyday experience and the individual variations in how the representations are expressed around a stable and consensual central core. Thus, it allows group heterogeneity both in terms of representational content and in terms of individual behaviour - provided that they are compatible with the range of acceptability defined by the central core. Differences in the peripheral system do not reflect a difference in representations if the central cores are similar.

This *double system* explains a key, apparently contradictory, feature of social representations: they appear as both stable and moving, rigid and flexible. Their stability and rigidity are due to their central system deeply anchored in a group's history and values. Their movement and flexibility are due to their peripheral system, fed by individual experience, which integrates personal and situational data with evolving social relations and practice.

Thus, social representations are both consensual and marked by interindividual variability. The consensus relies on a limited number of central elements, while the interindividual variability is reflected in their possibly rich peripheral system.

## In search of central core

I described elsewhere the structural techniques for the identification of the central core used in my research, such as the Basic Cognitive Schemes model (Annex 1), prototypicality analysis, and the Hierarchic Evocation

Questionnaire (Gruev-Vintila & Rouquette, 2007; Ernst-Vintila *et al.*, 2011). Several other techniques exist (Abric, 2003; Lo Monaco, *et al.*, 2017).

### Mobilisation nexuses: “prelogical, affective knots” that galvanise crowds

The affective dimension of social thinking, how feelings fuel our views and selves (Damasio, 2018) in thinking societies is still to be explored. Working in the risk field, Paul Slovic defined affect as “a positive (*like*) or negative (*dislike*) evaluative feeling toward an external stimulus” (Slovic 1999, p. 694). Alhakami and Slovic (1994), Finucane *et al.* (2000), suggested to understand it as an *orienting mechanism*: “it (...) appears that the affective response is primary, and the risk and benefit judgments are derived (at least partly) from it” (Slovic 1999, p.694). In this view, the affect precedes the rational evaluation of alternatives (“*pre-logic*”, Rouquette, 1994).

### Psycho-logic hesitations swayed off by a restrictive socio-logic

Rouquette conducted an experiment that came to be known as a princeps illustration of how social thinking triggers a unanimous, collective choice that takes over individual nuances (1994). Participants read a set of social measures for underprivileged citizens, presented as those promoted by “a political party”, the “national socialists”, or the “Nazi party”. In the first two cases, the participants more or less agreed with those measures, but in the third case they unanimously rejected them. Participants may or may not have experienced personal emotions (physical distress, etc.), however their affective response was an immediate, full rejection, beyond individual arguments and deliberation. Rouquette (1994) termed this type of response as “*pre-logic*”. Their collective rejection was not a matter of irrationality in Le Bon’s sense, but of taking clear sides against the Nazi party: uncompromising disapproval (Wolter, 2016) in an intergroup rejection in a historically-grounded relationship. Affect, then, appeared as a matter of collective history and of love-or-hate, rather than a matter of individual emotions and nuanced thinking. The psycho-logic hesitations of deliberation appeared to be swayed off by a socio-logic that reduced collective interpretations to a black-or-white, unambiguous choice. Individual differences are obviously irrelevant to explain such unanimous collective effects, which are only understandable if one accepts that our collective interpretations options draw on social thinking (“*what do the others think?*”, Elcheroth, Doise & Reicher, 2011). If indeed in this experiment social representations were those at work, what reduced their usual peripheral flexibility to a radical, “either-or” option? Or was there another form of social thought at work?

Rouquette suggested an interpretative notion to understand this type of effect: the notion of *mobilisation nexus* (from the Latin *nexus*, the act of binding together, Rouquette, 1988) stands for “an affective<sup>22</sup> prelogical knot common to a large number of individuals in a particular community” (Rouquette, 1994, p. 62). It is a “knot”, as opposed to a “structure”, in the sense that it fuses affect, cognition and attitudes. It is “affectively prelogical” because it leaves “no room for deliberation or afterthought”, hence it “instantly operates rejection or adhesion” (*ibid.*).

Plainly distinct from social representations, this notion was suggested to interpret powerful affective collective mobilisations such as those described in political science as “rally-’round-the-flag” (Mueller, 1973): “*specific, dramatic, and sharply focused*” popular support (*ibid.*, p. 209), that reduce criticism of dominant voices, silences dissonant voices, temporarily federates society beyond intergroup differences (Rouquette, 1994). This

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<sup>22</sup> Here, affect does not refer to a measure of individual physiological emotions’ such as skin conductance (EDR), tachycardia, sweating, etc.: it refers to rejecting/adhering to a social object/label.

notion bridges the social representational and social identity frameworks<sup>23</sup>, hinges their live manifestations in society, and brings in an affective colour to collective phenomena that involve masses of people. Theorised at a collective level of analysis (Doise, 1982), it complements the inter- and intraindividual levels soundly covered in other social psychological models of collective action: SIDE (Reicher, Spears, & Postmes, 1995), ESIM (Drury & Reicher, 2000; Reicher, 1996, 2001; Stott & Reicher, 1998), SIMCA<sup>24</sup> (Van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008), EMSICA (Thomas, McGarty & Mavor, 2009), etc.

A mobilisation nexus is an abductive *interpretation* (as opposed to a *cause*) of powerful affective mobilisation. It refers to an abstract idea which, at a specific time in history, is unchallengeable for a given community. For example, words such as “*Liberty*”, “*Justice*”, “*Democracy*” label “in the name of what” people mobilised at particular times. More recently, flying the flag after 9/11 attacks responded to a sense of “*Homeland*” under attack (Rouquette, 1994). Similarly, the mobilisation of 4 million French joining the *Marche républicaine*, and the digital crowds formed in response to the Paris terrorist attacks in January 2015 appeared to respond to a sense of attack on “*Liberty*”, claimed as core value of the French Republic in its motto “*Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*”.

Mobilisation nexuses fuse and galvanise crowds, just like a call of duty for an orchestra to gather around a specific song. For example, Anderson (1983) pointed to the *nation* as “an imagined political community” for which millions of people were willing to die in World War I (Bouchat *et al.*, 2017). While symbols do not always trigger mobilisation: not always does the Marseillaise gather the French, but in “times of war”, it brings people together as one (Ernst-Vintila & Reicher, 2018), sweeping dissonant voices from the loud chorus in *cantus firmus* (Imhoff & Erb, 2009). War, conflict, threat, crisis circumstances make the appeal of such abstract ideas appear as very concrete and “personal” for many, in a sense of “shared” involvement and mobilisation (Rouquette, 1994).

Mobilisation nexuses short-fuse mass mobilisation, while social representations may mobilise groups

To remind the theoretical distinction between *collective* and *social*, Rouquette’s theorisation of mobilisation nexuses (1994) used the term “collective” in its Durkheimian sense, which refers to what is consensual in a *society as a whole*, as opposed to “social”, which refers to what is consensual within a *specific group* of that society. When a mobilisation nexus is activated, it *federates* a society beyond intergroup differences, *masking* intergroup nuances and dissenting voices under a single consensual stand. In contrast, social representations are group-specific and *maintain* intergroup differences: they do the double work of maintaining consensus among a group’s members, while they simultaneously *differentiate* them from other groups (*ibid.*, p. 15). Thus, mobilisation nexuses may short-fuse *mass mobilisation*, while social representations could mobilise *groups*.

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<sup>23</sup> Focussing on the social and psychological conditions of possibility of mass violence, Rouquette wrote that “a first necessary condition (...) is the existence of an orderly distinction, characterized by the formation of a group identity summed up by affiliation signs: emblems, clothes, flags, tattoos, hair style etc. A second condition is the act of the minority, once mass violence is always exercised against the minorities. The third condition is the exceptionality, because the time of the violence is an exceptional moment in the daily routine and there is an uncertainty of the everyday norms. The fourth condition refers to a certain culture of violence or to a knowledge of the appropriated manners from its manifestation, diffused by the media. Those four clauses do not explain mass violence completely, but they can help to build up a type of risk scale that could facilitate the prognostic, and even the prevention, in some specific cases” (Rouquette, 1999c, p. 201).

<sup>24</sup> Analysing collective action at the individual and inter-individual levels (Doise, 1982), the SIMCA model predicted that a stronger sense of social identity should relate to a stronger motivation to engage in collective action (through stronger adherence to group norms), a stronger perception and experience of injustice (through group-based emotional experience), and a stronger sense of efficacy (through empowerment) (Van Zomeren, Postmes & Spears, 2008).

## Authentication criterion of a mobilisation nexus

*The proof of the pudding is still in the eating*, Moscovici liked to remind (1994/2019): the operational *authentication criterion* of a mobilisation nexus is its capacity to gather the masses (Campos & Rouquette, 2000). In January 2015 as we saw, millions joined the *Marche Républicaine* and online digital crowds in response to the Paris terrorist attacks.

While mobilisation nexuses command unconditional response, their dearth of articulated cognitions disables them to *coordinate* action and cognition. Action, instead, draws on a fusion of affect and attitude. In other words, unlike social representations, their affective power triggers action, but cannot *derive* deliberated behaviour<sup>25</sup>.

This means that they may trigger dramatic, short-fused mobilisation, but not necessarily sustainable action. Social psychologists noted such salvo in collective mobilisations. McGarty *et al.* (2014) showed the rapidity of identity alignment of national symbols during the Tunisian revolution. Skitka (2005) explicitly linked such salvo to a change in meaning, or, rather, in how meaning was endorsed, when the context changed in post-9/11 terror attacks, dissolving the shared sense of threat on “*Homeland*”). Thus, while in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 flying the American flag reflected patriotism (“*Homeland*”), a consensual feeling unequivocally endorsed by the 72-84% Americans who flew it, the percentage decreased when its meaning “*shifted more toward the nationalistic end of the spectrum, a sentiment that fewer Americans may be prepared to endorse unequivocally*” (*ibid*) later, during the Iraq War. Its meaning was unequivocal after the 9/11 attacks while the activated mobilisation nexus masked intergroup differences, and became conditional, controversial shortly after, when the mobilisation nexus wave faded away, unmasking the intergroup differences (flying the flag during the Iraq war was an identity expressive behaviour for only a nationalistic fringe of Americans).

## Empirical evidence of a mobilisation nexus’ properties

Mobilisation nexuses were theorised as interpretative notions, around several shared properties (Rouquette, 1994, p. 69-71): 1) they are profoundly *collective*, i.e., shared by a society as a whole (a nation); 2) they are *federative*: they temporarily *mask* intra- and intergroup differences for as long as they are activated (by that, bringing *collective homogeneity* in a society)<sup>26</sup>; 3) they are a *mobilising* form of an ideology stripped down to its essence in crisis/conflict circumstances; 4) they are a reflection not of “*reality*” but of the *social imaginary*<sup>27</sup>; 5) they are signified by a *specific, irreplaceable label (homeland ≠ country, etc.)*, which is *exhaustive* in that it merges denotation and connotation (Rouquette, 1994, p. 70), e.g., *Je suis Charlie* merged denotation and connotation of an irreverent national identity in the name of “*Liberty*”; 6) their implementation in discourses is often rhetorically *emphatic*.

Empirical evidence for these properties came from studies illustrating the federative nature of mobilisation nexuses (Campos & Rouquette, 2000; Licata & Klein, 2000), their power to trigger massive affective clear-cut *approval/rejection* response (Rouquette, 1994; Wolter, 2011; Wolter & Rouquette, 2006), silence intergroup differences (Campos & Rouquette, 2000; Lo Monaco, *et al.*, 2007), shift the social thinking and action

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<sup>25</sup> In “war” circumstances, people are ready to die for a “cause”, but the “cause” does not prescribe day-to-day activities, for example.

<sup>26</sup> For example, the “*Je ne suis pas Charlie*” voices were little heard in the days following the attacks, and only in the week following the *Marche Républicaine* were these “back-to-back conversations” about “national unity” discussed in the traditional media (Badouard, 2016).

<sup>27</sup> See Anderson’s (1983) example of nation as an “*imagined community*” and how effective nationalism created the meaning of national categories that it assumes, *cf.* Reicher & Hopkins, 2001.



criteria from individual to collective (Ernst-Vintila, *et al.*, 2011); and illustrated a correlation between mobilisation nexuses and people's increased personal involvement and intention to act (Wolter & Rouquette, 2006).

### *Mobilisation nexuses and social representations: three differences*

Whether mobilisation nexuses are an extreme state of a social representation or a distinct form of social thinking is a matter of debate. However, some clarifications can be made.

By definition, as we saw, representations are *socially differential*, while mobilisation nexuses are *collectively unifying*. Social representations have structures, while mobilisation nexuses are structureless "knots". The dynamics of social representations are slow (they "emerge", "establish", "transform" and eventually "fade away", Rouquette & Rateau, 1998), while mobilisation nexuses are stable across history and short-fuse rapidly. Social representations allow polemic views, while mobilisation nexuses are beyond debate. In terms of levels in the architecture of social thinking, the stability and collective nature of nexuses places them closer to ideologies than to social representations.

#### *a. One voice vs. multiple voices*

As we saw, mobilisation nexuses trigger unified, uncompromising support/rejection, clear-cut stands, and silencing of dissenting voices. In contrast, social representations admit polemic views about a social object, dialogical debate, intergroup arguments, social-cognitive conflict. Moreover, while they assure ingroup consensus (through their *central system*), they admit interindividual variations within that group (through their *peripheral system*). Thus, social representations allow different voices about a social object. It is well possible, however, that social objects, *Liberty* for example, can be an object of a mobilisation nexus when perceived as being under attack, and an object of polemic social representations in regular times. This remains to be tested. If this is the case, it would simply confirm that how we view an Object depends both on the object and on the relationship between the viewer (Ego) and the Other (Alter) - cf. Figure 3.

#### *b. Relationship to collective action*

As we saw, mobilisation nexuses command clear-cut, radical stands. They silence dissenting voices, and command unanimous collective action, albeit temporary. However, such action does not "derive" from "knowledge", because mobilisation nexuses draw not on knowledge, but on the collective imaginary; instead, then, action draws on a fusion of affect and attitude. In contrast, social representations serve a practical purpose (Jodelet, 1989) by prescribing a *range* of actions that are suitable, acceptable, valued - and, by contrast, define those that are inappropriate or forbidden (Rouquette, 1998b). They are "guides for action" (Guimelli, 2001): they prescribe actions which derive from, and coordinate with, socially shared knowledge (the social representations' central core), and actions which are, from an individual's perspective, situationally adjusted (*via* the peripheral system).

#### *c. Existence of a structure*

By "structure" here we understand that of a system: "elements" connected by "relations" (Guimelli & Rouquette, 1992). Social representations are, as we saw, *defined* by their structure and their central core. In contrast,

mobilisation nexuses lack a structure: they *merge together* affect and attitudes in a “knot” (Rouquette 1994). Their lack of interindividual flexibility excludes the existence of a peripheral system and explains their exclusive call for clear-cut stands.

## Personal involvement

### A referential system for engagement and indifference

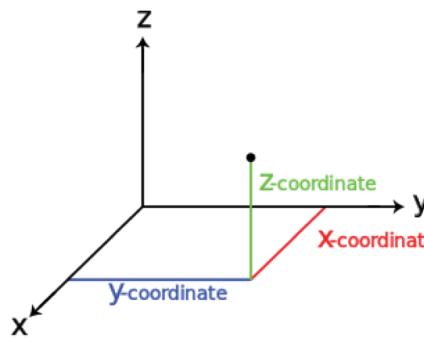
*Personal involvement* was developed by Rouquette aiming to explain the layout of different political worlds in our cognitive space (1988, 1997a, 1998c). In mathematics, a *space* is a set (sometimes called a universe) with some added structure. A *layout* is an arrangement of units in a given space, often measurable in frame of reference.

How can our knowledge and action, our acts and statements, be so different in public and in private? How is it that what we think and what we do are not necessarily in harmony with each other? Why do our discourses change depending on our interlocutor? Why do we act differently depending on the witnesses of our acts? Rouquette suggested that *personal involvement* may be a key social-psychological factor at work.

Personal involvement was conceived to understand the cognitive space in which the *plurivocité* of social objects is distributed. *Plurivoque*, as opposed to *univoque*, refers to an object whose meaning-hence function-is not single valued. Just as any mathematical space (metric space, vector space, etc.), cognitive space may be characterized by a number of dimensions that are measurable and that may be used to define an object's position in that space. The literature about personal involvement most often mentions three dimensions: object valuation (how people value it), personal concern (how people feel concerned by it) and perceived capacity to act towards it (Rouquette, 1997; Gruev-Vintila & Rouquette, 2007). The three dimensions can be measured on specific scales (Figure 2.6.). It is important to emphasize that, from a structural point of view, rather than the object's *nature* being that which defines its position in the person's cognitive space, it is the object's *position in her cognitive space* that defines its properties and its mobilising force<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> Rouquette (1980) and Juan's (2000) early work, today almost forgotten, brought evidence that personal involvement predicts and explains adhesion to beliefs, for example “alternative beliefs” (astrology, reincarnation, UFOs, near death experience, alternative medicine, etc.). Like Juan, other social representations she-researchers went almost unquoted, disappearing from the salient literature, hence “forgotten” (Haas, 2004; Coman, Manier, & Hirst, 2009). One cannot exclude a Rossiter's “Mathilda effect” (1993) at work in the field of social thinking when the male researchers' contributions remained visible, while, with the notable exceptions of Denise Jodelet and Claudine Herzlich, many female researchers' contributions went unquoted and faded away progressively until they became invisible. In writing this, I have in mind Sandrine Gaynard and Sophie Richardot's work on the conditionality theory, Isobel Stewart's work on the SCB model and the articulation between social representations and gender as a *thema*, Cathy Juan and Françoise Mariotti's work on personal involvement and gender, and possibly others. This gender-selective effect adds to the fact that most of the PhD supervisors in the field were male, many bright she-PhDs went untenured, unlike their male counterparts, and had to leave academia to earn a living, while male researcher's careers moved fast and strong, supported by other male researchers in the field. At least one “boys' club” association of male researchers has been formally active in France in the field of social representations in the last decade.



**Figure 2.6.** The three-dimensional model of personal involvement is an orthogonal coordinate system with three subjective, measurable, independent coordinates: risk valuation (x), personal concern (y), and perceived capacity to act (z)

Personal involvement describes a person's position towards an object, conceived as subjective, but socially determined referential system, and a predisposition to action (Flament & Rouquette, 2003), whose main function is "to discriminate in any circumstance [...] between what is important and what is futile, what is suitable (convenable) and unsuitable (inconvenable)... These operations are properly vital for decision-making, relational regulation, as they command engagement or withdrawal, and define both identity and alterity ('otherness')" (Rouquette, 1998b, p. 508). In other words, personal involvement distributes social objects in roughly two categories: those towards which people take action, and those towards which they do not. Thus, indifference and engagement, support and withdrawal, and, more generally, object-related social conduct is built and determined both individually and socially.

Personal involvement, then, appears, as a subjective, but socially ("and objectively") determined frame of reference (Rouquette, 1998c, p. 41), that corresponds to an individual's relationship to an object, (Rouquette, 1988, 1997a; Gruev-Vintila & Rouquette, 2007 ; Ernst-Vintila et al., 2011, Ernst-Vintila, 2016).

Stating that a person's *relative position* towards an object at a certain moment can be "defined" in this space, or that the object's position can be "defined" in the person's cognitive space is structurally equivalent and rests on an operational model of personal involvement literally conceived as a three-dimensional referential system in which each dimension can be independently measured in a coordinate system assumed to be orthogonal. Orthogonality means that the dimensions are (assumed to be) independent. A point's (or object's) position in this three-dimensional reference system can then be defined by three coordinates. In theory, those coordinates are : the value placed on an issue, perceived personal exposure, and the perceived capacity to act towards it (Rouquette, 1997; Gruev-Vintila & Rouquette, 2007).

### "Cultural" and factual involvement

Stating that personal involvement is a social-psychological variable means that a person's position towards an object is subjective, but socially determined. Indeed, the *historicity* of social thinking (cf. supra) also applies to personal involvement, pointing to its social, cultural, long-term roots in a group's culture and environment. This led Rouquette (1997) to consider two "levels", or aspects, in personal involvement: a cultural level, and a circumstantial, "factual" one. The "cultural" level refers to culture in an anthropological sense (for example European societies now vs. in the XIXth century). In contrast, the "circumstantial" level refers to a person's *ad-hoc* involvement (for example, finding herself caught in a demonstration).

The “cultural” and the “circumstantial” levels of involvement (Ernst-Vintila, Lo Monaco & Balan, 2010) differ in several respects (Ernst-Vintila, 2016, see Table hereunder). The “cultural” level of involvement is induced (shaped by) sociability itself, it is “historically” inherited, characteristic of a social group, it unfolds on the long term and has a collective influence on groups. An object’s subjective localisation in one’s cognitive universe, then, is not a mere result of personal choice, but shows a collective production (Rouquette, 1998a). By contrast, the “circumstantial” involvement is activated by situations and circumstances, it is anchored in the present, and has an individual hold. The first results confirm the distinction between the two levels of involvement (Ernst-Vintila, Balan & Lo Monaco, 2010, Demarque, *et al.*, 2011, Lheureux, *et al.*, 2011).

**Table 2.1**

*The two levels of personal involvement distinguished by Rouquette (1997), and their differences<sup>29</sup>*

<b>Cultural involvement</b>	<b>Circumstantial involvement</b>
a. Inherited	a. Situationally constructed
b. Long term	b. Short term
c. General, “global”	c. Local and specific
d. Social et collective effects	d. Individual et interindividual effects

### Personal involvement and social identity

The distinction between the social and the “cultural” (or social) and the “factual” (individual) aspects of involvement is important. It points to its social roots in the group’s history and identity. This points to a need to study personal involvement in relation to both social representational and social identity theories and to understand how a move from a personal to a social level of identification makes people act meaningfully and makes social identity/group norms salient.

### A three-dimensional model of personal involvement

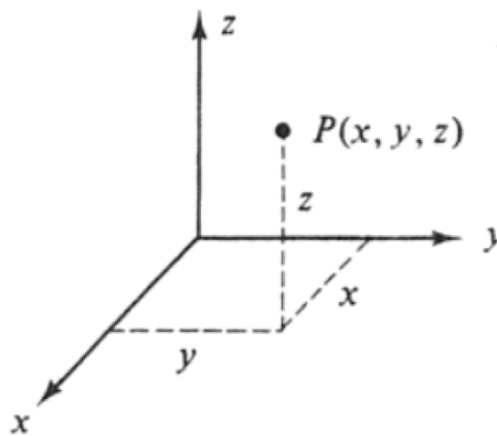
Rouquette’s operational definition of personal involvement was based on the following three cognitive dimensions, all of which can be measured on specific scales (1997):

- *Valuation* expresses the value placed on an issue, its importance for a person, estimated on a range from “it is a matter of no importance (-)” to “it is a matter of life and death (+)”.
- *Personal concern* is a self-declared estimation of a person’s concern with an object on a range from “it concerns others/everyone/society (-)” to “I feel specifically concerned (+)”.

<sup>29</sup> These points were suggested by M.-L. Rouquette during a seminar with I. Balan, A. Ernst-Vintila, H. Feertchak, C. Guimelli, G. Lo Monaco and J. L. Tavani (Paris Descartes University, May 2009).

- *Perceived capacity to act* is a gradation that goes from the feeling of being powerless to the feeling of being in full control (from “I cannot do anything about it (-)” to “it fully depends on me (+)”; regardless of who caused it, the question is to which extent I can protect myself from it). Rather than a matter of personal predisposition, action and resignation are a matter of “culture” (Rouquette, 1998c).

An object’s position in a person’s cognitive space is defined by its independent coordinates in this reference system (Rouquette, 1997): risk valuation (x), personal concern (y), and perceived capacity to act (z), as in Figure 2.7. These dimensions are measurable on subjective scales (Rouquette, 1997; Gruev-Vintila & Rouquette, 2007). Personal involvement is highest ( $x_{max}, y_{max}, z_{max}$ ) when a person feels that an object (a specific risk, a social issue, etc.) is a matter of life and death, when she feels concerned in a personal capacity, and competent/able to do something about it. A decrease in one of the three coordinates (for example, a lower concern with an issue) corresponds to a drop in personal involvement, hence a sense of indifference, as opposed to mobilisation when involvement is at its maximum.



**Figure 2.7.** Personal involvement defines an object’s position in a person’s mind (P) by three coordinates: risk valuation (x), personal concern (y), and perceived capacity to act (z)

Obviously, the “same” object may be “positioned” differently on each dimension by different people, or by one person in different social contexts. Those judgements, as we saw, are “subjective”, rather than “objective”, and they are socially and/or situationally determined. As we saw above, they depend on a person’s group membership or situational interactions, her social and cultural position, economic and symbolic position, her immediate relations within her group, etc. (Rouquette *et al.*, 2005, Rouquette, 2006).

It should be noted that, while the “object valuation” component of personal involvement is related to the global context, the norms, and the values of the individual’s *group*, its “personal exposure” component relates to a person’s *identity*. Considering that people’s cognitive activities are motivated and constrained by their particular social **position**, and that personal involvement articulates those *social* and *psychological* aspects, *personal involvement* is expected to play a major role in the elaboration and mobilisation of lay thinking (Rouquette, 2009, p.12).

Based on these three dimensions, order and even a hierarchy can be established among different objects, from cases to classes, from the particular to the more general, “*du concret à l’abstrait, du matériel à l’allusif, du factuel au sentimental, et discursivement du procès-verbal à l’ineffable (se polarisant ainsi vers (...) le nexus*” (Rouquette, 1998c, p. 42). This allows us to “map” positions (objects) in a person’s cognitive universe, identify “priority” objects that engage and mobilise, vs. objects doomed to indifference and disregard, as well as

to understand that their positions can vary with time, changes in social contexts and relationships, etc. (see the section on the *regard psychosocial*).

Relative to the “same” object, the three dimensions can vary between populations. Within the same population and the same object, they can vary over time, or their weight relative to one another can vary (for example as a social representation is setting up, or enters a transformation process, Mariotti & Reynier, 2000; Mariotti, 2003).

The three-dimensional model of personal involvement makes it possible to examine a person’s position towards various social issues/objects by evaluating the three coordinates for each issue and ordering those issues in the person’s cognitive space (mindscape), as in in Figure 2.7. Conversely, it allows ordering groups of persons who are similarly involved with a specific object (which from a structural point of view is the same).

For example, if we are interested in how societies think and mobilize differently when confronted with various social issues such as environmental risk, refugees, violence against women etc., we can use the notion of personal involvement to “find the position” (rank) of those social issues in a person’s cognitive space by finding their “coordinates” (xyz) and understanding which of the three “factors” may mobilise a specific group the most. Conversely, we can identify and order groups who are similarly involved by each of those issues: groups whose maximum involvement is with collective risk (for example, environmental activists), with refugees (some people who help refugees or the poor, but also support the Far Right or capitalism), with violence against women (feminist activists, etc.). In my work, I tried to understand how different aspects of personal involvement relate to the structure of social representations (Chapter 3).



## Chapter 2 - Synthesis

Chapter 2 focusses on the circumstances that disturb and polarize the daily life of a society, such as collective risks, which often provoke an exceptional *mass emergent sociality*, a sense of shared fate among “strangers”, with circumstantial relations marked by trust, respect, cooperation, solidarity, warmth. How do people think about their relationship to risk? What makes them act, or, on the contrary, refrain from acting? Can relationships with others and sociability phenomena play a role?

When I first became interested in the social thinking about collective risks, the relationships between the people who were facing risks were not really considered and the theory of social representations was barely used to understand their social thinking and behaviour. The dominant paradigms were the psychometric approach based on an intra-individual level of analysis, and, at the antipodes, the cultural theory of risk, which is a socio-anthropological approach. However, through their experience, their social construction, and their effects on social groups, collective risks appeared to be a social phenomenon. As such, they are subject to three “conditions”: cognition, communication and sociability. This makes it necessary to consider their social representations in their management and communication in societies.

First, I propose that the conceptual framework of social representations is necessary to include the response to extreme circumstances in the continuum of the more general social thinking landscape of contemporary societies, from which it is inseparable. Second, I present social thinking as a research object in social psychology and highlight its theoretical foundations and main concepts (*Landscapes*). Third, I introduce personal involvement, an explanatory variable of social thinking, which covers a person’s position of a person vis-à-vis a social object, and makes it possible to understand the “position” of objects in her cognitive space, hence her sense of mobilisation or indifference towards that social object (*Mindscapes*).



## Résumé du Chapitre 2

Le Chapitre 2 s'intéresse aux circonstances qui perturbent et polarisent la vie quotidienne d'une société, à partir de la question des risques collectifs comme circonstances qui provoquent souvent une sociabilité "de masse" circonstancielle exceptionnelle, un sens du destin partagé entre les personnes, avec des liens entre « étrangers » marqués par la confiance, le respect, la coopération, la solidarité, la chaleur. Comment les personnes pensent-elles leur rapport au risque ? Qu'est-ce qui les fait agir ou, au contraire, s'abstenir d'agir ? Les relations avec les autres et les phénomènes de sociabilité peuvent-ils jouer un rôle ?

Lorsque j'ai commencé à m'intéresser à la pensée sociale sur les risques collectifs, les rapports sociaux entre les personnes qui étaient confrontées étaient peu pris en compte et la théorie des représentations sociales était peu utilisée pour comprendre la pensée de sens commun, les pratiques et les comportements des personnes face à ces risques. Les paradigmes dominants étaient l'approche psychométrique basée sur un niveau d'analyse intra-individuelle, et, aux antipodes, la théorie culturelle du risque, qui est une approche socio-anthropologique. Cependant, par leur vécu, leur construction sociale, leurs effets sur les groupes sociaux, les risques collectifs apparaissent comme un phénomène social. En qualités, ils sont soumis à trois conditions de cognition, communication et sociabilité, ce qui rend nécessaire la prise en compte de leurs représentations sociales pour leur gestion et leur communication dans les sociétés.

Ici, premièrement, je propose un cadre conceptuel des représentations sociales nécessaire pour inscrire la réponse aux circonstances extrêmes dans la continuité d'un paysage de pensée plus général des sociétés contemporaines, dont elle est indissociable. Deuxièmement, je propose une présentation de la pensée sociale comme objet de recherche en psychologie sociale et rappelle ses fondements théoriques et notions principales (*Landscape*). Troisièmement, j'introduis l'implication personnelle, variable explicative de la pensée sociale, qui définit la position d'une personne vis-à-vis d'un objet social et permet de comprendre la "position" des objets dans son espace cognitif, son sens de l'engagement ou l'indifférence à leur égard (*Mindscapes*).

## Chapter 3

# Responding to extreme circumstances: social thinking and personal involvement

*... the work of every mental health professional, whatever their training, should be based on this principle: that however unusual, confusing, risky, destructive, overwhelming, or frightening someone's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours are, there is a way of making sense of them.*

Lucy Johnstone, 2018

This chapter describes my contribution to the research on social thinking and personal involvement in extreme circumstances.

### Contributions to the understanding of social thinking under extreme circumstances

Unlike individual risks (car accidents, personal health risks, etc.), extreme collective circumstances (disasters, emergencies, terrorist attacks, epidemics, societal crisis) affect communities *as a whole*. How people experience them and how they make sense of them are collective matters. What earthquakes mean in a society is far from their scientific understanding. The significance of a global financial crisis is both a matter of individual challenge for a family's breadwinners and a collective threat to a society's economic and social foundations. In the recent years, terrorism in Western societies appeared as a matter of security, estrangement and "religion". Totalitarianism as an extreme situation during the Second World War, the Shoah, and the Cold War marked world political events, transformed experiences of oppression around the world, and still imprints thinking societies generations after its overturn.

My research explored two red thread questions. The first aimed to understand how societies thought about collective risk, with visible effects for action or refraining from action. I write about it hereunder. The second focussed on the role of personal involvement in this process and will form the second part of this chapter.

## Natural hazards

The first series of empirical studies on collective risk concerned the social thinking about earthquakes in Bucharest, capital of Romania, a city of two million people, located at 160 km South from Romania's major epicenter (Vrancea). Bucharest is a city of the size of Paris. It is the European capital with the highest seismic risk and the tenth in the world due to its concentration of buildings and population<sup>30</sup>. It was vividly marked by the devastating earthquakes of 1940 (Richter magnitude 7.4, 1000 dead, 500 of whom in Bucharest) and 1977 (Richter magnitude 7.2, 1.500 dead, 1400 of whom in Bucharest). From 1977 to 2002, when my research started, Bucharest had been prone to several other earthquakes<sup>31</sup> with a lower magnitude (6.4 to 7.1) and especially less intense (less devastating effects). During my research, it was hit by an earthquake of magnitude 6.2 (October, 27, 2004).



<sup>30</sup> As a comparison, Nice, where recent earthquakes reached a maximum magnitude of 4.9, is one of the safest European cities riskwise (<https://bit.ly/2KXnK3u>, accessed 10 August 2018). In Southern France, recently subject to a study of social thinking about seismic risk, is a low to moderate seismic risk area, whose reference events were more than one hundred years ago (Lambesc, 1909, estimated magnitude 6,2; Nice, 1887, estimated magnitude 6,5), risk "experience" seems insufficient to make earthquakes an issue significant enough to trigger social representational processes (Chesterman, 2015).

<sup>31</sup> During the period 1977-2002, besides the earthquakes with the epicenter in Western (Timis) and Eastern Romania (Black Sea, etc.) the earthquakes experienced in Bucharest similarly to those in 1940 and 1977 (epicenter in Vrancea) were: August 30, 1986, magnitude 7.1; May 30, 1990, an earthquake of magnitude 6.9, followed the next day by an earthquake of magnitude 6.4. Sources: <http://www.infp.ro/cutremurele-din-romania-si-efectele-lor/>, <https://bit.ly/2B7IPIQ>, accessed 10 August 2018.

**Figure 3.1a**

*Bucharest city center before and after the earthquake of November 10, 1940.<sup>32</sup>*



**Figure 3.1b**

*Bucharest city center before and after the earthquake of March 4, 1940.<sup>33</sup>*



**Figure 3.1c**

<sup>32</sup> Source: <https://www.bucurestiivechisinoi.ro/2015/12/imagini-rare-cu-bucurestiul-dupa-cutremurul-din-1940-bloc-de-14-etaje-distrus-complet/>

<sup>33</sup> Source: [https://www.reddit.com/r/europe/comments/7im5tn/bucharest\\_1977\\_vrancea\\_earthquake/](https://www.reddit.com/r/europe/comments/7im5tn/bucharest_1977_vrancea_earthquake/)

Nice, currently one of the safest European cities earthquakewise, after the earthquake of February 23, 1887<sup>34</sup>.

I carried out my studies within the structural approach to social representations using the BCS model and procedure (Chapter 2, Annex 1), in order to conduct the finest analysis possible of the representational structures. To my knowledge, it was the first time that this advanced representational model was used about collective risk. I focussed on the structure of those of seismic risk elaborated by people who lived in cities that had (Bucharest), vs. had not (Caen, Dijon) risk experience. The results showed that the social representations of risk were normative in all cases, but became more practically oriented for those who had experienced risk. At first glance, this result may seem vapid if it wasn't for the understanding that it brings about passiveness and preparedness, evaluation and action: a normative representation is useful in judging. On the other hand, a more practically oriented representation is instrumental and likely to enable the use of more diversified risk-related information for practical purposes (risk mitigation behaviour) (Gruev-Vintila & Rouquette, 2007).

The studies started from the considerations described in Chapter 2 about the relations between practice and the structure of social representations. What about the risk experience and the social representations of risk, an uncertain object? How are its social representations structured? Is their structure "balanced" in terms of practical and judgemental aspects? In other words, are their functional and the normative components in balance, or does one prevail over the other? Does practice impact those two aspects in the same way? This is important to know, because a more structured, more complex, and more "balanced" representational system (operationally: one in which the praxis and attribution valencies reach 0.5 - cf. BCS model, Chapter 2) enables us "to recognize and use more diverse information, to take into account a greater number of new circumstances and problems" (Guimelli, 1995), with effects on behavioural prescriptions (for example, Er-Rafiy & Brauer, 2010, showed that increasing perceived variability brings behavioural nuance by reducing stigma and discrimination). How does risk-related experience affect the structure of the social representations of risk? Is risk culture enough to craft a practically oriented social representation?

To address these questions, I interviewed three groups of participants (N=410) using a BCS questionnaire :

- Participants in Group E0 (N=114) were residents of a low seismicity area, with no risk experience (control group). They were questioned in April 2002 and February 2003 in Caen and Dijon, France.
- Participants in Group E1 (N=210) lived in a moderate seismicity area, prone to high intensity earthquakes (Bucharest). Their average age (21 years old) was a way for us to make sure that they had not experienced the last major earthquake (1977). These participants had not experienced a major earthquake themselves, but they had a risk experience rooted in the risk culture transmitted in families, schools, official information, the media, institutions, conversations, etc. Participants in this group were questioned in February 2004 in Bucharest, Romania.
- Finally, participants in Group E2 (N=86) were earthquake survivors from Bucharest residents of the same age as those in Group E1. These participants were questioned in Bucharest, Romania, in November 2004, 10 days after a potentially destructive earthquake of magnitude 6 (Richter scale) hit the city on October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2004, forming a group that had direct (*live*) risk experience.

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<sup>34</sup> Source: <http://jeangilletta.com/fr/produit/nice-place-mozart-seisme-1887/>

Risk-related practice was thus operationalized as a selection variable through the participants' actual seismic risk experience: Absent/Collective/Direct<sup>35</sup>. One dependent variable was the structure of the social representation of seismic risk, analysed using the valency indexes associated to the Basic Cognitive Schemes model (for the calculation procedures, see also Fraïssé and Stewart, 2002).

The respondents participated in the standard procedure associated to the BCS model and filled out the BCS questionnaire (cf. Annexes 4 and 5). The inductor used to generate the associative answers ("elements of representation") was "earthquake" (a "central" element, cf. also Chesterman, 2015). The questionnaire allowed us to measure its connectivity, to evaluate the overall structure organisation and the respective activation of the functional and normative/evaluative representational components based on the valency indexes (Guimelli and Rouquette, 1992 ; Fraïssé and Stewart, 2002 ; cf. Chapter 2).

*Participants' risk-related practice significantly organised the structure of their social representation of risk*

The results in Table 3.2. show the effects of risk-related practice (earthquake experience) on the social representations of risk.

**Table 3.2**

*Effects of risk-related practice (earthquake experience) on the structure of the social representations of risk.*

<b>Risk-related practice (Earthquake experience)</b>	<b>Structure of the social representation (min = 0, max = 1)  Vt</b>	<b>Functional component of the social representation (min = 0, max = 1)  Vp</b>	<b>Evaluative component of the social representation (min = 0, max = 1)  Va</b>
No risk experience (E0)	0,29	0,19	0,46
Risk culture (E1)	0,35	0,24	0,53
Direct (live) risk experience (E2)	0,42	0,36	0,56
<i>Significance</i>	<i>F(2,407)=41,89, p&lt;.01</i>	<i>F(2,407)=51,09, p&lt;.01</i>	<i>F(2,407)=12,87, p&lt;.01</i>

*Note.* The degree of global organisation of the social representation is indicated by the *total valency index* (Vt), an aggregated index of the *praxis* and *attributive* valency indexes. The degree of organisation of the *functional* component of the representation is indicated by the *praxis valency index* (Vp). The degree of organisation of the *evaluative* component of the representation is indicated by the *attributive valency index* (Va).

Table 3.2. indicates that in all cases, regardless of the intensity of risk-related practice, the normative/evaluative component of the social representation of seismic risk prevailed over its functional component. A post-hoc HSD test of Tukey confirmed that, regardless of the intensity of risk-related practice, the difference between the

<sup>35</sup> In this series of studies, I also measured / experimentally manipulated the participants' personal involvement. I will describe these results separately.

normative/evaluative component of the social representation and its functional component was significant at  $\alpha=0.5$ . This result indicated that the social representation of the seismic risk was of a normative type. Thus, rather than practical instrumental aspects, its normative aspects prevailed, making it useful in circumstances where a judgement should be made, but giving it a low efficiency in prescribing collective risk-related conducts.

Table 3.2. also shows that increasing risk-related practice had a significant structuring effect on the social representation of risk ( $V_t$  :  $F(2,407)=41,89$ ,  $p<.01$ ). It also shows that increasing risk-related practice significantly organised both the functional and the normative components of the social representation ( $V_p$  (functional component):  $F(2,407)=51,09$ ,  $p<.01$ ;  $V_a$  (normative component):  $F(2,407)=51,09$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Thus, participants' risk-related practice (earthquake experience) significantly organised their social representation of risk, in both its functional and normative/evaluative components. From a structural perspective, such increased connectivity among the representational elements mean a more robust structure, with an increased number, possibly new types of relations among the representational elements, which should enable the representation to recognize and use more diverse information and take into account a greater number of risk-related circumstances.

### Comparing three representational states of the social representation of seismic risk

Let us now take a closer look at the effects of risk experience on the structure of the social representation of seismic risk in its three representational states (E0, E1, E2). Figure 3.4. shows the effects of risk related practice on the functional and normative structural aspects of social representations.

**Effects of risk related practice on the valency indexes of the SR components  $F(2,407)=11,94$ ;  $p<.01$**

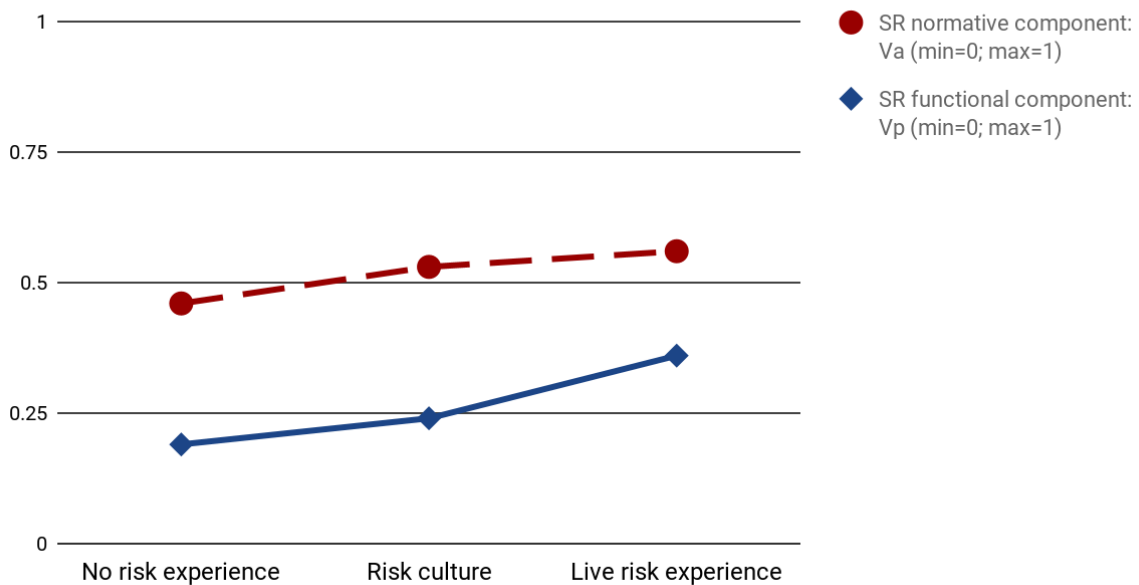


Figure 3.4. Effects of risk related practice on the functional and normative structural aspects of social representations of seismic risk.

### Structural dynamics

Figure 3.4 shows that increasing the practice level involves the structuring of the representation in both functional and normative components. Let us now focus closely on how practice impacts the structural dynamics of each. To facilitate this, let us:

- equate the variation of the valency indexes  $V$  as a function of risk experience with a function  $V_k = f(\text{Risk experience})$ , where  $k$  indicates the type of valency index;  $k$ , then, takes three values:  $t$ ,  $p$ , or  $a$ , depending on what it designates: total valency  $V_t$ , praxis valency  $V_p$ , or the attributive valency  $V_a$ .

- remind that:
  - the  $V_k$  function is defined on the interval  $[0, 1]$  (the valency theoretic variation interval)
  - its value expected at equilibrium is 0.5 (value observed in the stationary state of the representation, where the representation is stable, organized, and not engaged in a dynamic process - cf. Rouquette & Rateau, 1998 for a detailed explanation of the value).

Dynamics of “earthquake” total connectivity: analysis of the function  $V_t = f(\text{Risk experience})$

Figure 3.4 shows that the function  $V_t = f(\text{Risk experience})$  is an increasing function, with a quasi-linear increase in the total valence  $V_t$  as a function of risk experience. The minimum of the function  $V_t = f(\text{Risk experience})$  is  $V_{t \text{ min}} = 0.29$  and corresponds to the total valency recorded for participants who have no earthquake experience (E0, French sample); its maximum is  $V_{t \text{ max}} = 0.42$  and corresponds to the total valency recorded for the participants who experienced a potentially destructive earthquake (E2, Romanian sample). As can be seen, even at its maximum, the total valency approaches the value expected at equilibrium, but remains lower:

$$V_{t \text{ max}} = 0,42 < 0,5$$

Dynamics of “earthquake” functional connectivity: analysis of the function  $V_p = f(\text{Risk experience})$

Figure 3.4. shows that the minimum of the function  $V_p = f(\text{Risk experience})$  is  $V_{p \text{ min}} = 0.19$  and corresponds to the praxis valency recorded for participants who have no earthquake experience (French sample); its maximum is  $V_{p \text{ max}} = 0.36$  and corresponds to the praxis valency recorded for participants who experienced a potentially destructive earthquake (E2, Romanian sample).

By comparing the variation of  $V_k = f(\text{Risk experience})$  for the three values of  $k$  ( $t$ ,  $p$ , or  $a$ , depending on what it designates: total valency  $V_t$ , praxis valency  $V_p$ , or the attributive valency  $V_a$ ) we find that **the praxis valency is the index that varies the most**. A quick calculation shows:

$$\begin{aligned} V_t &= V_{t \text{ max}} - V_{t \text{ min}} = 0.13 \\ \mathbf{V_p} &= \mathbf{V_{p \text{ max}} - V_{p \text{ min}} = 0.17} \\ V_a &= V_{a \text{ max}} - V_{a \text{ min}} = 0.10 \end{aligned}$$

A gradient analysis<sup>36</sup> of the graphical function  $V_p = f(\text{Risk experience})$  in Figure 3.4. shows that the slope is steeper in the second part of the function (from E1 to E2). The steeper slope reflects an accented effect of the independent variable. Here, the accentuation of the slope reflects an **effect of live risk experience on the praxis valency stronger than that of risk culture**. In other words, if both types of earthquake experience (live or risk culture) consolidate the functional aspects of the representation (the Tuckey test shows that the difference between the  $V_p$  recorded under both modalities is frankly significant at  $= 0.5$ ) **the lived experience of the earthquake is that structures that structures them more than the experience “inherited” risk culture**.

In the same time, by comparing the three  $V_k \text{ max}$ , we see that, despite its increased reactivity to the effect of practices, **the  $V_p \text{ max}$  praxis valency is the valency index that remains the farthest from the expected value at equilibrium (0.5) even in the most favorable condition** (among E2 Romanian participants who experienced a potentially destructive earthquake):

$$V_{p \text{ max}} = 0.36 \ll 0.5$$

Dynamics of “earthquake” normative connectivity: analysis of the function  $V_a = f(\text{Risk experience})$

Figure 3.4. shows that the minimum of the function  $V_a = f(\text{Risk experience})$  is  $V_{a \text{ min}} = 0.46$  and corresponds to the attribution valency noted for participants who have no earthquake experience (French sample); its maximum is  $V_{a \text{ max}} = 0.56$ , noted for those who experienced a potentially destructive earthquake (E2, Romanian sample).

A **gradient examination** of the graphical function  $V_a = f(\text{Risk experience})$  shows that the slope is steeper in the function’s first part (from E0 to E1). As we saw, a steeper slope reflects an accented effect of the independent variable. Here, the accentuation of the slope reflects an **effect of risk culture on the attributive valency stronger than that of live risk experience itself, a result that is important to note**. It means that surviving an even destructive earthquake impacts less the representation’s evaluative component than risk culture (collective experience) does.

This latter result is of particular interest to us theoretically, because it confirms a theoretical prevision about the remarkable sensitivity of the normative component of representation to the social-global context in which this representation is elaborated (Abric and Guimelli, 1998, cf. Chapter 2). In the case of the representation of seismic risk, the social-global context is the physical and social environment, through its categories of sociability and culture, including risk culture, which provides (the Romanian participants) or does not provide (French participants) with a collective experience and the norms a shared resource in building social representations,

<sup>36</sup> A line gradient tells us how far up (or down) we go when we take one step on  $x$  to the right (here, one step to the right means an increase in risk experience).



including when the social issue at stake is that of the earthquakes as, necessary for the development of the social representation of risk. Importantly too, this shows that the social thinking about risk is included in how societies think, and not simply a “risk perception” matter apart from other issues.

If we now test the significance of this result by comparing the respective effects of risk culture (E0-E1 comparison) and lived experience (E1-E2 comparison) on the evaluative connectivity of “earthquakes”, the comparison shows that the evaluative component is significantly more structured by risk culture ( $F(1.322) = 17.94, p < .01$ ). This effect bypasses that of lived risk experience (the variation of  $V_a$  between E1 and E2 is not significant). A post-hoc Tuckey test shows that the difference due to the effect of the lived experience on the attributive valency is not significant.

This analysis suggests that even without a lived experience, risk culture alone is sufficient to structure normative connectivity and increase the attributive valency up to saturation value, close to, in fact even greater than, that expected at the representation’s stationary equilibrium ( $V_a = 0.53 > 0.5$ ).

Rather than the real, actually lived experience of earthquakes, the key factor in structuring the normative connectivity seems to be the “reconstructed”, “inherited”, “refracted” experience provided by the participants’ social-global context (risk culture). In other words, people’s physical and social environment that feeds risk culture seems to be sufficient to structure the evaluative component of risk representation in the absence of any actual experience of risk.

**In contrast, the functional component of the representation is more sensitive to the lived experience of earthquakes (“active practice”). Indeed, as shown in Figure 3.4, once the evaluative connectivity is saturated (E1), increasing the “earthquake’s” connectivity as an effect of lived experience relies on the structuring potential<sup>37</sup> of its functional connectivity.** This is indeed what happens: the effect of lived experience significantly impacts the activation of the functional connections, and is insignificant for the evaluative ones.

Moreover, we have seen that the most important impact on the functional component is obtained not through risk culture but through *lived* experience, and that even with such significant increase, the praxis valency, which indicates the representation’s instrumental orientation, remains lower than the value expected at equilibrium.

Finally, returning to the comparison of the variations of  $V_k$  under the effect of the Risk experience shows that the valency index which varies *the least* is the attributive valency. We propose two reasons for this. First, the attributive valence is already high (saturated and close to the value expected at equilibrium) already for participants who have no risk seismic practice (French sample):  $V_a \text{ min} = 0.46$ . Then, as we saw, the effect of risk related practice is preferentially exerted on the functional component and not on the normative component of the representation (as seen above, the effect of the lived experience of a potentially destructive earthquake on the evaluative component is not significant).

### *Health and the experience of collective risk*

To study the effects of risk experience on health, we examined the social representations’ emotional aspects. We were especially interested in the emotional markers of stress, such as fear, known as a marker for post-disaster mental disorders (Baillie & Rapee, 2005). We focussed on the Romanian groups (E1 and E2). The results are hereunder (unpublished).

Table 3.3. shows the percentages of emotional items among the overall answers induced by “earthquake” after hapax elimination (the words cited once). The emotional items are ranked in descending order of the frequencies recorded in group E2, in which participants survived a potentially destructive earthquake.

First, both groups express a clearly emotional aspect, in which fear and panic account for a notable 15 to 30% of the associated responses, with remarkably no significant difference between the survivors and their fellows socialised within the same risk culture.

Second, the overall emotional aspect of the social representation is significantly higher among survivors ( $\chi^2 = 27.06, \text{dof} = 15, p < .01$ ). However, only few items show significant variation: while survivors are significantly more aware of their own *powerlessness* and the earthquakes’ *unpredictability*, they also feel *less* pain and sadness in the actual aftermath.

This apparently paradoxical finding should be better understood, perhaps as a potential effect of the circumstantial increase in sociability during the earthquake, in the light of the “*social cure*” evidence, according to which a sense of shared fate and shared identity amongst people helps providing each other with more social support and effectively resist the adverse effects of situational stressors (Haslam & Reicher, 2006; Jetten, Haslam & Haslam, 2012).

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<sup>37</sup> Saturation potential could be defined as the difference between the observed activation state and the expected activation state at equilibrium.

**Table 3.3**

The emotional items and their percentages of occurrence among the answers induced by "earthquake", ranked in descending order of the frequencies recorded in group E2

<b>Social representational elements</b>  <b>Induced answers</b> <i>(inductor: earthquake)</i>	<b>E1</b> <b>Risk culture</b>  %	<b>E2</b> <b>Live experience</b> <b>(survivors)</b>  %	<b>Significativity</b> $\chi^2$ (ddl = 1) <sup>38</sup>
Panic	7,02	10,27	NS
Fear	7,81	8,75	NS
Inevitable	0,96	2,66	NS
Unpredictable	0,80	2,28	$\chi^2 = 6,78, p < .01$
Powerlessness (impuissance)	0,16	1,90	$\chi^2 = 5,25, p < .02$
Despair	0,16	1,90	NS
Tragedy	0,16	1,14	NS
Hysteria	0,16	0,76	NS
Insecurity (lack of safety)	0,64	0,76	NS
Pain	2,07	0,76	$\chi^2 = 3,86, p < .05$
Psychic shock	0,48	0,38	NS
Destiny	0,32	0,38	NS
Hope	0,32	0,38	NS
Sadness	0,80	0,00	$\chi^2 = 3,06, p < .01$
Compassion	0,16	0,00	NS
Detachment	0,16	0,00	NS
<b>Total</b>	<b>22,18<sup>39</sup></b>	<b>32,32</b>	$\chi^2 = 27,06, ddl=15, p < .01$

<sup>38</sup> Chi 2 were calculated based on the occurrence frequency in the associated answers population.

<sup>39</sup> Percentage of emotional items in the overall population of associated answers (the difference to 100% consists of other types of items: victims, damage, etc.)

## Conclusion

The social representations of seismic risk are normative, rather than functional. Thus, rather than instrumental aspects, their normative aspects prevail, making it useful in circumstances where a judgement should be made, more than when it needs to prescribe risk-related behaviour.

To my knowledge, this study was the first to examine the normative vs. functional aspects of the social representations of risks, and find that normative aspects prevailed in the structure of risk representation. Is then such normative character typical of the social representations of natural hazards? Certainly Picon's field data (2006) showed, from a historical and sociological perspective, the weight of the social norms in the making of and the transformation of the social representation of collective risk (flooding). At the time of my studies, though, no similar empirical data was available in (social) psychology, to confirm or refute this hypothesis, but later, Baggio's (2006) studies confirmed that the social representations of flooding were also normative; and Chesterman (2015) also found a low instrumental orientation of the social representations of seismic risk in Southern France (less exposed to seismic risk than Bucharest).

The second important result shows that the actual experience of a potentially destructive earthquake significantly structures the social representation's functional component, with no significant effect on its evaluative component, and has nuanced repercussions on its emotional aspects.

My studies showed that increased risk related practice reflects a representation of risk with a more robust structure, an increased number and possibly new types of *instrumental* relations among the representational elements, which should enable use and recognition of more diverse information, and take into account a greater number of risk-related circumstances. Bringing nuance, my findings showed that, if both "risk culture" and actual risk experience activate a representation's functional aspects, actual risk experience has the most important impact.

This finding has practical value. Its important implication is that risk mitigation campaigns benefit from practically "training" in addition to "informing" people (simulations, etc.).

As far as the representation's *normative* aspects were concerned, my findings showed, in contrast, that the key factor in structuring them is not the actually lived experience of earthquakes, but an "inherited", "reconstructed", "refracted" experience provided by the participants social-global context (risk culture). In other words, people's physical and social environment that feeds risk culture seems to be enough to saturate and fully structure the evaluative component of risk representation in the absence of any actual risk experience.

Theory wise, this result is important because it lends empirical support to the idea that the social representations of seismic risk not only depend on participants' risk-related experience, or the earthquake itself, but on the more general norms and values shared within a given community, a key assumption in which the making of social representations is guided by people's sociability (Moscovici, 1961; Rouquette & Rateau, 1998).

Finally, healthwise, my findings showed that the participants who survived a potentially destructive earthquake express more emotional aspects than their fellows socialised within the same risk culture. This result seems intuitive, but its nuances are not: in fact, these participants report (unsignificantly) more panic and fear, but *less* suffering and sadness. This somewhat intriguing result should be further examined in the light of the recent "*social cure*" hypothesis, considering the new evidence about the circumstantial sociability during disasters, in which a sense of shared fate and shared identity amongst people helped to provide each person with more social support and effectively to resist the adverse effects of situational stressors (Haslam & Reicher, 2006; Jetten, Haslam & Haslam, 2012).

## Financial crisis

Finding that the social representations of a collective risk are normative, rather than functional and that social practice preferentially impacts the instrumental aspects of their structure, thus “likely” making them able to prescribe more diversified behaviour, still required testing of how “likely” this was indeed.

Shortly after my earthquake studies, a crisis in the United States subprime mortgage market fully blew in a global financial crisis whose emblem was the collapse of the Lehman Brothers investment bank in September 2008. That financial crisis was considered by some economists to have been the worst since the Great Depression of the 1930s. It was followed by a global recession (“the Great Recession”), and the European debt crisis. In the public understanding, this situation had the contours of an “earthquake in confidence” and a societal crisis, in which excessive risk-taking by banks appeared as a key factor, and indeed a “cause”, along with consumerism, “an American value”, historian Sheldon Garon argues (2011), with an idea that in the United States it is even patriotic to spend, rather than save.

In this context, I wanted to empirically test if the social representations that had a more functional orientation were indeed more effective in guiding behaviour, as the theory seemed to suggest. To tackle this, I carried out a study in France in October 2008 and compared the social thinking about the financial crisis, actual behaviours and intentions for action in two groups of participants, with financial practice as a selection variable: senior managers of the financial sector, and lay people<sup>40</sup>.

Using *practice* as a selection variable was done in other studies about the social representations of the global financial crisis, independently from my earthquake studies. For example, Kirchler and Kastlunger (2010) analyzed the structure of the representations held by Austrian financial experts and laypeople. They found that, while two consensual, “potentially central” elements organized the representations in both groups: “unemployment” and “banks”. However, the meaning they held in each group was specific: for ordinary citizens the crisis “meant” “speculation”, which was not the case for the bankers, who replaced this element with “the United States” which they held responsible for the financial crisis (“scapegoating”). *Scapegoating* in the context of the global financial crisis is a social thinking strategy (Dollard *et al.*, 1939; Glick, 2005) that had already been identified in a Swiss study by Scheidegger and Tüscher (2009), two authors interested in how people perceived their self-efficacy and made attributions of responsibility for the emergence of the crisis (known to promote orthodox attitudes that reflect dominant beliefs shared in a group, cf. Dechonchy, 1971; Scheidegger, Clémence, & Staerklé, 2010). They questioned two categories of participants, with practice as a selection variable (business administration vs. social science students). They found that future business people made attributions of responsibility for the global crisis that *justified* the *statu quo*: they blamed specific actors of the industry but not the industry itself (*scapegoating* strategy), perceived the consequences of the crisis as less unjust, and suggested liberal economic measures rather than radical changes to the capitalist system to solve it. In contrast, social science students endorsed *less* fair market ideology, attributed more responsibility for the crisis to the market economy (the system in its whole rather than its specific actors), and suggested responses to the crisis that *challenged* the entire capitalist system.

With *practice* as an already tested selection variable in those studies, my first hypothesis concerned its effects on the social representations of the global financial crisis. Based on the collective risk studies (Gruev-Vintila, 2005; Gruev-Vintila & Rouquette, 2007; Baggio, 2006; Baggio & Rouquette, 2006), I expected that both senior executives of the financial sector, and lay people would express normative rather than functional representations of the financial crisis. However, I expected that senior executives of the financial sector would

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<sup>40</sup> The study also measured the participants’ personal involvement. I will describe these results separately. Part of the data with the lay citizens came from S. Delouvé. At that time, I was not aware of his criminal conviction for plagiarism. The data was collected by pen and paper and I entered it myself. This part of the data comes from students.

express a more functional social representation. And especially that their representation would be able to prescribe more diversified behaviour in the aftermath of the crisis.

Operationally, I used a lighter methodology than in the earthquake studies (because the questionnaires were administered in the street and bankers had little time to answer them two weeks after the fall of Lehman Brothers), so after pre-testing I opted for a free association task followed by a procedure to measure the representations' normativity and functionality indexes (Moliner, 1993). More precisely, I expected a higher functionality index in the social representation held by senior financial executives.

### *Normativity and functionality indexes*

The normativity index "IN" and functionality index "IF" provide a measure of the representational elements' normative / evaluative orientation.

To calculate the normativity index, participants gave five induced words to the inducer "financial crisis", then briefly stated how they "judged" the financial crisis, and finally evaluated on a 10-point scale how each of their five associated answers contributed to their "judgment". The normativity index was calculated based on the score on this scale. The higher the score, the more the orientation is normative.

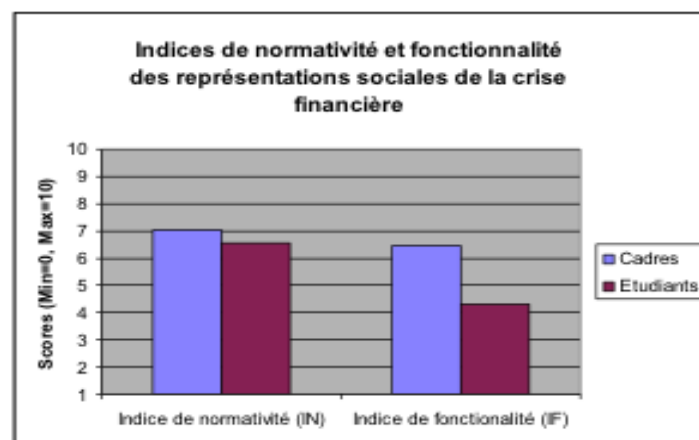
To calculate the functionality index, I used the same procedure, but instead of "a judgement", the participants reported an "action" ("what we can do") about the financial crisis, then evaluated on a 10-point scale how each of their five associated answers contributed to the expressed "action". The score measured each item's instrumental orientation. The higher the score, the more the orientation is instrumental.

### *Behaviour and behavioural intentions*

Participants answered open questions about the actions they took in response to the financial crisis, as well as their intentions of action if the crisis were to continue.

### *Results*

As shown in Figure 3.5, the representations were normative in both groups, but in the senior financial executives' group they had a significantly stronger functional orientation ( $F(1,27) = 4.48; p < .05$ ).



**Figure 3.4a**

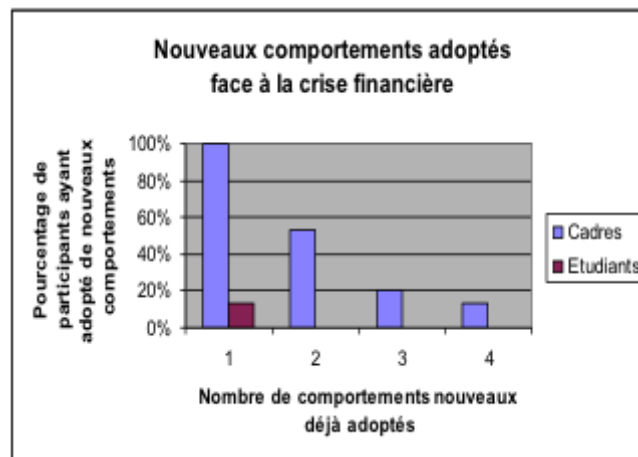
*Functional and normative indexes of the social representations about the financial crisis held by senior financial managers and lay persons*

*A more functional representation is more instrumental in driving behaviour*

Was their representations' functional orientation related to increased conducts? The results hereunder showed that it was, in three ways. A more functional representation (senior financial executives) drove more people to take action in response to the financial crisis; drove an increased number of risk-reduction actions, and was related to increased number of intentions for action if the financial crisis were to continue.

*Percentage of people in each group who took action in response to the financial crisis*

Figure 3.8. shows the percentage of participants in each group who had already achieved at least one financial risk-related action in the weeks following the crisis.



**Figure 3.6.** Percentage of senior financial managers vs. lay persons who took at least one action in response to the financial crisis in the weeks following it.

Figure 3.6 shows two important things. First, indeed many more senior financial executives took at least one action in response to the financial crisis (100% of senior executives vs. 13% of ordinary citizens, a percentage similar to that found in the general population by Roland-Levy, Pappalardo Boumelki, Guillet, 2009). Second, a number of them said that they took not only one, but up to four new behaviours in response to the crisis. The actions concerned change in spending, family-work balance, time management, asset and resource management, etc. (percentages in Table 3.4 hereunder).

*Risk-reduction actions taken in response to the crisis*

Table 3.4 shows the actions taken by senior financial managers in response to the financial crisis and the percentage of participants in this group who declared having taken them.

These results should be discussed in relation to those of other risk studies. Weber (1997) called *single action bias* a phenomenon noted in different contexts (medical diagnosis, farmers' response to climate change) according to which a significant proportion of people adopt one, and only one, action in response to risk; they are far less likely to adopt more than one action (more actions, however, would allow a more effective protection against risk). While the actions adopted were not all the same for all the people, Weber found that they tended to be limited to one. He concluded that, since reducing a complex risk should involve a portfolio of actions (several measures, actions, etc.), it would be beneficial for people to engage in an *analytical* (rather than *affective*) risk processing. Weber's study is obviously based on an economic model of individual rationality. However, it is interesting to note that it points to an increased number of actions related to the different sides of risk, therefore requiring a complex understanding. In the structural approach, this would mean a more complex structure of the social representation, especially a more complex functional component: this correlation is indeed

confirmed with senior financial executives (14% of whom avoided the single action bias and took more than one risk-reduction action, vs. none of the lay citizens, cf. Figure 3.6).

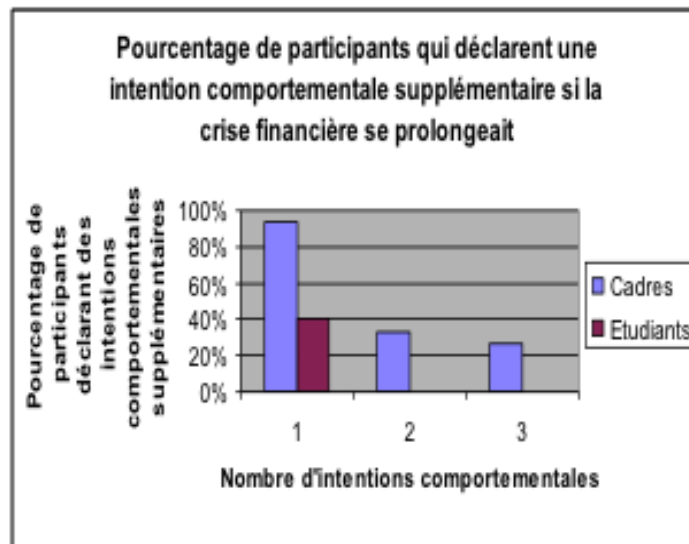
**Table 3.4b**

*Actions taken by senior financial and the percentage of participants who declared using them*

Actions taken by senior financial managers in response to the financial crisis	Percentage (rounded)
Spending with caution	23%
Working more	19%
Prudent financial management (investments)	19%
Travel freezing	8%
Increasing client contact (explore job market)	8%
Increasing the focus on the family	8%
Delaying buying second home	4%
Changing one's analysis grid	4%
Analysing alternative investment opportunities as some areas may go down (it's good to buy)	4%
Reducing professional mobility	4%

*Intentions for action if the financial crisis were to continue*

Figure 3.7 hereunder shows the percentage of participants in each group who reported intentions for action if the financial crisis were to continue.



*Figure 3.7. Percentage of participants (senior financial managers vs. lay citizens) who reported intentions to take action in response to the financial crisis if the crisis were to continue*

Figure 3.7 shows three important findings. First, 93% of the senior executives surveyed in October 2008 described, in addition to the actions already taken in response to the financial crisis, at least one intention for action if the financial crisis were to continue. Second, only 14% of ordinary citizens reported such intentions. Third, some participants, all senior executives, say they have not only one, but up to three more intentions for action in response to the crisis if it were to last<sup>41</sup> (all of which also refer to individual action at work or in the private family sphere; none refers to collective action and its potential for change, for example).

### Conclusion

The goal of the study was to empirically test a theory driven hypothesis supported by my earlier collective risk studies, namely that social representations with a more functional orientation would be more effective in guiding behaviour. Focussing on the social representations of the global financial crisis, we questioned people who had high vs. low risk related practice (senior finance executives vs. lay persons). First, using a structural method, the study confirmed that both social representations of the financial crisis were normative rather than functional in both groups, supporting my earlier findings about collective risks. Also, participants with established practices expressed a more functional social representation. Would it be more instrumental in driving behaviour? To test this hypothesis, we compared the actual behaviour and behaviour intentions in response to the financial crises in the two groups. The results showed that the more functional representation was more instrumental in driving behaviour in three ways: significantly more senior finance executives took action in response to the financial crisis, they took an increased number of actions, and had an increased number of intentions for action if the financial crisis were to continue<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup> In contrast to the previous Figure 3.6, Figure 3.7 shows a more salient single action bias (see Weber, 1997). Indeed, the vast majority of participants reported one additional action intention, and only one.

<sup>42</sup> There were hopes that the magnitude of the economic and social tsunami formed by the global financial crisis, the Great Recession and the European debt crisis would be viewed as “an extraordinary event” (Orfali, 2006, cf. above) perhaps sufficient to trigger a critical change in practice related to over-consumerism, the market economy, and capitalism values altogether (masculinism included, cf. Prüggl, 2012, for example), which would challenge “mentalities” (social representations) about the “system”. The theory of social representations, however, suggested that a such change could take place under two initial conditions (Rouquette and Rateau, 1998, cf. Chapter 2): sustained change in practices; and a perception of irreversibility of the situation. In retrospect, change in practice was temporarily noted in the crisis aftermath. The condition that was not fulfilled, however, was the perception of irreversibility of overall context. In fact, a return to “normal” was noted among those who afforded: after the recession ended, “*the index of Consumer sentiment recovered sharply for the top income quartile (but not for the bottom income quartile)*”, Petev, Pistaferri, & Saporta, 2012, p. 1). The index surveys people on their feelings about their individual financial situation, and the overall current and future economic situation. Thus, if the global crisis had appeared for a moment in the public understanding as an exacerbated expression of unbridled liberalism, and seemed to be the very demonstration of a need for change in our economic and social values, the return to the pre-crisis situation swayed many of those hopes. With the words of John Reed, Citigroup’s deposed co-president, “*It’s quite amazing. It’s like having a near-death car experience, and you get back in the car and you drive just as wildly as you did before*” (quoted by Elkind, 2010, p. 98). I would address the question of the transformation conditions of social representations in a later study about the long-term effects of totalitarianism (Ernst-Vintila, Smbatyan, Havarneanu, & Juarez, 2014).



## Terrorism

What is the connection between the financial crisis and terrorism? I argue that it is in how societies respond and mobilise social thinking. Perhaps surprisingly from a European perspective, but congruent with historian Sheldon Garon's argument noted above (2011), "spending" as a feature of an American way of life, had been emphasised in the years preceding the financial crisis, precisely as a *patriotic response to terrorism*: after Al-Qaida's September 11 attacks on Manhattan's World Trade Center in 2001, the United States vice-president Dick Cheney had even presented spending as an act of military aggression, a way for ordinary citizens to "*stick their thumbs in the eye of the terrorists*"<sup>43</sup>. Florida governor Jeb Bush agreed on CNN about shopping as an act of *patriotic duty*: "*We need to respond quickly so people regain confidence and consider it their patriotic duty to go shopping*"<sup>44</sup>. In a speech on airport security at O'Hare International Airport in Chicago two weeks after the attacks, President George W. Bush urged aviation employees not to be cowed: "*Get down to Disney World in Florida. Take your families and enjoy life, the way we want it to be enjoyed*"<sup>45,46</sup>.

In the United States, the Patriot Act received unanimous, unconditional support as a response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks (shortly after, the Iraq War started). In those post 9/11 years, aviation and terrorism formed a new threat prototype, on both sides of the Atlantic. Airport safety and security rules were reinforced. In Europe, "*Following the terrorist attempts to blow up several aircraft during flight using homemade explosives at London-Heathrow Airport in 2006, the European Commission adopted additional rules on aviation security to address this newly-identified threat.*"<sup>47</sup> New rules restricted passengers on carrying liquids, aerosols and gels (LAGs). "Flying while Arab" and "while Muslim" was acknowledged as a phenomenon studied by scholars (Baker, 2002; Handal, 2008; Blackwood, Hopkins, & Reicher, 2015).

However, as we know, far more people die every year in car accidents or gender-based violence than in terrorist attacks in the United States and Europe. Unlike the former, however, terrorist attacks carry an "extraordinary" associated risk<sup>48</sup> in social thinking. In social psychology, studies brought conflicting results. On the one hand, those conducted within the psychometric paradigm in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks found that attitudes and perceptions of terrorism resembled those of other types of risks, such as those of technology or the environment (Fischhoff, Gonzalez, Small, & Lerner, 2003; Lerner, Gonzalez, Small, & Fischhoff, 2003). In contrast, Klar, Zakai, and Sharvit (2002), who questioned Israeli participants one year after the start of the second Intifada, suggested that the case of terrorism was distinct from other risks, in the sense that it concerned a risk *with intent* (in contrast to unintentional risks, for example, environmental hazards) and due to *direct human intervention* (unlike natural, unforeseen events). Studies conducted in a social representational approach showed that, in Europe, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, had a far more limited impact than one might have imagined on the organization of representations of terrorism. In fact, most of the representational

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<sup>43</sup> The New York Times, September 17, 2001 <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/16/national/text-of-vice-president-cheney-remarks-on-meet-the-press.html>, consulted on January 20, 2015.

<sup>44</sup> CNN, Associated Press, September 22, 2001.

<sup>45</sup> The New York Times, September 28, 2001, consulted on August 18, 2018.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/28/us/a-nation-challenged-excerpts-from-bush-speech-on-travel.html>, consulted on January 20, 2015.

<sup>46</sup> In *Jihad versus McWorld*, political theorist Benjamin Barber (1995) contrasted the "soft" power of global (Western) secular materialism with tribal fundamentalism to explain "*how the planet is both falling apart and coming together*" (a thematic opposition (Holton, 1982; Moscovici, 1992; Moscovici & Vignaux, 1994) that seemed to also drive the collective interpretation of the Paris terrorist *attaques des terrasses* and at the Bataclan on November 13, 2015, viewed as emblematic of the French way of life).

<sup>47</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/transport/modes/air/security/aviation-security-policy/lags\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/transport/modes/air/security/aviation-security-policy/lags_en), consulted on August 18, 2018

<sup>48</sup> As we saw, terrorism is legally defined based on the existence of terrorist *acts*. Terrorist *risk* does not correspond to the acts themselves: rather, risk is the *likelihood* that a specific event (here, a terrorist act) exploits a system's *vulnerability* and produces destructive effects in a given place (casualties, material damage, etc.).

field had remained intact and only the prototype (the definition) of what constitutes a terrorist attack had changed (Guimelli & Deschamps, 2006).

How, then, do *societies* think about terrorist risk? With my BA students at the American University in Paris and Masters students at Aix-Marseille Université I conducted an empirical study in which they helped to collect data from the Boston-Logan Airport (United States) and Marseilles-Provence airport in France<sup>49</sup>. We focussed on the lay thinking about terrorism among participants who had different levels of antiterrorism practice (French safety officers vs. French passengers) and personal involvement (US vs. French passengers). Hereunder, I will describe the social representations about terrorism among participants who had different levels of antiterrorism practice (I will describe later the results that concern personal involvement).

A difficult issue was to get the authorisations and access, on the one hand, to the airport safety officers, and, on the other hand, to passengers in the boarding rooms, at a particularly sensitive time, when the airports' authorities' concern with safety and security was of prime importance in both countries. These conditions clearly restricted our scope, sample, and choice of instruments - hence the use of a "good enough", "lighter" methodology to access the representations' content and structure<sup>50</sup>, the hierarchic evocation questionnaire, a well-known associative technique in the field of social representations ("HEQ", cf. Chapter 2). We used pen and paper questionnaires, in which we filled in the participants' answers<sup>51</sup>. We collected the data from November 2006 to July 2007. The starting point was November 2006, the date when LAG restrictions were introduced at airports in response to the 9/11 and London Heathrow attacks.

First, we conducted qualitative interviews with French safety officers and passengers at the Marseilles-Provence airport. A thematic analysis showed two different views of terrorism. The dominating themes in the safety officers' discourse were safety itself and the actions to be taken in order to secure safety both on land and on board. The passengers' discourse, in contrast, was built around politics and what they viewed as so-called causes of terrorism (many passengers attributed the responsibility for terrorism to politics). This suggested that the social representations expressed in the two groups could be different.

Second, we used anti-terrorist practice as a selection variable to work with French passengers (N=48) and safety officers (N=53). We knew from the interviews that, in contrast to passengers, safety officers had anti-terrorist practice from previous training: individual protective measures used to reduce threat; antiterrorism/force protection planning, vulnerability assessments, site surveys, reporting; they were familiar with the technology and techniques associated with these duties; and with the organization, techniques, operational capabilities and operational threat posed by different terrorist groups. Hence, we tested the effect of practice on social representations of terrorist risk, expecting the representations' "probably central" elements to be more practically oriented among safety officers.

## Results

We compared the structure of their social representations by focussing on the central and peripheral systems.

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<sup>49</sup> As explained in Chapter 1, both airports were chosen because they were known to have had terrorist acts. Marseilles-Provence was the landing airport of flight Air France 8969, hijacked by terrorists of the Armed Islamic Group (*al-Jama'ah al-Islamiyah al-Musallaha*) en route from Algiers to Paris in December 1994 (an event remembered in Marseilles, as the pre-test confirmed). Boston-Logan was the take-off airport of flights American Airlines 11 and United Airlines 175, hijacked and crashed into the World Trade Center Twin Towers of New York by terrorists of Al-Qaida on September 11, 2001.

<sup>50</sup> We chose HEQ among several alternatives that we considered and pre-tested, such as the BCS questionnaire. The BCS proved difficult to use in "ecological" settings such as here, because of its duration and complexity for the participants. Here, it was pre-tested but, in spite of its sophisticated potential, we had to rule it out in favour of the lighter HEQ, which was more adapted to the temporal constraints of testing in the airport boarding area, where passengers transited for only 20 to 30 minutes before boarding.

<sup>51</sup> Besides conducting the study, the purpose was to train the students to gain the skills to become reliable interviewers with people outside lab settings.

**Tables 3.5 a and b**

*Comparison between the structures of the social representations of terrorist risk of French passengers and airport safety officers.*

<b>French passengers</b>	<b>Average rank First</b>	<b>Average rank Last</b>	<b>French Safety officers</b>	<b>Average rank First</b>	<b>Average rank Last</b>
	< 2,4	>= 2,4		< 2,4	>= 2,4
<b>Frequency</b> High >= 10	Attack Bomb Fear	Dead	<b>Frequency</b> High >= 10	Attack Bomb	Dead
	<i>Central items</i>	<i>First periphery</i>		<i>Central items</i>	<i>First periphery</i>
<b>Frequency</b> Low <10	Cowardice	September 11 WTC Injustice Al-Qaeda Insecurity Plane Fundamentalism Bin-Laden Islam Danger Hostages Explosion Religion Extremism Violence War	<b>Frequency</b> Low <10	Fear Danger Terror Cowardice Casualties	September 11 Bin-Laden Explosion Extremism Fanaticism Islam Religion
	<i>Potential change zone</i>	<i>Second periphery</i>		<i>Potential change zone</i>	<i>Second periphery</i>

**Table 3.5a**

**Table 3.5b**

*Note.* The items in the table are the free association answers given by the participants to the inductor “terrorism” (“What are the first five words or expressions that come to your mind when you hear the word “terrorism?”). The items that are candidates to the central core of the social representations of terrorist risk (“central items”) are located in the first quadrant of each table. The operational part of the social representation is represented by the items located in the “first periphery” quadrants.

Tables 3.5a and b show the structures of the social representations of terrorism held by French passengers and safety officers. The central core is the consensual, stable, significant part of the social representation. Its comparison in the two groups showed that the two representational cores shared two elements: *attack* and *bomb*. In addition, though, the passengers showed an additional potentially central element, with a clearly affective valency: fear. This suggests that while both representations share a similar definition of terrorism, they differ in their affective aspect, with fear as a defining feature of terrorism for passengers (who lack antiterrorism practice), but not for the safety officers.

The peripheral system is the operational part of the representation, a reflection of the interindividual and situational variability and prescriptions for action, as we saw earlier. The richer the peripheral system, the higher the representations’ interindividual variability and the more diverse its situational prescriptions for action. The comparison of the two peripheral systems shows richness and diversity among safety officers (dead, fear, terror, casualties, danger, cowardice), as opposed to poverty among passengers (casualties, cowardice). This is less a matter of *content* than of *structure*: rich vs. scarce (cf. also Gaymard, 2006). On the one hand, this contrast in structure suggests that the safety officers have more complex, more varied, and more adaptable operational representation, with higher interindividual and situational variability (“which enables them to “recognize and use more diversified information, and consider a large number of new circumstances and problems”, Guimelli, 1995), more nuanced behavioural options to respond to different situational conditions. In contrast, the passengers’ scarce peripheral system indicates lower interindividual variability, less potential to adapt the abstract “potentially central” elements (attack, bomb, fear) to concrete circumstances and individual experiences, also less potential to prescribe concrete, situationally variable behaviour, thus a more unconditional, clear-cut behaviour.

As we see, such a structure was noted when groups lack practice towards an object. Lack of practice, however, is not a condition for the people to refrain from taking stances. In fact, as we saw in the earthquake and financial crisis studies, when practice is lacking, the normative aspects of social thinking take over (the normative component of the social representation prevails over its instrumental component), which means that thinking and action would draw even more on group norms than they would if enough practice had structured a complex functional component, able to prescribe action that is individually diversified, nuanced, negotiable, contextually flexible.

Such findings are compatible both with the SIDE model and its developments by the social identity theory applied to intergroup conflict research, and with the conditionality theory, leading to a better understanding of clear-cut forms of social thinking such as mobilisation nexuses.

To be more precise, the particularities of this type of structure, characterised by a definitional element of affective type in conjunction with a *scarce* peripheral system, because it restricts the range of possibilities (reduced individual, situational and contextual negotiability), creates the conditions for radical stances towards the represented object, because of the representations' poor flexibility. I will take a closer look at this issue later, by comparing the US and French passengers' social thinking about terrorism, which will lead us to draw on the notion of mobilisation nexus.

As we know from Moscovici's princeps work, practice was not "needed" for catholics and communists to build their own social scientific "theories" (social representations) of psychoanalysis in the 1950's (Moscovici, 1961). In all cases, group norms drove social thinking. "Practice" is not a necessary condition for people to "socially think" about an object. Indeed, as we saw in the earthquake studies, the normative representational component is saturated even when people only have a risk "culture" - tradition and norms. Neither is practice "needed" for people to (feel able/entitled to) form judgements about social objects, as we saw in the financial crisis study. Thus, especially when functional landmarks are lacking, people's social thinking follows the only other available landmarks: their groups norms.

With peripheral elements no longer there to act as "bumpers" (Flament, 1994) by integrating as acceptable "exceptions" the challenging elements that come to jeopardize the central core (an integration that uses "strange schemes", Rouquette, & Guimelli, 1995; Wolter & Rouquette 2010) a process that draws on the conditional nature of peripheral elements, defending the central cognitions from contextual challenges likely relies on radical reasoning: denial (negation scheme, Wolter & Rouquette, 2010), or rejecting the proponent of the challenging cognition (Black Sheep Effect, Marques, Yzerbyt, & Leyens, 1988; Lo Monaco, Piermatteo, Guimelli & Ernst-Vintila, 2011; Zouhri & Rateau, 2015). Hence the importance of practice for building a representational structure able to flexibly respond to a variety of individual, situational and contextual conditions.

## *Conclusion*

The goal of the study was to empirically study the social thinking about terrorism by collecting data on in the aftermath of new airport security measures introduced in the United States and Europe in response to recent terrorist attacks that had involved airplanes ("9/11", and London Heathrow). We collected data in the US and France on two airports known to have had acts of terrorism. We used a structural procedure and compared the lay thinking about terrorism among participants who had different levels of antiterrorism practice. We interviewed two groups of participants: French safety officers and French passengers.

The comparison of the two central cores showed that they share two elements:. In addition, the French passengers showed an additional potentially central element, with a clearly affective valency: fear. Both groups defined terrorism by its means ("attack", "bomb"), but, as opposed to the safety officers' instrumental view, the lay view on terrorism was marked by "fear" as a defining feature.

The comparison of the two peripheral systems shows richness and diversity among safety officers (dead, fear, terror, casualties, danger, cowardice), as opposed to poverty among passengers (casualties, cowardice). On the one hand, it suggests that the safety officers have a more complex, more instrumental representation, which enables them to adapt, recognize and use more diversified information in concrete and diverse circumstances. In contrast, the passengers' scarce peripheral system indicates lower interindividual variability, less potential to adapt the abstract definition to concrete circumstances and individual experiences, also less potential to prescribe concrete, situationally variable behaviour.

These results suggest that, when the representations' peripheral adaptation and modulating capacities are scarce, their rigidity leads them to face situational challenge in more radical ways, for example, by using denial (Wolter and Rouquette, 2010), or rejecting the challenger as a group member (Black Sheep Effect, Lo Monaco, Piermatteo, Guimelli & Ernst-Vintila, 2011, Zouhri & Rateau, 2015). Hence the importance of practice (training in socially diverse circumstances, etc.) for building a structurally balanced social representation, able to adapt to diverse interactions and to maintain social relations when contrasting views challenge it.

### Should the public response to terror matter? A live digital mobilisation nexus<sup>52</sup>

While the internet plays an operational role in radicalisation and planning of violence and terrorism, it is also a venue for connection and solidarity after traumatic events. We focussed on the digital mobilisation in France in response to the first wave of terror attacks in Paris, which occurred in January 2015. Addressing sense making of collective trauma is important because in the context of global risk the collective understandings of extreme events may be decisive in the coming years.

Our first goal in the hours that followed the attack on Charlie Hebdo was to study the public response online through real-time data collection. We thought that the attack, which very early was called an attack on Liberty, a core value of the French Republic, would trigger a mobilisation nexus (from the Latin *nexus*, the act of binding together, Rouquette 1988) and federate society beyond intergroup differences. The attacks on the policewoman and the HyperCacher in the following days added a second goal, to examine the possible difference in the public response to the attacks.

Here, we first recall social psychological findings on collective response to terror attacks. Second, drawing on a social identity approach to crowd behaviour and the literature on collective action and mobilisation, we focus on digital collective action and emotion. Finally, we review the use of Facebook features as tools of digital mobilisation.

In the discussion, we examine the difference in the digital response to the two attacks and two possible interpretations. The first argument is the "order" of the attacks and appears insufficient. The second suggests that the colossal public response to the attack on Charlie Hebdo was triggered by its particular collective interpretation as an attack on an emblematic value of French identity, "Liberty", theorised as a *mobilisation nexus*, while the attack at HyperCacher was not understood as an attack on France and Frenchness, but on a narrower category of citizens, whose place in the "nation", then, appeared to be perceived as disturbingly less clear, certainly not emblematic.

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<sup>52</sup> I present here a study based on digital data collection in the immediate aftermath of the terror attacks in Paris perpetrated in January 2015, submitted for publication in 2016, re-submitted in 2020.

The “conservative shift”

One of the most consistent findings in studies run after the 9/11 terrorist attacks (2001) is that people understood those attacks as targeting a specific *group*, which raises the question of their definition of “group”. Nail & McGregor (2009) found “a conservative shift” post-9/11 attacks among both liberal and conservative Americans. In Spain, the 2004 Madrid bombings led to an increase in authoritarianism, stronger attachment to traditional conservative values, and a reduction of attachment to liberal values (Echebarria-Echabe & Fernández-Guede, 2006). The 2005 London bombings increased endorsement of what authors called the “in-group foundations” and stronger prejudice toward Muslims and immigrants (Van de Vyver *et al.*, 2016). The differences in both ingroup foundations endorsement and prejudice were even surprisingly larger among people with a liberal orientation than among those with a conservative orientation (*ibid.*), suggesting that especially the liberal part of society shifted to conservatism after terror attacks<sup>53</sup> (*reactive co-radicalisation hypothesis*; Pratt, 2015; Reicher & Haslam, 2016). Even more surprisingly, following the 2004 Madrid train bombings, also perpetrated in the name of Islam, both anti-Muslim and anti-Semitism prejudices increased (Echebarria-Echabe & Fernández-Guede, 2006).

Such responses obviously go beyond individual fears and anxieties, pointing to collective interpretations and inclusive or exclusive identities.

In a study run in Europe one week after the 9/11 attacks in Manhattan, researchers on social categorization found that focusing the European participants’ attention on an identity that *included* American victims into a *common ingroup* led them to report more personal concern and personal relevance of terrorism, more fear, stronger fear-related behavioural tendencies than when the victims of terrorism were categorized as *outgroup* members (Dumont, Yzerbyt, Wigboldus & Gordijn, 2003).

Post-terror crowds formation

As we see, although often studied at the individual level, the collective response to terrorism involves social psychological processes that go beyond the individual (personal relevance, fear, anxiety, etc.) or even interpersonal levels (social sharing of emotions, affiliation - Páez *et al.*, 2007; Rimé *et al.*, 2010; Garcia & Rimé, 2019). Drury *et al.* (2009) noted that “*emergent togetherness, solidarity or ‘community spirit’, (was) surely one of the most important and striking forms of resilience*”. In such circumstances, people claim group memberships and identities even more than personal identities<sup>54</sup>: “*Nous sommes tous Américains*”, *Le Monde*, a major French media, claimed after the 9/11 attacks in the US, paraphrasing J. F. Kennedy’s “*Ich bin ein Berliner*”.

Skitka (2005) asked if the widespread, symbolic behaviour of flying the American flag after the 9/11 attack (74-82% of Americans) was related to *patriotism* (“*defined as love of country and attachment to national values*”, p. 1996) or to *nationalism* (an unconditional, “*uncritical acceptance of national, state, and political authorities combined with a belief in the superiority and dominant status of one’s nation*”, *ibid.*, p. 1997). Her evidence reflected patriotism and a desire of those who feel *involved as members of a “group” under threat* to show solidarity with fellow citizens, rather than a desire to express out-group hostility (nationalism). What drove such identity performance? When people focus on their group as in Skitka’s study, group-based identities became more salient than personal identities: the respective group norms prescribed the context in which people

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<sup>53</sup> Contrasting with such findings, Zerhouni, Rougier, & Muller, 2016 found that “French cities implicitly biased against “Arabs” (as compared with French) participated less, and not more, to the Charlie Hebdo rallies” in January 2015.

<sup>54</sup> [http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2001/09/09/nous-sommes-tous-americains\\_1569503\\_3232.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2001/09/09/nous-sommes-tous-americains_1569503_3232.html), accessed 8 April 2015.

made their behavioural choices (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987)<sup>55</sup>. People then came to care for “the group” and “comrades” even more than for themselves, especially in public contexts (*cf.* SIDE, Reicher, Spears, & Postmes, 1995). This leads to an upsurge of ingroup solidarity (Staub, 2002), and even devotion, unconditional commitment, and sacrifice for the group’s cause and for comrades (*cf.* Kahn, Klar, Roccas, 2017; Atran, 2016, for a review). Such solidarity was salient among the survivors and witnesses of the 2005 London bombings: mutual help was more common than ‘selfish’ behaviour, a sense of unity existed amongst survivors, and there was a link between this sense of unity and helping, even risk-taking to help strangers (Drury *et al.* 2009). They termed “*mass emergent sociality*” the *social bonds* formed among “strangers” during the disaster, a phenomenon that underlies *collective resilience*: common fate entailed a redefinition of self from ‘me’ to ‘us’, enhancing concern for others in the crowd, those perceived as ‘us’ (Hopkins & Reicher, 2016; Reicher, 2017).

Post-terror, people saliently shift to *collective* criteria in thinking, feelings, action, sense of identity, involvement, and meaning making (Reicher *et al.*, 1995; Drury *et al.* 2009; Ernst-Vintila *et al.*, 2011). Such shift characterized both the current official discourse and public understanding in Europe and the United States - as opposed, for example, to the understanding of *political* terrorism in Europe in the 70’s, which was understood as targeting *representative personalities*. In the same vein, a study about the public understanding of terrorism in the US and Europe after 9/11 conducted *before* the recent European terrorist wave showed that the American participants felt concerned by terrorism, however not as much as individuals, but, rather *as members of their (national) group*, significantly more than Europeans (French) (Ernst-Vintila *et al.*, 2011). Also, their understanding of terrorism was more consensual, affective, identity-related, clear-cut, and had a stronger orientation towards collective, rather than individual action. Those findings led the authors to suggest that post-terror social thinking drew on a mobilisation nexus rather than on a social representational process.

Such findings reveal the existence of an identity-driven public understanding of terrorism marked by the salience of group membership, in which both inclusion and exclusion (those perceived as ‘us’ vs. ‘Other’) operate within a system of classification through binary opposition, ‘us–them’, ‘good–evil’, ‘safe–dangerous’ (Moscovici & Vignaux 1994), in processes driven by group, rather than individual interpretations. Consistently with social identity considerations, they point to a public understanding of terrorist attacks that calls on collective aspects (collective meaning, group membership and identity, collective action, etc.), rather than individual psychological aspects. Overall, they suggest that responses to terror attacks perceived as attacks on a national group draw on a specific form of social thinking, one that is profoundly mobilising, unequivocal, affective, clear-cut, elicited in conflict and threat circumstances. We suggest that a *mobilisation nexus* is at work.

### **Digital mobilisation: a social identity approach**

The relationship between the rise of cyberspace and the emergence of new forms of protest suggests that the use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter decreasingly fits with a “cyberspace” detached from physical reality (Brunsting & Postmes, 2002; Gerbaudo, 2012). Instead, social media is used as a re-appropriation, even an extension, of public space, which involves the assembling of different groups, often around specific “places” (Gerbaudo, 2012). Did Facebook stand as the digital equivalent of the *Place de la République* in the French response to the Paris attacks in January 2015? Hereunder, we recall findings about digital collective behaviour, emotions, identity formation and community emergence.

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<sup>55</sup> Schumann & Klein (2015) explained that when a social identity is salient— being explicitly stated or contextually derived— the limited availability of interpersonal cues increased the influence of group norms (Postmes, Spears, Sakhel, & De Groot, 2001; Sassenberg & Boos, 2003), enhanced group identification (Lea, Spears, & De Groot, 2001), and the perceived entitativity of a group (Sassenberg & Postmes, 2002).

### a. Collective action in the digital age

Social media are the flagship of digital communication “*from mass passive information consumption to interactivity and user-generated content*” (Kende, van Zomeren, Ujhelyi, & Lantos, 2016, p. 2) and a platform for digital engagement (Schumann & Klein, 2015). Their core is *interactivity*, which “*is not merely (...) a technical feature (...)—it is what enables social use*” (Sundar, 2004) and plays a key role group digital behaviour (Rafaeli & Sudweeks, 1997). Studies suggest that social, rather than merely informational, use of social media motivates people to engage in online collective action (*cf.* Kende *et al.*’s review, 2016).

In pioneering social psychological work on collective action on the Internet, Postmes & Brunsting (2002) used the term “collective action” to refer to “*actions undertaken by individuals or groups for a collective purpose, such as the advancement of a particular ideology or idea, or the political struggle with another group*” (p. 290), while Becker suggested to consider it as “*any action that promotes the interests of one’s ingroup or is conducted in political solidarity*” (2012, p. 19).

Postmes & Brunsting (2002) argued that collective action through an otherwise physically isolating computer is possible because social behaviour does not stem from the immediate proximity of other individuals, but people rely on internalized group memberships and social identities to achieve social involvement. They advanced that the Internet presents ideal conditions to express social identity, because the online environment impacts the strategic and cognitive factors that influence social, rather than individual, identity *performance*: “*enhance group salience by reducing attention to individual differences within the group (i.e., depersonalization)*” (*ibid.*, p. 295).

How does group identity influence collective digital participation? Spears and Postmes (2015) reviewed a considerable amount of research to describe how polarisation occurs online. Drawing on the social identity approach to group behaviour (Turner *et al.*, 1987) and the SIDE model, they concluded, consistently with Moscovici’s early idea that the social effects of technology characteristics depend on the social relations *in situ* (1961b), that online communication can enhance rather than undermine social influence processes in contexts where a shared identity and shared norms are either unambiguously given or somehow contextually anticipated (e.g., Postmes, Spears, Sakhel & De Groot, 2001; Sassenberg & Postmes, 2002; Sassenberg & Boos, 2003; Postmes, Spears, Lee, & Novak, 2005; Cress, 2005; Lee, 2007)<sup>56</sup>.

In addition, studies found that online collaborations in which the sense of group emerges in the self are associated with stronger group identification, social identity salience, group cohesion (Lea, Spears, & De Groot, 2001; Lee, 2007), and a greater tendency to perceive the collaborative group as an entity or “as one” (Sassenberg & Postmes, 2002; Tanis & Postmes, 2008). McGarty *et al.* noted about the convergence of dissent during the Tunisian revolution of 2011 that “*confrontational action can unite a crowd that was otherwise divided in a common (and, in our terms, opinion-based) identity*” (2014, p. 8), a process that could be involved in societies acting temporarily “as one”. McGarty *et al.* (*ibid.*) concluded that the Tunisian revolution benefited from online social networks not simply from the perspective of efficient organization, but also from building such group *opinion-based* identities.

Kende *et al.* (2016) further suggested that because *publicly* expressing group membership online can amplify the behavioural consequences of a salient group identity (i.e., engagement in behaviour that is normative to the in-group), social media interactions are most predictive for motivating collective action. Postmes & Brunsting (2002) brought evidence for online action as an equivalent to offline action (by activists and

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<sup>56</sup> Of course, this is not to claim that the anonymity of online communication will always strengthen group salience as a fixed “rule” without exceptions; as Spears & Postmes (2015) explained, this would violate the context-specific and interactionist approach of SIDE.



nonactivists alike) and argued that the web can promote identity formation and help build communities. In line with the idea that it is *through participation* that the key constituents of community are enacted (Campbell & Jovchelovitch, 2000), Kende *et al.* used the notion of *interactivity* to refer to the active engagement with social media as opposed to being a passive observer or non-user of it (2016). They termed *social affirmative use of social media* the people's "*participation in online discussions, information-producing and -sharing takes place with the purpose of expressing one's group identity and building social capital: posting, sharing, and commenting group relevant information, or engaging in discussions about issues that express group membership*" (Alberici & Milesi, 2013; Chong, Zhang, Mak, & Pang, 2015; Kende *et al.* 2016, p. 2-3). Kende *et al.* (2016) specifically point to the unique mobilising power of group identity (van Zomeren *et al.*, 2008), especially politicized group identity (Simon & Klandermans, 2001), social movement identity (Stürmer & Simon, 2004) and opinion-based identities (McGarty, Lala, & Douglas, 2011; Musgrove & McGarty, 2008; Thomas *et al.*, 2012) drawing attention to group identification, the psychological connection induced by belonging to a social group or category (Leach *et al.*, 2008) as a relevant factor in understanding how the social affirmation use of social media motivates engagement in collective action.

## **b. Digital emotions, affect, and involvement**

Digital reality is increasingly being used for affective interaction. Researchers identified and even measured a "sense of virtual community" (Blanchard & Markus, 2002; Blanchard, 2007), a "sense of presence" which increases in emotional environments (Riva *et al.*, 2007) and can matter more to people than the physical social network itself, health psychologists showed (Bruchon-Schweitzer, 2014). As we saw, the influence of affective affiliation with the ingroup is even more pronounced online (Postmes & Brunsting, 2002). With social media becoming increasingly important, studies found that after extraordinary events (events that "disrupt" the ordinary, Snow *et al.*, 1996, 1998) people mobilise and turn to online social networks for emotional reasons within minutes. The online emotion regulation seems to take effect even more rapidly when group identities, rather than individual identities, are involved (Courbet, Fourquet-Courbet & Marchioli, 2015). In those cases, the social media take on the role of a collective consciousness (Durkheim, 1912)<sup>57</sup>.

How do people affectively "rally-round-the-flag" online? The social identity approach found that affiliation is driven by how they define their identity. Collective emotions, such as *entrainment*, a feeling of affective attunement with others during rituals (Collins, 2004a, b), can increase the identification with a social group (von Scheve & Ismer, 2013; Salmela, 2014). For example, emotional entrainment during an international sports event is a predictor of changes in national identification and the perceived emotional significance of national symbols: flag, slogans, etc. (Von Scheve *et al.*, 2013).

## **c. Socially shared meaning and identity formation online**

Expressing emotions online allows people to *participate*, leaving a passive position of spectators of a collective ritual to *involve* as active participants, arguably even participants in building collective memory and history (Courbet *et al.*, 2015). Such engagement is a shift in personal involvement (Rouquette, 1997; Ernst-Vintila, 2016)

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<sup>57</sup> Durkheim's work on the *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* advanced that when people face a significant emotional event, they feel a fundamental anthropological need to communicate and experience their emotions collectively, and to refer to a supra-ordinate collective consciousness. He argued that rituals and the experience of collective emotions ('collective effervescence') are crucial in establishing, maintaining, and reinforcing solidarity, cohesion, and social identification in groups and communities. In this vein, a consistent social psychological finding is that anxiety triggers affiliation (Schachter, 1959) and social sharing of emotion benefits people's well-being (Páez *et al.*, 2007; Rimé *et al.*, 2010).

that responds to “a fundamental human desire to take part in the construction of shared meaning” (Elcheroth *et al.*, 2011, p. 746). This appears to be directly involved in the emergence of new socially shared meaning and identity formation (cf. McGarty, Thomas, Lala, Smith & Bliuc, 2014, about the Tunisian “Facebook revolution”; (see Khan *et al.*, 2016). On the other hand, experimental studies on social representations showed that involvement (*spectator vs. participant*) plays a key role in narrowing collective reasoning to more inflexible, black-or-white, clear-cut strategies (*canevas de la négation*), especially about valued issues (Guimelli, 2002; Ernst-Vintila *et al.*, 2011) - group values, symbols, etc., and even more so in crisis circumstances (Wolter & Rouquette, 2010). This set of findings points to post-terror circumstances as *conditions of possibility* for the activation of a mobilisation nexus.

### *Uses of digital interactive features in collective mobilisation*

#### **a. What are digital features such as Facebook’s Likes, Shares and Comments capable of telling us?**

Social networks are web-based services through which people can maintain existing ties and develop new social ties with people outside their network (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Greenhow *et al.*, 2009). Among the many available, Facebook has been the most popular, with 1.5 billion daily active users on average as of the third quarter of 2018<sup>58</sup>. At the time of the data collection (January 2015) Facebook displayed only three interactive features<sup>59</sup>: *Like*, *Share*, *Comment*. The studies hereunder focussed on their uses then (Smock, Ellison, Lampe, & Wohn, 2011).

Cho, Schweickart & Haase (2014) used the number of *Likes*, *Shares*, and *Comments* to measure the levels of the respondents’ *online engagement*. Users can publicly indicate their personal affective responses to online messages by *Liking* a message: *liking* is an individual action that involves only the respondent, and means that the person has purposely chosen to ‘link’ his or her profile to a page and receive content from that page in her Facebook news feeds (Carah, 2014). It should be noted that *Liking* a content makes it public and brings it in one’s “friends’ ” newsfeed; “*Liking*” a Facebook page is a low-threshold action that can be identity constructing, steer a group’ s activities towards a common goal or group enhancement (Klein, Spears, & Reicher, 2007).

Alhabash *et al.* (2013) used those Facebook features and the notions of viral reach (volume of online interaction), affective evaluation, and message deliberation to evaluate collective behaviour. He used the number of *Likes* to measure a post’s (individual) affective evaluation, the number of *Shares* to measure its viral reach (“quality, worth, popularity, and importance”), and *Comments* to measure the users’ active and public *deliberation*.

Facebook’s *Share* was especially interesting because it appeared as a form of action meant to reach others, and even show solidarity, both in large scale events (the Tunisian revolution, McGarty *et al.*, 2014) and in everyday life: people *Share* charitable content (e.g., solicitation of financial help for a child that needs surgery), content meant to help (e.g., lost pets), to warn fellow people (e.g., terrorist attacks, police notices of dangerous criminals on the loose) (Tiidenberg & Allaste, 2016). *Sharing* with Facebook “friends” denotes a will to rally “similar others” in one’s “*psychological in-group*” (Postmes, 2007). We saw that people rely on internalized group memberships and social identities to achieve social involvement (Van Zomeren *et al.*, 2008). As the Facebook adage goes, “*Sharing is caring*”, the public expression of support suggests how many citizens coalesce for a collective purpose and a sense of solidarity that can encourage other people to act (Alberici & Milesi, 2013; Van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, & Leach, 2004). Rather than mere “interest”, then, *sharing*, is a measure of active

<sup>58</sup> Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/346167/facebook-global-dau/>, consulted 12 January 2019.

<sup>59</sup> Lee *et al.* (2014) defined a Facebook feature as a technical tool that the site provides to facilitate communications and interactions among users (Photo, Message, Group, Like, Share, Comment, Wall, etc.)

user engagement (Alhabash, McAlister, Hagerstrom, Quilliam, Rifon, & Richards, 2013) denoting an affective response and a first step of mobilisation.

### **b. Facebook uses in bridging across intergroup differences**

For societal resilience after terror attacks it is of exceptional importance to understand how groups *bridge beyond intergroup differences*, including digitally. Research on the use of Facebook features views them as indicators of engagement, of collective and affective behaviour, and correlates of bridging across groups. Lee *et al.* (2014) examined the relationship between the use of then-Facebook features (*Like, Share, Comment, etc.*) and *bridging social capital* (Putnam, 2000<sup>60</sup>). As opposed to *bonding social capital* (connections among homogenous groups), *bridging social capital* refers to the connections *across* socially heterogeneous groups, i.e., federating beyond intergroup differences. *Bridging*, then, allows members of distinct groups to share information and build cross-group consensus and solidarity (Droogendyk, Wright, Lubensky, & Louis, 2016), in a coalescence especially interesting here because it reflects how groups federate beyond intergroup borders in “rally-round-the-flag” circumstances. For example, the use of *Wall* (*broadcasting* on one’s friends’ pages (Burke *et al.*, 2011), somewhat similarly to Kende *et al.*’s (2016) understanding of the use of *Share*) was a significant positive predictor of bridging social capital. Instead, *Liking*, which Lee *et al.* (2014) understood as “showing silent emotional support”, was associated with greater bonding social capital<sup>61</sup>.

Thus, when interested in cross-group connections, the bridging *Share* feature is relevant.

### **c. Twitter, identity formation and digital crowd emergence**

Mapping the Twittersphere provided insights into how groups emerge often by using network-analysis approaches to provide a ‘bird’s eye view’ of large-scale digital activity in today’s ‘*connective action*’ (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Studies found that *communities* emerged from topic-related discussions with clusters of interconnected users, the information sources on which they relied most (Himmelboim & Han on cancer discussions, 2014), with opinion leaders and influencers who could be metrically identified (Dubois & Gaffney, 2014; Xu, Sang, Blasiola, & Park, 2014). Such emerging communities are similar to what social psychologists termed *opinion-based groups*: groups that are not distinguished by their relative status, but defined by shared opinions (Bliuc, McGarty, Reynolds, & Muntele, 2007; McGarty, Bliuc, Thomas, & Bongiorno, 2009; EMSICA, Thomas, McGarty, & Mavor, 2009; Thomas, Mavor, & McGarty, 2012). As groups form “around” an opinion, they also ‘take sides’ relative to other groups, turning the issue into a *polarized* one. Lotan’s study of the 2014 Israel-Gaza conflict, for example, visually demonstrated a distinct polarisation between the pro-Israel and pro-Palestine sides with a negligible number of bridging actors in-between.

In emerging online communities, Bennett and Segerberg (2012) found that political content is often expressed in the form of easily personalised ideas (*‘We Are the 99 Percent’* during the Occupy Wall Street

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<sup>60</sup> Putnam’s political science work (2000) studied social capital as “civic engagement” and a key component of a resilient community (one that resists sudden shocks), community empowerment, group formation, civil society strengthening, coalition building, solidarity, reciprocity and collective strength, including online (Williams, 2006). Social psychological research found that a sense of shared identity amongst people may encourage people to view others as a source of social support which in turn contributes to a sense of health and well-being (Jetten *et al.*, 2017; Hopkins, & Reicher, 2016).

<sup>61</sup> Somewhat surprisingly, *Share* correlated little to social capital. One of the reasons may lie in the choice of measures: the basis for the correlations was the Frequency of Use, and it is unclear from the results if the participants (Korean college students) used the *Share* feature with a frequency similar to that of other features, or only “exceptionally”. *Comment* was associated with lower bonding social capital. Smock *et al.* (2011) suggest that people *Comment* because of relaxing entertainment and light social interaction; thus, in crisis circumstances the number of comments should be small).

movement in the US in 2011; '*Horrya-Liberté-Freedom*' during the Tunisian Jasmin Revolution in 2011; '*Je suis Charlie*' in France in January 2015, etc.). They suggest that such *personalized slogans* are not only personally involving, but also *particularly inclusive* and can be easily *passed across platforms*, online and offline. As "personal action frames", they emphasize an "us" collective identity expressed within a short time span. For example, a study on Twitter commenting and the *emerging viewertariat* during a TV broadcast of a political debate (*BBC Question Time*), showed that, when commenting, Twitter users identify themselves as part of collectives to a greater extent than identifying themselves as individuals (Anstead & O'Loughlin, 2015). The social collectives with which they identified included the British electorate, political parties, nation, ethnic group, religious group, audience, as an immigrant, as part of humanity, etc.

### **An analysis of the French digital crowds response to the terror attacks**

We examined the French digital crowd response to the terror attacks of January 2015 using Facebook features analysis in real time, as the attacks were unfolding. We ran an observational, non-participative quantitative study, using public data (Ess & Buchanan, 2002; Burkell, Fortier, Wong, & Simpson, 2014) and following the Association of Internet Researchers ethics guidelines 2.0 (Markham *et al.*, 2012). This granted both the authenticity of digital behaviour and respect for the participants' voices (Young & Hegarty, 2019). If the post-terror mobilisation was a response to all the attacks, we should find relatively similar patterns after each.

#### *Method*

We focused on two Facebook pages created *ad-hoc* in the immediate aftermath of the first terror attack of 2015: "*Soutien à Charlie Hebdo*" and "*Soutien à Charlie Hebdo et à la liberté d'expression*". Both were created after the Charlie Hebdo attack, respectively half an hour and less than one hour later. At the time of their creation, both of their descriptions stated that they were created to honour the victims, mobilise against terrorism, convey unity and tolerance. One of the pages was still open in 2017, though inactive; as of March 2017, its name had been changed to "*Soutien à Charlie Hebdo et aux victimes du terrorisme*"; the other was only accessible via webarchive.

We recorded the data live from creation until the 21<sup>th</sup> of January 2015. The number of posts, affiliates and reactions on both pages exploded on January 7-9<sup>th</sup>, then declined and progressively self-extinguished after the *Marche républicaine* organised on January 11<sup>th</sup>. We continued to record the data but after the 12<sup>th</sup> of January the activity on the two pages became insignificant. Thus, the study focusses on the data collected from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> of January 2015.

#### *Participants*

The number of affiliates of the two pages increased from 0 to 840 000 over 4 days (7-11 January 2015) and remained stable in the following weeks.

#### *Procedure*

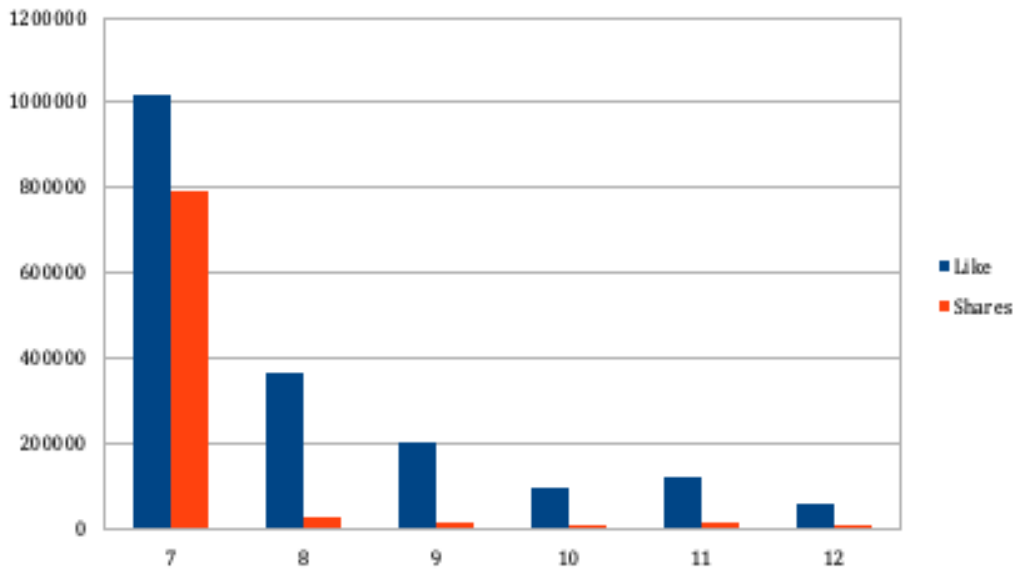
We examined the collective mobilisation based on the responses on those Facebook pages recorded on January 2015 7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>. We measured (*cf.* Alhabash *et al.*, 2013): (a) the *individual affective response* through the number of *Likes*; (b) the *collective affective response* by the number of *Shares* ("viral reach"); and (c) *deliberation* by the number of *Comments*: adding text, arguments, caricatures, indicate a beginning of a "dialogue" (Marková, 2003) and certainly more "deliberation" than a mere click on the *Share* feature. The most important digital marker for crowd mobilisation was of course the importance of *Shares*. To assess the collective vs. individual affective digital response we focussed on the contrast between *Shares* and *Likes*. To assess the primacy of affect over

deliberation we focussed on the contrast between *Shares* and *Comments*. Because the numbers of participants continuously increased over the period of interest, we compared percentages calculated in real time.

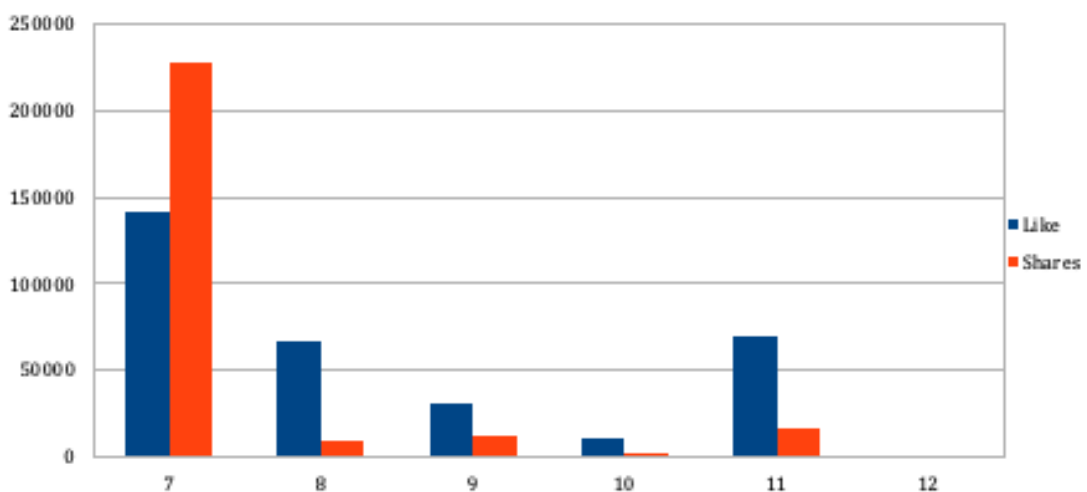
*Results*

**A spectacular increase in the collective, rather than individual, affective digital response**

Charts 1 and 2 show the results for the indicators of individual and collective affective response on each Facebook page: percentage of “Like”, respectively “Share”.



**Chart 1.** Volume and timing of the *collective affective response*(percentage of “Share”) and of *individual affective response*(percentage of “Like”) on Facebook page “Soutien à Charlie Hebdo” (x-axis, dates: January 7<sup>th</sup>: Charlie Hebdo; January 8<sup>th</sup>:policewoman; January 9<sup>th</sup>: HyperCacher).



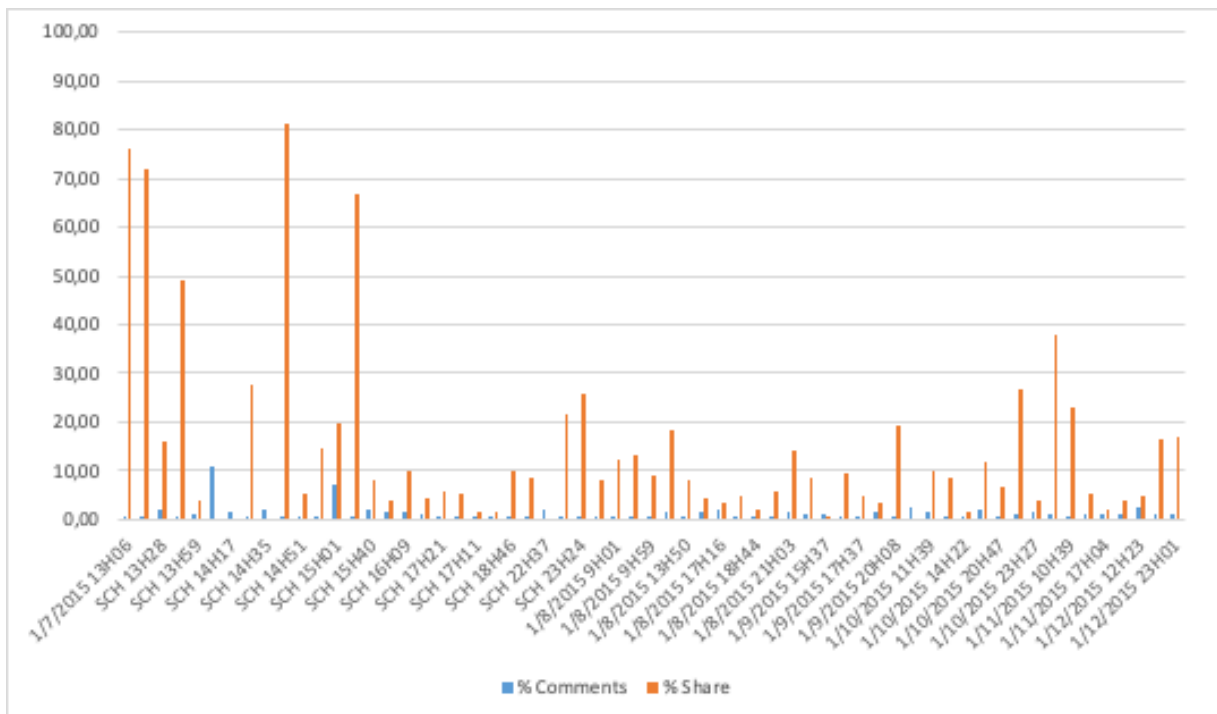
**Chart 2.** Volume and timing of the *collective affective response*(percentage of “Share”) and of *individual affective response*(percentage of “Like”) on Facebook page “Soutien à Charlie Hebdo et à la liberté d’expression” (x-axis, dates: January 7<sup>th</sup>: Charlie Hebdo; January 8<sup>th</sup>:policewoman; January 9<sup>th</sup>: HyperCacher).

First, Charts 1 and 2 show a response pattern with a very powerful collective affective response in the immediate aftermath of the Charlie Hebdo attacks (January 7<sup>th</sup>), with a peak in the percentage of *Shared* posts that was unparalleled afterwards. Both charts show that the collective affective response peaked even earlier than the individual one (percentage of *Likes*), which indicates the prevalence of the *collective* nature of people’s affective response.

Second, Charts 1 and 2 show a spectacular increase in *Share*-ing, a collective affective response after the attack on Charlie Hebdo, as opposed to the more moderate increase in other features. Importantly, no such increase was noted in the aftermath of the anti-Semitic attack on the HyperCacher (January 9<sup>th</sup>)<sup>62</sup>. After the HyperCacher attack all the indicators point to a more banal response. This pattern authenticates a digital mobilisation nexus only after the attack on Charlie Hebdo, but not after the attack on the HyperCacher. The digital response to the attack on police woman Clarissa Jean-Philippe was negligible.

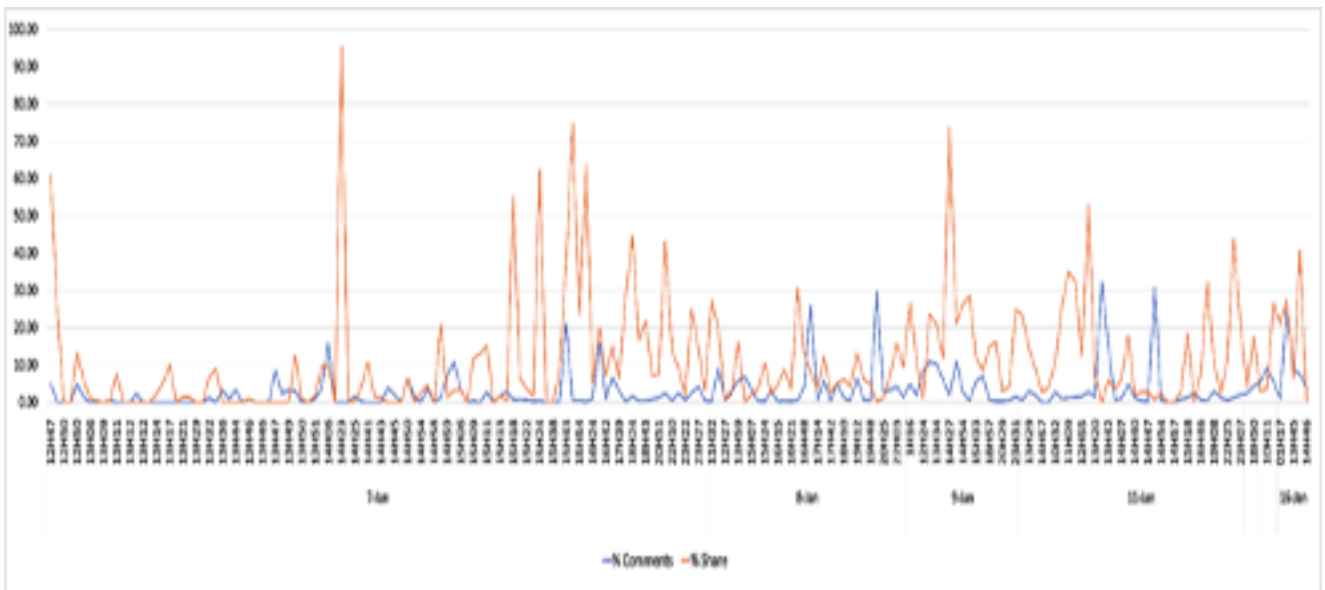
**The collective affective response exceeded and preceded deliberation**

We compared the volumes of Shares and Comments to see if the collective affective response (*Shares*), not only exceeded, but also preceded (*pre-logical*) a more elaborated response (*Comments*). If indeed a mobilisation nexus is a *prelogical* affective knot, then the *Shares* (affective response) should not only massively exceed the *Comments* (“deliberation”, logical reasoning), but also to appear first in a time sequence. Such difference in the volume and timing of *Shares* and *Comments* can be an indicator of the *prelogical* nature of a mobilisation nexus. Charts 3 and 4 show the percentage and timing of *Shares* vs *Comments* on each of the two Facebook pages.



**Chart 3.** Percentage and timing of “Share” vs “Comment” on Facebook page “Soutien à Charlie Hebdo” (January 7<sup>th</sup>: Charlie Hebdo; January 8<sup>th</sup>: policewoman; January 9<sup>th</sup>: HyperCacher).

<sup>62</sup> In terms of content, a remarkably low number of 6 posts from a total of 188 referred to the victims of the anti-Semitic attack.



**Chart 4.** Percentage and timing of “Share” vs “Comment” on Facebook page “*Soutien à Charlie Hebdo et à la liberté d’expression*” (January 7<sup>th</sup>: Charlie Hebdo; January 8<sup>th</sup>:policewoman; January 9<sup>th</sup>: HyperCacher).

Charts 3 and 4 show the difference in volume and timing between *Share* and *Comments*. They indicate that a massive collective affective response (% *Shares*) *preceded* “deliberation”, reflected in the low percentage of *Comments*. This pattern, especially salient in the aftermath of the Charlie attack, is congruent with the idea of a prelogical nature of a mobilisation nexus-type response. This finding about the relative volume and timing of affect and “deliberation” is a novelty in the empirical evidence about mobilisation nexuses. Although not a proof, it brings support to Rouquette’s (1994) theoretical suggestion concerning the mobilisation nexuses’ activation upstream of “deliberation”.

## Discussion

Drawing on social identity and social representations approaches to crowds, two empirical studies examined the colossal French response to the Paris terrorist attacks in January 2015. We used live empirical data collected online on Facebook. The results are consistent with the authentication of a mobilisation nexus in the digital crowd response to the Charlie Hebdo attack. First, they showed **a spectacular increase in the collective, rather than individual, affective digital response**. Second, the intensity and primacy of the collective affect over “deliberation” supported the idea of a prelogical nature of a mobilisation nexus, which is an empirical novelty from a theoretical perspective. Overall, these findings authenticated a mobilisation nexus in the public response to the Charlie Hebdo attack, but not to the anti-Semitic attack on the HyperCacher.

The results showed (1) a massive, unanimous response to the attack on Charlie Hebdo, (2) in sharp contrast with a weaker, controversial response to the attack on the HyperCacher, and (3) a two-step digital response pattern: first, a consensus federated beyond intergroup differences, but very soon unanimity dissolved, unmasking intergroup differences and controversies. We offer two possible interpretations for these results. The

first suggests that the difference in the digital crowd response could be imputable to an “order” effect. The second suggests that the response to the attack on Charlie Hebdo, but not to the anti-Semitic attack, was triggered by a particular collective interpretation of the Charlie Hebdo attack as an “attack on the French ingroup” and on an emblematic value of French identity, “*Liberty*”, theorised as a *mobilisation nexus*.

*Was the difference in digital response due to the “order” of the attacks ?*

One can obviously think that the difference in the digital response was due to the consecutiveness of the attacks. Indeed, the anti-Semitic attack on the HyperCacher *followed that* on Charlie Hebdo. The collective response to the anti-Semitic attack could have been so remarkably lower because people were already under shock. However, why would one hypothesize that a terrorist attack coming after another would *reduce*, rather than *increase*, the collective response? In fact, the social amplification of risk framework (SARF, Kasperson *et al.*, 1988) suggests that it could have increased. Indeed, at the time of the attack on the HyperCacher, the third in a row, the events were unfolding, not knowing how and when they would end, the attacks were co-ordinated, the terrorists still free, the country faced a novel and dreadful risk of other attacks to possibly follow, the media was dramatically broadcasting news about the attacks live 24/7 echoing political institutions, experts, etc., the attacks were in all the conversations in offices, schools, transportation, hospitals, stores, online, etc. All of these arguments plead for the contrary: a social amplification of risk and an *increase* in the digital response could have been expected. The data showed the opposite: a massive *decrease in* public response after the HyperCacher attack.

On the other hand, if the decrease in response had been due to the HyperCacher attack coming after Charlie Hebdo, then the collective response should be massive after an attack that was not preceded by another terrorist attack. Obviously, our study could not test this hypothesis, but the reality tragically did: none of the anti-Semitic attacks in France raised a public response comparable to the attack on Charlie Hebdo, even the atrocious attack of the Ozar Hatorah Jewish school in Toulouse in 2012 (now Ohr Torah), and the tragic killing of three children aged 3, 6 and 8 by a self-confessed al-Qaeda. If the aftershock wave was enough to explain the lack of mobilization after the HyperCacher attack, how to explain the lack of mobilization after the horrifying Jewish school attack, which was not preceded by an event similar to Charlie Hebdo? The “consecutiveness” argument was absent, and so was mobilisation. Thus, the attacks’ order is insufficient to explain the difference in their response.

*Was the difference in the digital response due to the collective meaning of the two attacks?*

Another possible source of the difference in digital mobilisation may be a contrast in the attacks’ collective interpretation. Obviously, the attack on Charlie Hebdo was collectively understood as an “attack on the French ingroup” through attacking people who represent the group’s most fundamental values - *Liberty*, theorised as a mobilisation nexus, while the attack on the HyperCacher was interpreted as one on a subcategory of the French ingroup, or even on members of a group against whom the aggressions are banalized or so frequent that desensitization occurred (Soral, Bilewicz & Winiewski, 2018).

This interpretation warns of the disturbing collective perception of the victims, i.e., French journalists vs. French Jewish citizens. While it is clear from the data that people reacted differently because they gave higher importance to one attack over the other, the claim could be stronger if there was evidence that the basis of



categorization was indeed French journalists vs. French Jewish citizens. The social categorization theory could then offer the theoretical basis of the comparison. Our in-vivo, non participatory data collection did not allow for such evidence to be produced, nor for a manipulation check in such sense. However, this evidence stemmed from the official declarations in the public media at the time of the events: “*In three days that traumatized a nation, three men with deep histories of association with terrorist organizations carried out three deadly attacks: The first against a newspaper, the second against a police officer and the third against a kosher grocery store. The last, said President François Hollande in an address to the nation Friday evening, was unquestionably “a horrifying anti-Semitic attack”*”<sup>63</sup>.

Indeed, the difference in response between the attack on Charlie Hebdo and the attack on the HyperCacher - and in fact, as we saw above, any other terrorist attack involving the loss of life, shows that a mobilisation nexus was not activated out of compassion for the deceased or out of the shared experience of threat following a terrorist attack, but indeed because the Charlie Hebdo attack was experienced as if the nation was under attack, thus invoking a response across the nation. The attack on the HyperCacher was not seen as an attack on France and Frenchness, but on people categorized as a far narrower category, whose place in the “nation” appeared to be perceived as more ambivalent, certainly not emblematic (Ernst-Vintila & Reicher, 2018).

Here we illustrated how a mobilisation nexus drove solidarity in France after a terrorist attack drawing on a specific definition of (national) identity. While the quantitative analysis of Facebook’s interactive features would have highlighted the intensity and timing of mobilisation, which is already an important result, the notion of mobilisation nexus revealed a *qualitative* contrast in the collective meaning of the two attacks. Such contrast pointed to a difference in their respective *statut événementiel* (Rouquette, 2007; Ernst-Vintila *et al.*, 2013), based on how emblematically their appeal concerned specific definitions of French identity.

In other words, without the notion of mobilisation nexus, examining the digital response would have revealed differences in its intensity; the notion of mobilisation nexus revealed that what seemed a merely quantitative difference revealed a *qualitative* distinction in meaning. Using the mobilisation nexus helped us integrate a theoretical understanding around such *qualitative* contrast in crowds mobilisation.

## Conclusion

We analysed the French digital response to the terrorist attacks in Paris in January 2015, against the Charlie Hebdo satirical weekly, on January 7<sup>th</sup>, and the HyperCacher, a kosher grocery in Eastern Paris, on January 9<sup>th</sup>, using real-time online data from Facebook. The results showed a sharp contrast between a dramatic, unanimous, response to the attack on Charlie Hebdo, that federated the French society beyond intergroup differences, and a modest response to the anti-Semitic attack on kosher grocery store HyperCacher.

The data showed that hundreds of thousands of people responded to the attack on Charlie Hebdo through digital participation, by joining and reacting on two Facebook pages created *ad-hoc*. This was visibly not the case after the attack on the HyperCacher. We offered two possible interpretations for the difference in the digital response to the attacks.

The first was a simple “common sense” argument: the order of the two attacks. However, a real-life examination weakened this argument, as not a single anti-Semitic attack triggered a massive collective mobilisation in France.

The second interpretation pointed to a qualitative difference in the events’ collective interpretations. It suggests that the contrast in digital mobilisation comes from a collective understanding of the attack on Charlie

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<sup>63</sup> Original French quote by L’Obs, 9<sup>th</sup> of January 2015: [goo.gl/v8qHSX](http://goo.gl/v8qHSX), translation by the Washington Post, 9<sup>th</sup> of January 2015: [goo.gl/4MNSor](http://goo.gl/4MNSor)

Hebdo as an “attack on the French ingroup” through attacking people who represent the group’s most fundamental values - *Liberty*, theorised as a mobilisation nexus. In disturbing contrast, the attack on the HyperCacher was interpreted as if it was an insult to a subcategory of the French ingroup, perhaps an attack on members of an out-group, or even on members of a group against whom the aggressions are banalized.

We suggest that the notion of mobilisation nexus takes us one step closer to understanding how polarised identities become salient in crowds and their affective connection to their group’s (historical) symbols and warns of the need to prepare societal resilience that draws on inclusive rather than exclusive identities. In the current international context, it is useful in studies in which the collective understanding informs people’s response to extreme events. Overall, it is in harmony with the voices of those who have emphasized the importance of theorising (Ellemers, 2013; Kruglanski, 2001; Van Lange, 2013; Van Zomeren, 2016) and who pleaded for more integration between social representations research and social identity research (Breakwell & Lyons, 1996; Chryssochoou, 2004, 2016; Deschamps & Moliner, 2008; Elcheroth, *et al.*, 2011; Howarth, 2006; Rateau & Moliner, 2009; Reicher, Elcheroth & Doise, 2011).

## Totalitarianism: “Carry that weight”

*“Psychological trauma is an affliction of the powerless. At the moment of trauma, the victim is rendered helpless by overwhelming force. When the force is that of nature, we speak of disasters. When the force is that of other human beings, we speak of atrocities. Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning (...). Traumatic events are extraordinary, not because they occur rarely, but rather because they overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life. Unlike commonplace misfortunes, traumatic events generally involve threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death. They confront human beings with the extremities of helplessness and terror, and evoke the responses of catastrophe”. Judith Herman (1992, p. 33)*

Arendt wrote that totalitarianism “aimed at and succeeded in organizing masses” (Arendt, 1951/1958, p. 308) by “extinguishing individual identity permanently and not just for the moment of collective heroic action” (ibid., p. 314). A particular distribution of power, not just “dictatorship”, but “total domination” (ibid.), marked the structure of those classless societies. The overturn of their economic and social foundations and people’s isolation from one another through random “liquidations”<sup>64</sup> (mass murder) corrupted solidarity, transformed the sociability itself and dramatically shaped Europe’s social political life in the XXth century until not so long ago.

« *Située sur le même continent que l’Europe de l’Ouest, c’est tout un autre monde* », Moscovici wrote about Eastern Europe in the *Chronique des années égarées* (1997, p. 389). Totalitarianism is a state violence that enforces “*the most extreme and negative forms of socialisation*” (Watier & Markova, 2004, p. 39). However, despite its exceptional interest and its marking decades ago by the author of the social representations theory, few empirical studies have explored it, its persistence in the collective forms of social thought, and how a totalitarian organization of power impacted the social representations in totalitarian and post-totalitarian societies.

When I write that the organization of power engages sociability, I draw on Aron’s writing on democracy and totalitarianism: “*les relations des hommes entre eux sont le phénomène fondamental de toute collectivité. Or, l’organisation de l’autorité engage plus directement la façon de vivre que tout autre aspect de la société*” (1965, p. 35). Considering that social representations are a fundamental category of sociability, this implies that the organization of authority and power, because it engages sociability, impacts its fundamental categories (Bouthoul, 1952), including, then, social representations.

How does a society’s power structure, as a sociability *datum*, impact social thinking?

A grant allowed Meri Smbatyan and me to explore the heavy legacy of communist totalitarianism and the slow, laborious evolution of social thinking in post-totalitarian societies. We conducted an empirical study in Armenia, where Smbatyan was a Masters student in psychology at Yerevan State University. Because the transformation of social representations is a matter of historical time and generations, rather than psychological time and individuals (cf. Chapter 2), we thought that studying them in two distinct generations could bring some elements of understanding. Armenia’s situation, a former Soviet republic with a totalitarian regime until 1991 (heteronomous context), then a sovereign republic in transition to democracy (autonomous context), allowed us to access two representational states formed in two distinct global social systems (Abric & Guimelli, 1998): one in the generation socialized during totalitarianism (heteronomy), the other in the generation who socialised during the country’s transition to democracy (autonomy).

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<sup>64</sup> “*the most elementary caution demands that one avoid all intimate contacts, if possible – not in order to prevent discovery of one’s secret thoughts, but rather to eliminate, in the almost certain case of future trouble, all persons who might have not only an ordinary cheap interest in your denunciation but an irresistible need to bring about your ruin simply because they are in danger [in] their own lives*” (Arendt, 1958, p. 323).

In our study, we used an “operational” contrast between those two global social contexts that lies in their normative organization of power: the totalitarian system is heteronomous (rules are imposed), while the democratic one is autonomous (rules come from inside)<sup>65</sup>.

In cooperation with Grig Havarneanu and Juana Juárez Romero, we focussed on the representations of *injustice* (Ernst-Vintila, Smbatyan, Havarneanu, & Juárez Romero, 2014).

### *Power systems and normativity*

I wish to address the *emprise totalitaire*, hence link power and discernment. Discernment assumes that citizens know that they have an autonomy of thought with respect to authority. I draw on Arendt and Aron to propose that, in a totalitarian system, the citizens’ particular relationship to the State is decisive in how they elaborate and mobilise social thought about high stake objects, such as laws, legality, in/justice, etc. From a social psychological perspective, drawing on Moscovici (1981/1985) and Markova’s work on totalitarianism (2004, 2007, 2008), Herman’s work on trauma and political terror (1992), Rouquette’s work on citizenship (1999b, 2004), and some of my own previous work, I focussed on the lasting social representations formed in a totalitarian system, and how they differ from those in a more democratic system.

If we admit with Russell that “*the fundamental concept in social science is Power, in the same sense in which Energy is the fundamental concept in physics*” (1938), then “*the division of society as a division of power and non-power*” (Castoriadis & Mongin, 1977) has totalitarian regimes as a prototypical case.

On the other hand, the lack of discernment is linked to the particular relation to the Law in totalitarian states: “*Eichmann's zeal (...) is that of a man whose relation to the law has been perverted by the very fate of laws in a totalitarian state*”, Arendt’s (1963) commentators noted (Casen, 2012). It is precisely in the internalisation of such perverted laws and norms that the totalitarian socialisation denounced in Markovà’s work consists.

The citizens’ relationship to the law, State and Authority, then, appears essential in the elaboration and mobilisation of representational systems especially about legality, justice and injustice. C. Kurilsky-Augeven, a researcher specializing in Soviet legal socialization, wrote “*les images de la loi, du droit et de la justice ne peuvent être comprises sans être éclairées par les représentations développées par le sujet à propos des notions fondamentales d'autorité, de faute, de sanction, de liberté ou d'égalité*” (Kourilsky-Augeven, 2007, p. 22).

Exploring the social representations in a totalitarian system requires us to understand a fundamental characteristic that distinguishes it from a democratic system : the nature of normativity imposed by control over societies.

In an autonomous, democratic system, the elaboration and the respect of norms are based on the social relations between the individuals, that is to say on their sociability (in the sense of Gurvitch, 1968) - rather than on the authority-individual relationship: it is an *autonomous* system. Unlike the perverse norms in totalitarian regimes, in these democratic societies, standards are there to protect the safety of others. Recognizing the value of the Other is the very meaning of justice, noted Levinas (1961).

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<sup>65</sup> Heteronomy, which refers to action influenced by a force external to the individual, is a concept developed by Kant, who relied on Rousseau’s work on the social contract. A heteronomous system is a system external to social relations (the rules are imposed from the outside: in our study, the totalitarian system), whereas an autonomous system is intrinsic to social relations (the law emanates from them: in our study, the democratic system) (Piaget, 1932). Castoriadis contrasted heteronomy and autonomy in societies noting that, while all societies create their own institutions (laws, traditions, behaviours, etc.), “*an autonomous society is a society which self-institutes explicitly*” (1975/1982, p. 131). By contrast, in heteronomic societies, norms are “given”, or imposed, by an extra-social authority (for example, God, ancestors, etc.; in modern societies, the State).

In contrast, in a totalitarian system, the norms are imposed by the authority. Unlike dictatorship, they cover both the public and the private domains. They are based on coercively controlling interactions between the authority and the people, and on the severity of the sanctions. A totalitarian system is in fact a totalitarian captivity, a typical illustration of a *heteronomous* system, dominated by an authority "*that institutes a total social, political and ideological control over individuals*", as Neculau wrote (2008), using *perverse* norms, a violent system based on coercion, retribution of submissiveness, sanctions oftentimes extreme against those who resisted, and isolation of both individuals and the society<sup>66</sup>. Neculau, a Romanian social psychologist, studied the totalitarian communist regime that came to power in Eastern Europe after the Second World war and the Shoah. He focussed on the totalitarian effect on social representations (Neculau, 2002, 2006; Neculau & Sirota, 2010; Sirota, Neculau, & Soponaru-Puzdriac, 2010). Drawing on the idea that the representational core was determined by a community's global social context (Abric & Guimelli, 1998), its "global social envelope" (Deconchy, 2002), Neculau analysed how the introduction of a new relationship between citizens and the State had worked in the Eastern Europe totalitarian system and how it had become concrete in the so-called "building of new man", who expressed new, hegemonic representations (Moscovici, 1988) and "adapted" practices. Both those new, hegemonic representations and the "adapted" practices broke with the past and were imposed as forceful acknowledgements of people's own lack of autonomy. Such lack of autonomy meant that they were controlled by what *others* (the authorities in power) did, thought, and felt, and to which the people adapted accordingly. Even when not endorsing the State authorities' "centralised", unitary, totalitarian vision, they worried about it, anticipated its expectations and response, and deferred to its opinion, which made it difficult for them to make decisions and take action *on their own*.

If we admit with Aron (1965) that sociability depends on how power is organised in a society, then a change in power organisation, such as the transition from a totalitarian to a democratic regime (and obviously the reverse, as history showed), should affect sociability, consequently its fundamental categories, among which are social representations. This, and the persistence of totalitarian effects on the social thinking of citizens socialized during the totalitarian era, were the major hypotheses of our empirical study.

We questioned a sample of N = 60 citizens of Yerevan, capital of ex-Soviet Armenia, from generations socialised in the two political systems: half of the participants had been socialized during the Soviet regime (totalitarianism), and the other half during the country's transition to democracy. To collect their social representations of injustice, we used a "hierarchical evocation questionnaire" ("HEQ", inducer: "injustice"), a methodological choice constrained by the need for congruence between the representational object, the concerned population and the representational collection method (Rouquette, 2005). The study took as independent variable the global social political system in which the social representations had been elaborated, understood as in political sciences, i.e., as a situational variable that characterises a societal state and that has an "objective" character relative to the human mind and social thinking. We measured the citizens' perceived capacity to act and collected their social representations about injustice.

### An illustration of the *emprise totalitaire*: power and social representations

#### *Empirical findings on the representational structure and content*

Using a HEQ procedure (associated words' rank x frequency), we established a four-box table corresponding to the four representational zones formed about "injustice" during totalitarianism vs. transition to democracy.

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<sup>66</sup> As Jovchelovitch noted, "*totalitarian regimes try to prevent the production of everyday knowledge by force, whereas traditional societies operate by the authority and power of the social bond itself. The latter derives its power from the fact that it is recognized; the former needs force and, frequently, state violence to exert its effects*" (2001).

**Tables 3.6 a and b**

*The structure and content of social representations formed about injustice in a totalitarian system vs transition to democracy*

<b>SR about "Injustice" formed in a totalitarian system</b>	<b>Average rank First</b> < 2,4	<b>Average rank Last</b> >= 2,4		<b>SR about "Injustice" formed during transition to democracy</b>	<b>Average rank First</b> < 2,4	<b>Average rank Last</b> >= 2,4
<b>Frequency</b> High >= 4	State authorities (F=17, R=2.50)	Corruption (F=7, R=3.00)  Illegality (F=3, R=3.16)		<b>Frequency</b> High >= 4	Fight (F=4, R=2.00)  Broken hopes (F=4, R=2.00)  Inequality (F=5, R=2.40)  Illegality (F=5, R=2.40)	Rights violation (F=5, R=2.60)  Unemployment (F=5, R=2.75)  Corruption (F=7, R=2,85)  Discrimination (F=4, R=3.00)  Elections (F=6, R=3.50)  False (F=9, R=3.77)  Bribery (F=4, R=4.00)  Anger (F=4, R=4.00)
	<i>Central items</i>	<i>First periphery</i>			<i>Central items</i>	<i>First periphery</i>
<b>Frequency</b> Low <4	Rights violation (F=3, R=1.33)  President (F=2, R=1.50)  Elections (F=2, R=1.50)  State (F=2, R=2.50)  Profit (F=2, R=2.50)	Justice court (F=3, R=3.00)  Poverty (F=3, R=3.00)  Deception (F=2, R=3.00)  Anxiety (F=4, R=3.25)  Monopoly (F=3, R=3.33)  Despair (F=2, R=3.50)  Police (F=2, R=3.50)  Falsehood (F=2, R=4.50)  Powerlessness (F=3, R=3.66)  Inequality (F=2, R=5.00)		<b>Frequency</b> Low <4	Education (F=2, R=1.50)  Violence (F=2, R=1.50)  Chaos (F=2, R=2.00)  Deception (F=2, R=2.33)  Poverty (F=2, R=2.50)  Life (F=2, R=2.50)	Nepotism (F=3, R=2.66)  Power (F=3, R=2.66)  Government (F=3, R=3.00)  Low salary (F=2, R=3.00)  Impunity (F=2, R=3.00)  Armenia (F=2, R=3.00)  Politics (F=2, R=3.00)  Challenge (F=2, R=3.50)  Health (F=4, R=3.66)  Law (F=2, R=4.00)  Sadness (F=2, R=4.50)  Repression (F=2, R=5.00)
	<i>Potential change zone</i>	<i>Second periphery</i>			<i>Potential change zone</i>	<i>Second periphery</i>

**Table 3.6a**

**Table 3.6b**

Tables 3.6a and b show major differences between the social representations of injustice formed in the two political systems. First, a “*stripped down*” representational structure (Rouquette & Rateau, 1998, p. 18) formed during totalitarianism contrasts with a rich, complex structure during the transition to democracy. Moreover, the social representation formed during totalitarianism is characterised by a sharp contrast between the high consensus around its one central element (almost 2 out of 3 persons referred to the State authorities before anything else about “injustice”) and its peripheral weakness, which denotes low situational/interindividual variability, scarce possibilities for challenge and negotiation. In contrast, the representation formed during the country’s transition to democracy showed a richer structure, more complexity in both the central and the peripheral system (consensus around more central elements, increased number of peripheral elements, denoting higher situational/interindividual variability), with items such as *Fight* and *Inequality* driving the representation’s central meaning, and issues concerning the citizens themselves (autonomy, rather than heteronomy, Box 3: *Education, Violence, Poverty*) positioned as drivers of future representational change for subcategories of the interviewed population.

By gun or by abuse, “*in situations of captivity the perpetrator becomes the most powerful person in the life of the victim, and the psychology of the victim is shaped by the actions and beliefs of the perpetrator*”, Herman noted (1992, p. 75). In the “totalitarian” representation, the State authorities’ view is decisive not only because of the heteronomy that it “adds” to the representational content, but especially because of its structurally central character, which means that the Authorities’ own meaning took over the other elements’ meaning. This illustrates how, in a totalitarian system, the people’s social representations refer to, and actually incorporate as a central reference, the totalizing vision of the authorities in power and the (perverted) norms which they impose (heteronormativity). As a consequence, not only does the authorities’ vision “coexist” with other elements in people’s social representations, as we see in the representations’ content, but, from a *structural* point of view, the State authorities themselves are a central, “organizing” element, which gives its meaning to the whole social representation, *imposing* the Authorities’ vision and meaning of social objects over those of the citizens. Totalitarian circumstances raise the “*possibility that gigantic lies and monstrous falsehoods can eventually be established as unquestioned facts, that man may be free to change his own past at will, and that the difference between truth and falsehood may cease to be objective and become a mere matter of power and cleverness, of pressure and infinite repetition.*” (Arendt, 1951).

Establishing the central character of the State authorities in those social representations is an important finding for the understanding of the social psychology of totalitarianism, especially of the “*emprise totalitaire*”. On the other hand, given the historic timescale of social representations, this finding illustrated the dramatically long term effects of totalitarian captivity on thinking societies even a quarter century after the regime changed (“*Carry that weight*” effect).

From a more theoretical and structural perspective, these findings showed again, just like our previous terrorism studies, how high representational consensus (Table 3.6a, Box 1, central core) is associated with a scarce peripheral system (Boxes 2, 3), a finding that should be seriously explored in further studies, especially about the “structure” (or lack of structure) of mobilisation nexuses. Of course these studies should be continued and replicated to consolidate their validity.

## Conclusions

Drawing on Arendt’s (1951/1958, Aron’s (1965), Moscovici’s (1981/1985) work on totalitarianism, Markovà’s on the totalitarian socialisation (2004, 2007, 2008), Herman’s work on captivity, trauma and political terror (1992), Rouquette’s work on citizenship (1999b, 2004), and some of my previous work, we showed how in a totalitarian system the social representations of injustice refer to the authority and the norms which it imposes. Not only is

the authority's vision embedded in people's social representations, visible in the representations' content, but, from a structural point of view, the Authority itself is an "organizing", central element; that is, one that imprints its own, hegemonic meaning on the representation itself. Under totalitarian captivity (Neculau & Sirota, 2008), the totalitarian authorities' powerful vision, then, not only coexists for citizens along with other representational elements, but, because of its centrality, imprints them with its significance and takes over their meaning<sup>67</sup>. The outcome, then, goes far beyond individual meaning and mind, taking hold of a thinking society in captivity. Regardless of the truth or falseness of the authorities' view, of its content *per se*, of people "believing" it or not, it drives their representation and behaviour because the State authority is a central, and in our case the only (!) core element, in the social representational structure. The *emprise totalitaire*, then, goes far beyond individual "beliefs" and minds, taking over a thinking society.

I consider these findings an important contribution to the understanding of the social psychology of totalitarianism, a step forward in understanding the "*emprise totalitaire*", and empirical evidence of Moscovici's idea that in a totalitarian system "*la soumission externe cède la place à la soumission interne, l'emprise bien visible est remplacée par une emprise spirituelle, invisible et d'autant plus imparable*" (Moscovici, 1981/1985, p. 66).

This long term *totalitarian emprise* can probably only be countered by the counterpower of collective resistance, transmission (*collective heroic action*, in Arendt's terms, 1951) and the legitimacy that such solidarity brings to sustainable discernment and dissent in challenging those systems (Reicher, 2004; Ernst-Vintila, Pachtchenko-de Préville, Rouquette, 2011). "*There is only one way that the products of oppression can be dissolved, and that is to stop the oppression*" Kardiner<sup>68</sup> and Ovesey wrote (1951, p. 381). However, Arendt warned, "*Totalitarian solutions may well survive the fall of totalitarian regimes in the form of strong temptations which will come up whenever it seems impossible to alleviate political, social, or economic misery in a manner worthy of man*" (1951/1958, p. 459).

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<sup>67</sup> Much like a captor or abuser becomes a reference for his victim, and takes over her mind through her traumatic memory (Salmona, 2008), making her come to bond with him, a survival mechanism known as the Stockholm syndrome (Graham, Rawlings, & Rimini, 1988).

<sup>68</sup> In this work, Kardiner focussed on the subjectification of oppression and how a collective history of oppression becomes embodied. Kardiner's belief in the impact of the environment on the unconscious and the Kardiner is most famously known for writing *The Traumatic Neuroses of War* (1941), a seminal study on combat related psychological trauma, and one of the first to make explicit connections between peacetime and war trauma. Many of the symptoms he described in this study would later be used in the 1980 definition of post-traumatic stress disorder by the American Psychiatric Association (DSM-III).





# Personal involvement and the polarisation of social thinking

We saw in Chapter 2 that personal involvement was conceived as a subjective, but socially determined frame of reference that reflects a people's relationship to a social object. It is thought to play a key role in shaping and mobilising social thinking (Rouquette, 1980, 1997, Flament & Rouquette, 2003, for a review, Ernst-Vintila, 2013, Lo Monaco, Apostolidis, Dany, 2013). It may be described as a three dimensional system, whose dimensions (coordinates) are: risk valuation, the perceived personal exposure, and the perceived capacity to act (Rouquette, 1997). Personal involvement is highest when people feel personally and specifically concerned by what they view as a matter of life and death and about which they feel able to do something.

The literature suggests that high personal involvement is associated with a richer representational structure (Rouquette, 1994a), and a change in personal involvement triggers a change in the preference for reasoning in more or less radical ways (Rouquette & Guimelli, 1995; Guimelli, 2002). In a series of studies I focussed on how personal involvement impacts the action-related vs. normative representational aspects and their structural balance. In this second part of Chapter 3 I will describe my findings about how we feel *involved* under extreme circumstances, and the key role that our involvement plays in social thinking.

## Natural hazards

My first series of empirical studies about personal involvement concerned the social thinking about collective risk (earthquakes) using the methodology described earlier. It resulted in one of the first empirical publications in English about the psychosocial model of personal involvement.

### Results

First, using risk valuation as selection variable<sup>69</sup>, I showed that personal involvement was globally associated with significantly more structured social representations (Rouquette, 1994a). As Table 3.7 shows, this concerns both the overall representational structure ( $V_t$ :  $F(1,408)=26,48$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and its f components ( $V_p$  (functional component):  $F(1,408)=11,93$ ,  $p <.01$ ;  $V_a$  (normative component):  $F(1,408)=31,92$ ,  $p <.01$ ).

**Table 3.7**

*Effects of personal involvement (risk valuation) on the structure of the social representation of seismic risk.*

Representational structure/Personal involvement (Risk valuation)	Overall structure $V_t$ (min = 0, max = 1)	Functional component $V_p$ (min = 0, max = 1)	Evaluative component $V_a$ (min = 0, max = 1)
Low	0,32	0,23	0,47
High	0,38	0,28	0,56
Significance	$F(1,408)=26,48$ , $p<.01$	$F(1, 408)=11,93$ , $p <.01$	$F(1, 408)=31,92$ , $p <.01$

*Note.* The total valency index ( $V_t$ ) is an aggregated index of the praxis and attributive valency indexes. It indicates the global organisation of the social representational structure. The praxis valency index ( $V_p$ ) indicates the degree of organisation of the functional

<sup>69</sup> Participants evaluated on a 6-point scale the consequences of seismic risk severity compared to other natural hazards (floods, air pollution, nuclear waste, greenhouse gas, oil spills, etc.). The scale went from « it is a matter of life and death (+) » vs. « it is a matter of no importance (-) ». The higher the score, the higher the valuation of seismic risk. When coded, the 6-point scale was dichotomized in two classes, which formed the two modalities retained in the analysis: scores 1 to 3 formed the modality « Low Risk Valuation » and were coded « VO- »; scores 4 to 6 formed « High Risk Valuation », coded « VO+ ».

component. The degree attributive valency index ( $V_a$ ) indicates the degree of organisation of the evaluative component. All indexes vary from 0 to 1, with a value at balance of 0.5.

However, Figure 3.8 shows that participants who had experienced an earthquake and who reported high risk valuation had the highest level of social representational organisation. By contrast, those who had not experienced earthquakes and who reported low risk valuation had the lowest level of representational organisation.

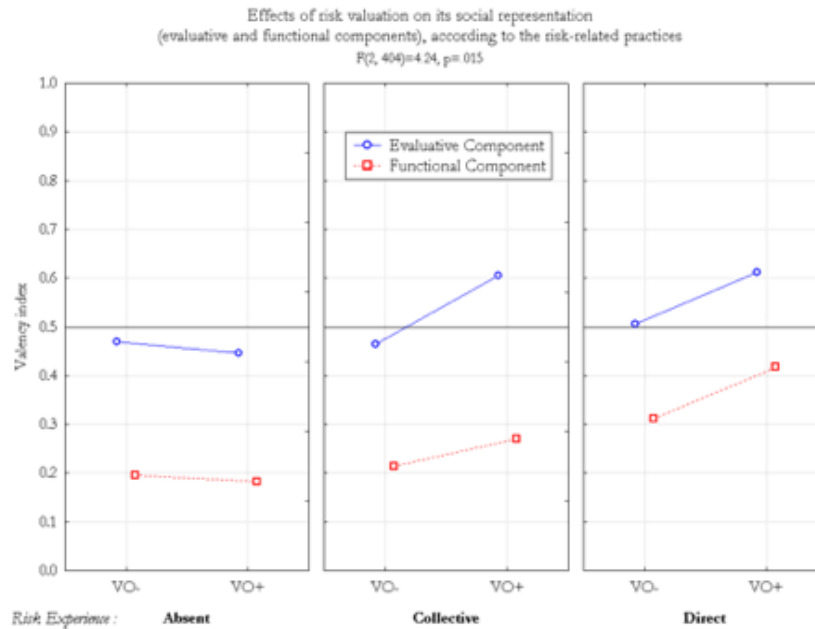


Figure 3.8. Effects of personal involvement (risk valuation, VO: low risk valuation (VO-), vs. high risk valuation (VO+)) on the social representational evaluative and functional components, according to risk-related practice (earthquake experience).

Note. The total valency index ( $V_t$ ) is an aggregated index of the *praxis* and *attributive* valency indexes. It indicates the global organisation of the social representational structure. The *praxis* valency index ( $V_p$ ) indicates the degree of organisation of the *functional* component. The degree *attributive* valency index ( $V_a$ ) indicates the degree of organisation of the *evaluative* component. All indexes vary from 0 to 1, with a value at balance of 0.5.

Figure 3.8 shows that personal involvement was associated with a more structured social representation only when people had risk-related practice ( $F(2,404)=4,24, p<.015$ ). Indeed, a richer representational structure i.e., higher *connectivity*, increased number of relations between the representational elements (higher  $V_t, V_p, V_a$ ), was only noted for participants who had risk-related practice (Romanian sample), either through their local risk culture, or personal earthquake experience. Importantly, in this case, higher personal involvement was associated with an increase in both the normative and the functional valencies. The robustness of the functional aspects is especially noteworthy because, as we saw above, they make the representation more instrumental and more practically oriented in behavioural prescription. In contrast, when participants had no risk-related practice (French sample), personal involvement was uncorrelated to increased organisation in the representational structure.

### Conclusion

These findings have theoretical and practical implications. First, they were among the first empirical evidence of personal involvement's relation to the social representational structure. They showed that this relation depends on the existence of risk-related practice, hence suggesting a mediating role for personal involvement in social thinking about risk, in complement to the determining role of risk-related practice.

They also yield important applied recommendations to increase the effectiveness of collective prevention campaigns. They suggest that, when collective risk-related conduct is sought, an effective campaign is one that targets more than increasing people's risk valuation (fear, concern, etc.). Indeed, a strategy consisting solely in increasing their awareness (or fear) of that risk is probably an ineffective one. As we saw, increasing personal involvement when people had no risk-related experience was not associated with a variation in the representational structure, hence no impact should be expected in terms of the representations' effectiveness in guiding behaviour. Instead, an effective campaign would be one that would increase their collective risk valuation *after* it made sure that they reached, *as social fellows*, a certain degree of risk-related practice, either via collective risk culture or sufficient risk-related practical training and simulations, experienced in a relevant group setting (Figure 3.8, center) - which brings in their social identity as a central question.

Hence, increasing the personal involvement of participants who have risk-related practice etc. seems an effective strategy to shape a more instrumental and more practically oriented representation, with likely effects on collective behavioural prescription.

## Financial crisis

In the first part of this chapter I described the findings about the social representations of the financial crisis being normative, rather than functional, for both lay people and senior financial executives, in spite of the latter having solid financial *practice*. First, this data collected in the immediate aftermath of the financial crisis in 2008 also showed that practice preferentially impacted the instrumental aspects of the representational structure, which groups the action schemes, thus making the senior financial executives' representations more instrumental in driving crisis-related behaviour in three ways: they were more numerous to take action in response to the financial crisis, they took an increased number of actions, and also reported more intentions for action if the financial crisis were to continue.

Second, my earthquake studies had shown that the organizing impact of personal involvement on the representations' functional component was conditioned by the existence of a given group' risk-related practice.

Finally, Tafani, Marfaing, and Guimelli (2006), who studied how people process and forward information drawing on their representations, found that the semantic transformations respond to social rationales which serve an identity function aiming to maintain a positive image of the ingroup (cf. the "scapegoating" strategy mentioned above about the responsibility attributions for the financial crisis). The authors suggest that personal involvement plays a key role both in how people transform the message (its structure and content), and in how they behave and intend to behave in the future.

Drawing on these three lines of considerations, I was interested in the differences between the senior financial executives and lay persons in terms of personal involvement with respect to the financial crisis. In forming a hypothesis about their different personal involvement, I drew on Rouquette's (1997) distinction between the "cultural" and the "circumstantial" aspects of personal involvement. Knowing that "cultural" involvement is driven by sociability itself and that it is characteristic of a social group, I expected that the two categories of participants, differently socialized in relation to the financial field, would report different levels of involvement. Operationally, I expected senior managers to report higher involvement scores about the financial crisis than ordinary citizens.

I studied personal involvement regarding the financial crisis in its three aspects. Participants responded on six-point scales (1 to 6) to questions regarding crisis valuation, perceived identification with the crisis ("perceived proximity"), and perceived ability to act. Working on views about globalisation in different world regions, Guimelli and Abric (2007) had suggested that, as a component of personal involvement, the perceived capacity to act could be broken down into two sub-dimensions, one individual and one collective. They suggested

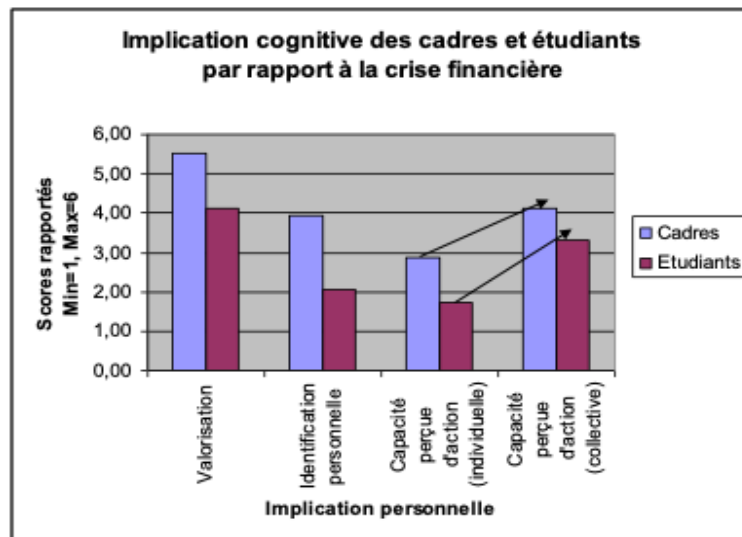
that people can feel able to act in a personal capacity, but also feel enabled at a collective level, as a group member. Hence, they distinguished between the perceived capacity for individual vs. collective action. I used this distinction in all of my subsequent studies about personal involvement regarding financial crisis, terrorism, totalitarianism, health, etc. Hence, in this study, participants reported if they felt they could take action about the financial crisis, on the one hand individually, and on the other hand collectively (as a member of a professional group, association, etc.). They answered on two scales which made it possible to collect two distinct scores, one for the individual and the other for the collective sub-dimension of the perceived capacity of action.

**Table 3.8**

*Senior financial executives' and ordinary citizens' personal involvement scores relative to the financial crisis.*

<b>Personal involvement/Participants' group</b>	Risk valuation Min=1, Max=6	Personal Identification (diffuse vs. strict concern) Min=1, Max=6	Perceived capacity for individual action Min=1, Max=6	Perceived capacity for collective action Min=1, Max=6
Senior finance executives	5,53	3,93	2,87	4,13
Lay citizens	4,13	2,07	1,73	3,33
Significance	F(1,28)=23,56; p<,0001	F(1,28)=11,11; p<,0024	F(1,28)=9,41; p<,0048	NS

First, Table 3.8 shows that senior executives reported higher scores in all three components of personal involvement regarding the financial crisis, with significant differences in terms of valuation ( $F(1,28) = 23.56, p < .0001$ ), "personal identification" (closely concerned,  $F(1,28) = 11.11, p < .002$ ), and individual capacity for action ( $F(1,28) = 9.41, p < .005$ ). Second, importantly, both groups report higher scores for the collective, rather than individual, capacity for action. Indeed, participants in both groups felt enabled in terms of collective action and it is interesting to note that, in spite of their significant difference in terms of perceived capacity for individual action, both groups converge in their perceived capacity for *collective* action (the difference between them is insignificant). These results show that participants who were highly socialised to financial practices (senior finance executives) place more importance, feel more closely concerned, and report a higher perception of their individual capacity for action, yet perceive collective action as more effective. One can think that this informs, as we saw above, why they responded to the crisis by taking individual action, a behavioural choice that justified the *statu quo* even further, in contrast to lay citizens whose involvement relied heavily on collective action, a response to the crisis that *challenged* the entire capitalist system - hence corroborating Scheidegger and Tüscher's findings (2009).



**Figure 3.9**

*Scores for personal involvement regarding the financial crisis*

*Note.*

$\Delta P$ : slope of the line  $\Delta P = PCAc - PCAi$  in each of the two groups, where PCAc = perceived capacity for collective action, and PCAi = perceived capacity for individual action

$\Delta P0$ : slope of the straight line PCAc - PCAi for lay citizens (bottom arrow)

$\Delta P1$  slope of the PCAc - PCAi line in the senior executive group (top arrow)

$\Delta P1 = 44\%$

$\Delta P0 = 92\%$

$\Delta P0 > 2 \Delta P1$

The analysis of the difference between the perceived capacity for collective and individual action in each group (slope of the lines  $\Delta P = PCAc - PCAi$  in each of the two groups, where PCAc = perceived capacity for collective action, and PCAi = perceived capacity for individual action in Figure 3.9), showed that, while a relative balance between the collective and individual mode of action exists among senior executives and allows individual action, the imbalance is clearly in favour of collective action among ordinary citizens ( $\Delta P1 = 44\%$  for senior executives,  $\Delta P0 = 92\%$  for lay citizens,  $\Delta P0 > 2 \Delta P1$ ). This reflects a much stronger reference to (reliance on?) collective action among lay citizens (whose financial practice, as we know, is significantly lower than that of the senior finance executives). Such a switch to the collective action mode when people feel involved but lack significant practice was explored elsewhere (terrorism study).

### *Conclusion*

This study aimed to distinguish between the objective and the social reality of the financial crisis of 2008 by focussing on the social thinking mobilised about it. In doing so, one purpose was to shed light on the role of personal involvement, this time about what was thought to be a historically relevant event, which was new.

Compared to the senior finance executives, lay citizens reported giving a smaller importance to the crisis, feeling only diffuse concern, perceiving a reduced individual capacity for action, and massively viewing collective action as a possible response. It was noteworthy that both types of participants reported collective action as more effective than individual action. The differences between the two groups illustrated two different modes of "cultural" involvement, as induced by their respective socialisation and sociability (Rouquette, 1997; Scheidegger and Tüscher, 2009).

## Terrorism

This study focussed on the role of personal involvement in engaging lay thinking about terrorism. I collected data shortly after the first wave of terrorist attacks that used airports (9/11, London Heathrow, etc.), with US and French passengers at Boston–Logan and Marseilles-Provence airports, both knowingly related to terrorist attacks. On the one hand, because personal involvement is a function of social and cultural position (Rouquette *et al.*, 2005), the theory suggested that, in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, US nationals would feel higher involvement with regard to terrorism than other nationals. On the other hand, it suggested that “*when there is involvement, the structure of the corresponding representations is enhanced*” (Rouquette & Guimelli, 1995): Higher personal involvement should be related to a more consensual (normative, group centered) lay thinking. Operationally, highly involved participants (US nationals as opposed to French) would show an increase in consensus (central elements, stronger salience, etc.), and a decrease in interindividual variability (dearth in the peripheral system). Because of the identity function of the social representations, which allows a person to define and assert group membership as well as positioning with regard to other groups, the consensual (central) elements that are specific to the highly involved participants were expected to reflect identity issues - i.e., such specific central elements should be salient and meaningful for “Us”-“Them” issues.

### Method

Personal involvement was measured under its three aspects using six point scales. To capture the difference between its social vs. individual aspects, we used two subscales to measure the perceived capacity to act (*cf.* Guimelli & Abric, 2007): participants evaluated if they felt that they could do something about terrorism, on the one hand “individually”, and on the other hand “as members of a group” to which they belonged/referred (either professional, NGO, religious, national, or other type of group). Operationalizing this distinction was interesting because the object of the lay thinking here was a collective risk, which may be subject to both individual and community action and protection. To analyse the structure of the social representations of terrorism in the two samples by comparing respectively their central core and peripheral system we used a prototypicality analysis (Vergès, 1992).

### Results

#### Personal involvement

The US passengers reported significantly higher personal involvement than the French (terrorism valuation, personal concern). Both groups perceived *collective* action as effective, and *individual* action as ineffective. Notably, the US passengers perceived a significantly higher capacity to act *collectively* than the French. For the US passengers, the social aspects of personal involvement (terrorism valuation and perceived capacity for *collective* action) clearly took over the psychological ones (personal exposure and perceived capacity for *individual* action)<sup>70</sup>. This suggests that in this highly involved sample, the social thinking about terrorism relies

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<sup>70</sup> One may be surprised by the high level of the scores reported by the US passengers for their perceived capacity to act *collectively*, given that such participants reputedly come from an “individualist” culture (Hofstede, 1991), which values individual action. This shift from the individual to the collective mode of action may be referred to findings on anxiety and affiliation (Schachter, 1959), and to *groupthink*, « a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members' strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action » (Janis, 1972, p. 9). We argue that this observation is due to the activation of a mobilisation nexus.

on social rather than individual aspects (group membership and identity, *cf. supra*), in other words on their social (cultural) positioning. Such a notable identity and action pattern, i.e., the *change in the criteria that define possible action, from the individual to the collective mode*, characterises mobilisation nexuses (Rouquette, 1994; *cf.* Chapter 2), a form of lay thinking of a different order than social representations, one that is profoundly collective and commands clear-cut stands, in conflict, threat and crisis situations:

*Personal involvement and social representations: a structural analysis*

Tables 3.10a and b show the structures of the social representations expressed by the French and US passengers. The comparison of the two central cores showed two consensual elements: attack and fear. Moreover, the American passengers' consensus (higher personal involvement) formed around two additional elements: casualties and Muslims. These two items therefore participate in defining terrorism for the American, as opposed to the French. What does this mean? If a central (defining) element is absent, the participants may not recognise the object of that representation as such (Moliner, 1989, working on the 'Calling into question' hypothesis). In this case, an attack perpetrated by "Muslims" resulting in casualties would be recognised as terrorism; but an attack that results in casualties but is not attributed to "Muslims", would not. This showed that what was actually central in highly involved passengers' social thinking about terrorism were the *identity* ("Muslims") and affect ("*fear*"), rather than *factual items* ("bomb", for this group, is a peripheral element). This illustration of the identity function of lay thinking, which allows defining membership and positioning with regard to other groups, coupled with the central co-occurrent affect, was an additional indication of a mobilisation nexus.

**Tables 3.10a and b**

*Comparison between the structures of the social representations of terrorist risk of French and American passengers.*

N.B. The items in the table are the free association answers given by the participants to the inductor "terrorism" ("*What are the first five words or expressions that come to your mind when you hear the word "terrorism"?*"). The items that are candidates to the central core of the social representations of terrorist risk ("central items") are located in the first quadrant of each table. The operational part of the social representation is represented by the items located in the "first periphery" quadrants.

<b>French passengers</b>	<b>Average rank First</b> < 2,4	<b>Average rank Last</b> >= 2,4	<b>American passengers</b>	<b>Average rank First</b> < 2,4	<b>Average rank Last</b> >= 2,4
<b>Frequency</b> High >= 10	Attack Bomb Fear	Dead	<b>Frequency</b> High >= 10	Attack Casualties Muslims Fear	Bomb
	<i>Central items</i>	<i>First periphery</i>		<i>Central items</i>	<i>First periphery</i>
<b>Frequency</b> Low <10	Coward	September 11 WTC Injustice Al-Qaeda Insecurity Plane Fundamentalism Bin-Laden Islam Danger Hostages Explosion Religion Extremism Violence War	<b>Frequency</b> Low <10		Al-Qaeda Extremists September 11 Crime Bin-Laden Chaos Middle East Suicide Innocence Safety
	<i>Potential change zone</i>	<i>Second periphery</i>		<i>Potential change zone</i>	<i>Second periphery</i>

**Table 3.11a**

**Table 3.11b**



On the other hand the structural analysis shows in both groups a striking dearth in the peripheral systems, which reflects reduced interindividual variability and limitation in the prescriptions for action. Coupled with the central core analysis above and the reliance on the social rather than individual aspects of personal involvement, this denoted an increase in the consensual thinking and a decrease in the interindividual variability in the highly involved group (US passengers). This tends to confirm that high personal involvement relates to a more consensual and more “narrow”, more radical form of lay thinking, pointing to a mobilisation nexus.

### *Conclusion*

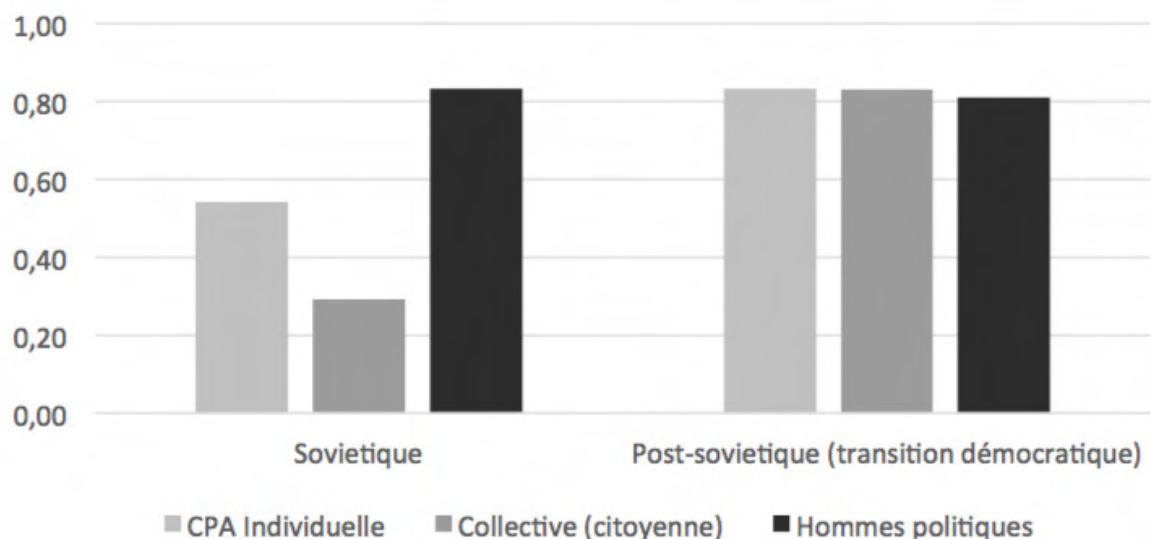
These results provided empirical evidence for a theoretical hypothesis (Rouquette 1994) according to which, in conflict, threat or crisis situations, and in the absence of practices, personal involvement is related to a more radical form of lay thinking. The study revealed a link between highly involved participants and collective action but personal involvement did not, by itself, foster prescriptions for action: thus, in a threat situation, social identity criteria define criteria for collective mobilisation and a group confronted with a sensitive object such as terrorism may then be open (vulnerable) to the directions for action provided by a leader for example (instrumentalisation of terrorism). These findings make the mobilisation nexus an important theoretical notion in linking social thinking and social identity research.

## Totalitarianism

In this study I was interested in personal involvement and especially the perceived capacity for action in a post-totalitarian society 25 years after totalitarianism. I used a “cultural” (as opposed to circumstantial) level of personal involvement, because the “cultural” level of personal involvement is induced by the sociability itself (see Chapter 2). As we know from history, being a “citizen” generalised as a *status* only when the persons, as individual members of society, were granted a capacity to act, in the form of voting rights (Rouquette & Rateau, 1998). However, “*one of the contrasts between the democratic and totalitarian systems (in which the society is entirely absorbed by the State) lays in the fact that in the second, the citizen is actually deprived of the capacity to act, denied the power to vote (which one will distinguish here from actually going to vote ...) and other forms of action as an exercise of individual and collective citizen rights*” (Ernst-Vintila, Pashchenko-de Prévile, Rouquette, 2011).

### *Perceived power distribution between the authority and the citizens in the totalitarian vs. transition context*

To verify that in judging their *current* post-totalitarian society, the participants’ *reference* point was the society in which they had been socialized, we measured to what extent they reported a *current* distribution of power congruent with that in which they had been socialized: attributed to the authority, as a characteristic of Soviet totalitarianism (group 1), or distributed between citizens and the authority (group 2).



**Graph 3.11**

*Perceived capacity for individual, collective (citizen) and authority (politicians) action in the totalitarian vs. non-totalitarian (democratic transition) contexts (average scores, 0 = minimum, 1 = maximum).*

Graph 3.11 shows how the participants socialized in different power organisation regimes perceived the power distribution between the people and the authority in their *current* society in transition. The most important remark concerns the totalitarian sample's perception of unequal power distribution: those participants still attributed maximum power to authority, especially at the expense of their collective power as citizens. In sharp contrast, participants socialized during the transition perceived a balanced power distribution between their own ability to act individually, collectively (as citizens), and the authorities'.

If such a persistent feeling of citizen powerlessness in front of the authority may be surprising nearly a quarter century after the fall of totalitarianism, it actually empirically illustrates that such evolution "*exige une génération d'hommes qui sachent résister aux pressions du milieu*" (Moscovici, 1981, p. 70).

We also measured the perceived capacity for citizen (collective) action, which proved sustainably low in the totalitarian sample, but increased in the post-totalitarian sample.

#### *Perceived capacity for action*

Table 3.12 shows a contrast between the two groups of participants: those socialized during totalitarianism report still feeling powerless, while those socialized during the transition perceive a significantly higher capacity for citizen action ( $m_1 = 0.29$ ,  $m_2 = 0.83$ ,  $t = 4.96$ ,  $p < .0.0005$ ).

**Table 3.12**

*Perceived capacity for personal and citizen capacity for action when people were socialised in a totalitarian system vs. transition to democracy*

<b>Socialisation regime</b>	<i>Individual capacity for action</i>	<i>Collective (Citizen) capacity for action</i>
<i>Totalitarianism</i>	0.54	0.29***
<i>Transition to democracy</i>	0.78	0.83***

### *Conclusion*

The results showed that people socialized in a totalitarian system, even 25 years later still feel a very unequal distribution of the power to act against injustice, which they lose to authority, especially to the detriment of their capacity for collective action as citizens. It is in individual terms that they eventually feel some capacity for action. In contrast, the participants socialized during the democratic transition perceive a completely different distribution of power, much more balanced, especially marked by a significant sense of capacity for collective action. The contrast is stark with the lingering sense of citizenship powerlessness reported by participants socialized in the totalitarian system. Such persistence - nearly a quarter of a century after the fall of the totalitarian system, and even as society has changed - provides information on the durability of the totalitarian effects on civil society, and on the cleavage of society in terms of civic engagement/withdrawal practices (Rouquette, 1998), a seemingly generational difference which relies in fact on the totalitarian socialisation context. This finding provides evidence for Rouquette's hypothesis (1997) about "cultural" involvement being "induced" by sociability itself. It also illustrates the durability of the "*propaganda success (...) [which] is to create the conditions allowing this "weary indifference" to spread sufficiently so that most citizens agree to let anything happen before their eyes, so that they are satisfied at the same time to carry out what is prescribed and not to imagine a possible alternative*" (Rouquette, 2004, p. 59).

### Health: making sense of conflicting behavioural prescriptions during an epidemic

Our research question in the ANR-ANTHROPO-MVT project was: how do conflicting sanitary and traditional rationales make sense in people's behaviours during an epidemic? The project focussed on health and the environment aiming to study the vector-borne disease sanitary management at La Réunion, a French overseas territory, based on the example of the chikungunya epidemic. Its psychosocial component addressed the research question drawing on the notion of personal involvement and its "function" to divide social objects in roughly two categories: those towards which people take action, and those towards which they do not, *to discriminate between what is relevant and what is mundane, and command engagement or withdrawal from action*. We were especially interested in people's perceived resources during the epidemic (perceived capacity for action) and their assessment of the epidemic's relevance in their cognitive universe: how important it was to them, and how strictly or loosely they felt concerned, themselves and their families.

The epidemic affected La Réunion between the beginning of 2005 and the middle of 2006, with a

prevalence of almost 40% of the population (244,000 people) causing 203 deaths. In the autumn of 2010, several cases of dengue and chikungunya were found in mainland France. Both diseases are vector-borne and viral, which means that the virus is transmitted from person to person by a vector, an infected mosquito. The epidemic's management and prevention needs to address both vector control (VC), and personal protection against vectors (PPAV). Vector control acts on the mosquito's environment: no stagnant water in gardens; waste disposal; burning antivector spirals; avoiding insecticides (risk of mosquito resistance). Personal protection against vectors requires watching out for mosquitoes around gardens, especially at sunrise and sunset; wearing light, long clothing; using repellent sprays, etc.

The health-environment connection was highlighted in vector control local campaigns, for example discouraging stagnant waters in gardens. However, such sanitary messages conflicted with the more ancient (local, traditional) conceptions of health and quality of life, which value luxuriant gardens that need stagnant waters. The medical and traditional rationales, then, result in contradictory behavioural prescriptions. We used the social thinking framework to understand sense making in this polyphasic context, and people's estimation of their capacity to act on health and disease.

## *Method*

### *Participants*

We interviewed 100 medical doctors ("MDs", general practitioners) (average age 50, M / F ratio = 3/1, average duration of exercise at La Réunion: 18 years), 11 of whom had specific training in tropical medicine, and 80 attended continuing medical education. We also surveyed households from La Ravine des Cabris, located in the South of the island. In collaboration with the French Research and Development Institute (IRD) entomologists, the area was considered representative because it had a low altitude, individual housing, highly urbanized area but was still fairly vegetated, had strong vector density (*Aedes*), and the dwellers were recent and had Creole background.

### *Procedure*

We used a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods. First, we carried out informative interviews with local sanitary authorities and health professionals (N=100) and families. Second, we conducted field observations during the prevention operations conducted by the local sanitary authorities (LAV/DRASS). Third, we invited 415 Reunionese households to fill an interdisciplinary survey designed with anthropologists, entomologists, medical doctors, and social psychologists (November 2007). It included four sections: family composition, habitat/garden, use of health care services during the epidemic, perceptions of health and the environment. The social psychological section concerned practices (therapeutic routes, vector control, local environmental practices) and social representations (discourses, conceptions and knowledge about the chikungunya and vector-borne diseases). We also measured personal involvement towards the disease (risk valuation, personal concern, perceived capacity for action: effectiveness, accessibility of protective means), with the assumption that it would play in health care behaviour, especially perceived capacity to act.

## *Results*

### *Representations*

Representations of the chikungunya were largely descriptive, rather than functional, hence quite ineffective in prescribing "sanitary" behaviours. The perceived capacity for action made it possible to form two groups among participants. Those who perceived a stronger capacity for action expressed a more functional representation, a

greater salience of the functional aspects, higher behavioural prescriptions related in particular to the transmission and protective means against the disease.

### *Practices*

The analysis of therapeutic routes revealed a persistent multicultural and ancient medical pluralism: while most of the patients consulted a doctor for first-line treatment (93%), many used traditional treatments: medicinal plants (bought or picked: 49%); added self-medication with drugs (26%), physiotherapy (18%), prayer (17%). The interviews showed that people very quickly became aware of the health authorities' relative ignorance about the disease and its seriousness, noted the saturation of doctors' waiting rooms and generalized prescription of analgesics and anti-inflammatories, perceived an ineffectiveness of treatments. They observed symptomatic cases and drew their knowledge about "diagnosis" from visible symptoms (fever, joint pain in the extremities, rashes). To manage this health crisis they relied on the use of the local pharmacopoeia: "zamal" (cannabis) decoctions was perceived as a resource based on folk knowledge but also an identity marker.

In terms of the vector control practices, the conflict between the sanitary recommendation to eliminate stagnant rainwater from the gardens and the centrality of the "garden" in the Islanders' representation of the quality of life explains their low support for the official vector control recommendations during the epidemic and the do-it-yourself measures relying on cultural traditions that did not contradict their representation.

### *Personal involvement among lay participants*

Lay participants almost unanimously acknowledged a significant valuation of the risk of disease. When presented with a list of possible risks on the Island, chikungunya came only in fourth place (score: 0.92), behind road accidents (0.94) and pollution (air pollution, 0.94 ; water pollution: 0.93). All scores were high from 0.82 to 0.94 for a maximum of 1, showing that all the risks were considered as important on the Island. However, they were subject to a reduced personal identification, which ranged from 0.54 to 0.6 for a maximum of 1. This suggests that, while the Ravine des Cabris respondents considered the risks listed as important on the island, they felt quite unconcerned, including by the chikungunya. Many explained their sense of exposure to chikungunya drawing on a lay understanding of medical logic, using notions such as individual differences in immunity, vulnerability, but also with fatality: "having chance or bad luck" with catching the "chik", a feeling of helplessness and a sense of personal non-responsibility in the face of the epidemic.

As far as the perceived capacity for action was concerned, while the protection / prevention means were found effective, people mentioned that they were difficult to implement, an argument used to explain their own reduced perceived capacity for action. All the protective means against the disease received high "efficiency" scores (from 0.6 to 0.95 for a maximum of 1). In addition, responding *after* the official campaigns and *in the presence* of sanitary authorities' representatives, the participants gave very high efficiency scores to the items concerning the cleaning of gardens, stagnant waters, and waste disposal. In contrast, the "accessibility" scores, which measured how easy it was to implement the protective means, were significantly lower than the efficiency scores (the perceived accessibility scores ranged from 0.53 to 0.68). This difference was even more noticeable in the case of the means that were reportedly perceived as the most effective: the cleaning of gardens (efficiency score: 0.95, accessibility score: 0.61) and the waste disposal (efficiency score: 0.94, accessibility score 0.63). This sharp contradiction within the very "perceived capacity for action" component of personal involvement reduced the adoption of the recommended sanitary measures and even lead to dis-involvement.

### *Perceived capacity for action among the medical doctors*

Most of the medical doctors considered the recommended sanitary protection to be effective (mosquito nets, 76%; repellents, 57%; 3% for repellent bracelets), only a minority considered the action of public authorities to be so (39%). In interviews an issue of trust and communication between the field doctors and the island's health authority appeared, in a context in which information was key for the health crisis management (only 64% of the doctors had access to a computer to make communication possible). In terms of

treatment effectiveness, the use of analgesics was considered effective by 28% of the doctors, the use of "zamal" (cannabis) by 7% (with a difference according to the doctor's experience in tropical countries), chloroquine by 6%, and medicinal plants 2%, regardless of the duration of practice, membership in the sentinel network, and participation in chloroquine tests.

## Conclusion

The findings highlighted, despite the many information campaigns and communication about the chikungunya epidemic, that, for many, "sense making" about the epidemic drew on a "*pre-existing and symptomatic system of thought*" (Apostolidis & Dany, 2012, p. 77), and drove "*multi-determined and pluri-reasonable human behaviour*" (*ibid.*). In particular, our findings emphasized that the health-environment link made by doctors, scientists, and sanitary authorities is not solely a matter of medical management: its obliteration hinders the adoption of disease prevention behaviour. People's social thinking, representations and personal involvement should be acknowledged in interdisciplinary work between doctors and social scientists to consider the medical, social, and environmental aspects in disease prevention and management (Vernazza-Licht, Gruénais, Bley, 2010), especially when new sanitary behaviour is concerned.



## Chapter 3 - Synthesis

Chapter 3 describes my contribution to research on social thought and personal involvement in extreme circumstances. The first studies address the seismic risk. The data collected before and after an earthquake in a region with moderate seismicity in a post-totalitarian society (Bucharest, Romania) shows that the social representations of risk were normative in all cases, even though they became more practice-oriented for people who had experienced the earthquake. The physical and social environment that feeds the culture of risk seems to be sufficient to saturate the evaluative component of the social representation even in the absence of practices. The second important result shows that experiencing a potentially destructive earthquake significantly structures the functional component of social representation, has no significant effect on its evaluative component, and has a nuanced effect on the emotional aspects.

Second, I focus on the social thinking about the global financial crisis marked by the collapse of the Lehman Brothers bank in September 2008. I wanted to empirically test whether social representations that had a more functional orientation were really more effective to guide behaviour, as theory suggested. I interviewed senior finance executives vs. non-professionals. I found that the representations were normative in both groups, supporting my previous findings on collective risks, and that a more functional representation indeed prescribed more behaviour.

Third, I wanted to understand the social thinking about terrorism based on empirical data. After the 9/11 attacks, data collected from French and US passengers and airport security officers show that the latter have a more complex representation. On the other hand, common sense representations (passengers) have a weak peripheral structure hence reduced modulation capacities, leading to more radical thinking, possibly pointing to a *mobilisation nexus*. After the terrorist attacks in Paris in January 2015, real-time online data allowed me to better explore this notion. The data showed a stark contrast between the unanimous response to the attack on Charlie Hebdo, which united the French society across intergroup differences, and the modest response to the anti-Semitic attack in Vincennes. The notion of a mobilisation nexus has helped to better understand certain polarized identities that had become prominent in the digital crowd, drawing attention to the need to prepare social resilience based on inclusive rather than exclusive identities.

Finally, I explored the social representations of justice and injustice in a post-totalitarian society. From a structural point of view, Authority itself remained an organizing element, imparting its hegemonic meaning to the representation itself, which means that it went well beyond the individual minds, ensuring the control of a thinking society in captivity. I see these results as a contribution to the understanding of the social psychology of totalitarianism, a step forward in the understanding of coercive control, and empirical evidence for Moscovici's (1981) idea that in a totalitarian system external submission converts into internal submission.

In the second part, I explore the link between personal involvement and the normative and practical aspects of social thinking, drawing on research about earthquakes, the financial crisis, terrorism, totalitarianism, epidemics. One finding concerns the long term effect of totalitarian socialization and coercive control on people's capacity to act. A second important finding is that in a threat situation, in the absence of practice, personal involvement is linked to a more radical form of social thought, where social identity criteria are criteria for action and collective mobilization. I see these findings as contributions to the theorisation of the *mobilisation nexus*, and new bridges between the social representations and social identity theories.



## Résumé du Chapitre 3

Le Chapitre 3 présente mes recherches sur la pensée sociale et l'implication personnelle dans des circonstances extrêmes. Les premières études abordent le risque sismique dans une région à sismicité modérée au sein d'une société post-totalitaire (Bucarest). L'environnement physique et social qui alimente la culture du risque semble être suffisant pour saturer la composante évaluative de la représentation même en l'absence de pratiques. Ces représentations normatives du risque deviennent plus axées sur la pratique pour ceux qui l'avaient vécu. Le deuxième résultat montre que vivre un séisme destructeur structure la composante fonctionnelle de la représentation sociale, sans effet significatif sur sa composante évaluative, et a des répercussions nuancées sur ses aspects émotionnels.

Deuxièmement, j'expose une étude sur la pensée sociale au sujet de la crise financière mondiale marquée par l'effondrement de Lehman Brothers en septembre 2008. Je voulais tester empiriquement si les représentations sociales qui avaient une orientation plus fonctionnelle étaient vraiment plus efficaces pour guider les comportements, comme le suggérait la théorie. En interrogeant des cadres supérieurs de la finance vs. non-professionnels, j'ai constaté que les représentations étaient normatives dans les deux groupes, étayant les conclusions antérieures, et qu'une représentation plus fonctionnelle prescrivait en effet plus de conduites. Enfin, on s'attendait à ce que l'ampleur de la crise financière en fasse un "événement extraordinaire", peut-être suffisamment pour déclencher un changement critique de pratiques liées à l'économie et aux valeurs du capitalisme (masculinisme inclus), pouvant remettre en cause les représentations, cela n'a pas été le cas.

Troisièmement, je présente des recherches sur la pensée sociale à l'égard du terrorisme. Après les attaques du 11 septembre 2001, les données recueillies auprès de passagers et de responsables de la sécurité aux États-Unis et en France montrent que les seconds ont une représentation plus complexe. En revanche, les représentations de sens commun (passagers) ont une structure périphérique faible et des capacités de modulation réduites, conduisant à une pensée normative, plus radicale, de type *nexus mobilisateur*. Après les attentats terroristes de Paris en janvier 2015, les données recueillies en temps réel m'ont permis de mieux explorer cette notion. J'ai constaté un contraste frappant entre la réponse unanime à l'attaque contre Charlie Hebdo, qui fédérait la société française au-delà des différences intergroupes, et la réponse modeste à l'attaque antisémite de Vincennes. La notion de *nexus mobilisateur* a permis de mieux comprendre certaines identités polarisées devenues proéminentes dans la foule digitale, attirant l'attention sur la nécessité de préparer une résilience sociale basée sur des identités inclusives plutôt qu'exclusives.

Enfin, j'ai exploré les représentations sociales de la justice et l'injustice dans une société post-totalitaire. D'un point de vue structurel, l'Autorité elle-même reste un élément organisateur, imprimant son sens hégémonique à la représentation. Le résultat va donc bien au-delà du sens et de l'esprit individuel, assurant le contrôle d'une société pensante en captivité. Je considère ces résultats comme une contribution à la compréhension de la psychologie sociale du totalitarisme, un pas en avant dans la compréhension de l'*emprise totalitaire*, l'idée selon laquelle dans un système totalitaire la soumission externe cède la place à la soumission interne (Moscovici, 1981).

En seconde partie du chapitre je présente mes études sur le lien entre l'implication personnelle et les aspects normatifs et pratiques, voire mobilisateurs, de la pensée sociale. Elles portent sur les tremblements de terre, la crise financière, le terrorisme, le totalitarisme, les prescriptions comportementales contradictoires lors d'une épidémie. J'ai constaté l'effet à long terme de la socialisation et du contrôle totalitaire sur l'implication "culturelle", surtout sur la capacité perçue d'action. Un second constat important est qu'en situation de menace, en l'absence de pratique, l'implication personnelle est liée à une forme plus radicale de pensée sociale, où les critères d'identité sociale sont des critères d'action et de mobilisation collective: le *nexus mobilisateur*. Je vois ces résultats comme des contributions à la théorisation de cette notion et à l'intégration des théories des représentations sociales et de l'identité sociale.

# Chapter 4

## Arguing for the future

*Dans les collectivités archaïques, le pouvoir appartient toujours (...) aux hommes et non aux femmes.*

Serge Moscovici, 1972

*Combat and rape, the public and private forms of organized social violence.*

Judith Herman, 1992

*There is a troubling commonality in terrorist attacks, extremist ideologies and brutal crimes: the violent misogyny of the perpetrators.*

Antonio Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General, UN General Assembly Address, September 2019

## Research perspectives on social thinking and social identities

This chapter proposes a vision of future research that adds a voice towards the integration of the social representations, social change, and social identity conceptual frameworks in a psychology of violence, oppression and resistance. I present some theoretical anchors and methodological implications of trauma informed research in social psychology. First, I present a political perspective on social vs. psychologized social identity and a social psychological theory of the citizen that brings power in the equation. Second, I recall a feminist perspective on social identity and oppression. Drawing on both, I discuss what makes trauma informed research relevant in the battle of visions in contexts marked by violence and negative operations of power. In trauma informed research, behaviours are understandable responses to adverse environments and the behavioural responses serve protective functions that draw from the human capacity for meaning making and agency. A trauma informed approach is one that takes the participants' sense making and standpoints seriously, rather than consider them in terms of cognitive biases, troubles, individual motivation, etc. Finally, I describe the research projects with my doctoral students and illustrate how the use of a trauma informed methodology may inform the social psychological theorisation of misrecognition, based on an empirical research about the identity misrecognition of young French Muslim women who wear a headscarf, as well as research on violence.

### Political perspective

Broadly construed, 'politics' refers to processes whereby the social relations that determine our conditions of existence are produced, reproduced, and transformed (Hopkins, Kahani-Hopkins & Reicher, 2006). The idea that *the personal is political* is not new: it is at the core of both a certain vision of social psychology, and of feminist critical research. In both of these visions, social identities are representations constructed under conditions marked by power relations. Separating them from structures and institutions is taking away their social and political meaning, considering them as a personal choice and reducing them to an individual meaning. It

also means misunderstanding the privileged institutions and groups that impose on us their own definition of our identity, and misunderstanding our position in relation to them.

However, *“like so much political debate that has passed through the prism of neoliberalism — and we must appreciate the importance of neoliberalism to this trend — “identity” has moved from a politically and sociologically informed understanding of power and social categories, to a more psychologised, individual understanding of a freely-chosen sense of self”*, Tyler noted (2019).

When they introduced the Social Identity Deindividuation Model (SIDE), Reicher and colleagues reminded that the *“European social psychology emerged largely in opposition to such individualistic and anti-collectivistic approaches (e.g. Israel & Tajfel, 1972)”* in which *“a unique personal self is the basis of all rational action and the group serves to impede the operation of such selfhood”* (Reicher, Spears & Postmes, 1995, pp. 175-176). In particular, they wrote, *“the tradition of social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978, 1982) and, more recently, self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987; Turner, 1991) is explicitly concerned with the social nature of selfhood and its relationship to group behaviour”* (Reicher, et al., p. 175). Their focus is of course on the social and political nature of identity, rather than psychologized identity.

In this landscape, when reliable social psychological landmarks exist, they are as rare as they are valuable. This makes exploration more difficult, yet *“la pensée n'en est que plus libre pour risquer des perspectives”* (Rouquette, 1989, p. 220).

However, in between the “everything is political” and an *in vitro*, politically aseptic, a-historic laboratory research, Rouquette (1988) thought that there was room for a “reasoned recognition” of *citizens* as social beings. He formulated a general social psychological theory of the citizen, considering the *citizen* as the “object” of political psychology and a product of the social system, under three aspects: the *citizen-as-thought-about*, the *citizen-who-thinks*, and the *citizen-who-acts*. *“Il ne s'agit pas de mettre un peu de politique dans la psychologie ou un peu de psychologie dans la politique. Il s'agit d'étudier des phénomènes dont les journaux, les conversations et les mémoires sont pleins, pour ne rien dire des places publiques ; il s'agit, en bref, de considérer tous les rôles de l'homme dans la Cité lorsque la Cité est en cause, sans négliger tout ce qui, en l'homme, procède du gouvernement et des affrontements de la Cité.”* (Rouquette, 1989, p. 220).

In Rouquette’s theorisation, the image of the human being is that of a *“Sujet pratique dont les activités cognitives sont à la fois motivées et conditionnées par son insertion sociale particulière, autrement dit par sa citoyenneté au sens étymologique du terme ; et c'est donc du côté même de cette insertion qu'il convient de rechercher les principes de production et de régulation de ces activités cognitives”* (Rouquette, 2009, p. 8). Social positions bend cognitive processes. Knowledge and understanding depend on social positions. The citizen is a complex “object”, anchored in the intersection of singular determinations and global regulations, at the articulation of the individual and the collective, the very definition of social psychology as Moscovici formulated it in 1984<sup>71</sup>.

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<sup>71</sup> *“L'identité n'est pas plus une construction individuelle que l'Etat n'est définissable par les motivations de ses représentants ou de ses fonctionnaires (...). Dans une société ou un groupe donnés, l'identité constitue d'abord un dispositif, au sens récemment précisé par Giorgio Agamben : “J'appelle dispositif tout ce qui a, d'une manière ou d'une autre, la capacité de capturer, d'orienter, de déterminer, d'intercepter, de modeler, de contrôler et d'assurer les gestes, les conduites, les opinions et les discours des êtres vivants”* (2007, p. 31). *De ce point de vue, la seule description des conduites et des discours, quelle que soit la finesse qu'on y mette, ne suffit pas à rendre raison de ce qu'on enregistre. L'étude des variations situationnelles et de leurs effets immédiats, quel que soit l'appareil statistique qu'on y déploie, ne réussit pas davantage, faute de perspective et d'ampleur, à rendre compte de l'historicité constitutive des rapports humains.”* (Rouquette, 2007, p. 502).

## Feminist perspective

We will “*retain the example of gender as an organizing thema par excellence in the order of social phenomena. There are others of course. But this is so important in any culture that it cannot be taken as just one possibility among others*” (Flament & Rouquette, 2003, p. 125).

Many theorists classified virtually all major social movements of the XX<sup>th</sup> century as “identity based”, including the civil rights movement and the women’s liberation movement. Tyler (2019) explained that sometimes in academic work identity politics means a social category of people with a shared experience of oppression, or a shared, *imposed* identity, usually as an “other” to a dominant group, occupying positions of greater power. Thereby, people of a particular group can identify and recognise each other as both members of a shared group, and as members of a group that is the target of particular forms of discrimination. The central understanding was that these identities are *created*, or socially *constructed*, under oppressive conditions, rather than *innate* or *natural*. This does not mean they are not real, or are not deeply felt, but that we must acknowledge that they are not entirely of our own choosing, either. As Alcoff *et al.* argue, “*identities are not mysterious inner essences but socially embodied facts about ourselves in the world*” (Alcoff, Hames-García, Mohanty, Hames-García, & Moya, 2006). In many ways, this goes to the heart of understanding oppression itself as a structural problem of power, Young (1990) explained. She drew on Frye’s (1983) conception of oppression as “*an enclosing structure of forces and barriers which tends to the immobilization and reduction of a group or category of people.*”

The intertwining between societal structures and individuals is at the core of feminist critical race research. One of the most influential feminist ideas of the last thirty years based on the recognition of multiple and intersecting structural inequalities, including racism and sexism, and on the fact that these intersections can create new forms of oppression in as such is *intersectionality*. Intersectionality as a framework that helps analyze “*the various interactions of race and gender in the context of violence against women of color*” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1296). Its author, a leading scholar of critical race theory, stated that intersectionality is not primarily about individualised or psychologised identity, but about how “*structures make certain identities the consequence of, and the vehicle for, vulnerability*” (2016). In search of these structures, she said that we must ask “*what are the policies, what are the institutional structures that play a role in contributing to the exclusion of some people and not others*” (Crenshaw, 2016). In this unequal power dynamic denounced as white-supremacist, capitalist patriarchy, some specific groups, women especially, though not only, are culturally coerced into subordinating practices, and some groups of women more than others. The point is to challenge the structures, and name the perpetrators, not to blame individual women (Tyler, 2019).

Social psychology presents itself as a seemingly pure and disinterested science. However, a field of science is a social field like any other, with its power relationships, its monopolies, its struggles, and its strategies, interests and profits (Bourdieu, 1976). In fact, Fricker (1999) wrote that while we are perhaps used to the idea that there are various forms of oppression: political, economic or sexual, in a world “structured” by the powerful to the detriment of the powerless (Hartsock, 1983), there is also another species of oppression at work, “*one that has not been registered in mainstream epistemology: epistemic oppression*”. “*(T)he powerful have some sort of unfair advantage in structuring our understanding of the social world*”, she wrote (p. 191). She coined the term epistemic injustice, to term an injustice done against someone “specifically in their capacity as a knower” (2007).

It is a fact that psychology draws an understanding of social processes based on studies overwhelmingly run by white men researchers with white participants (Miller, Eagly & Linn, 2014; Kurtiş & Adams, 2015; Adams *et al.*, 2015; Eagly & Miller, 2016). Social psychology is no exception (Ernst-Vintila, Ben Alaya, de Rosa & Neculau, 2016; Young and Hegarty, 2019). Historically, gender and minority perspectives have often been ‘peripheral’, marginalized as less valid or important than those of such dominant populations thus included in

studies (Moscovici, 2019). This was central in silencing many voices and making them invisible in social psychological research. Just as one example, the very few LGBTQIA+ or Global South voices found today in a discipline that aimed for what Carolyn Sherif had called a “rich talk” (Fine & Torre, 2019).

In contrast, as we saw, the social representations theory and feminist epistemologies (Collins, 1997; Harding, 2015) argue that knowledge cannot be separated from social and political positions, in which history and domination are key.

In fact, the question of gender inequality and power was quite mute in social psychology although it was raised already half a century ago by one of the founders of our discipline:

*“Tous les groupes masculins s’efforcent d’imposer aux femmes et aux jeunes une discipline, de brimer les tentatives d’autonomie, en superposant les exigences de la société dont ils se sont proclamés les gardiens aux volontés individuelles qui pourraient se faire jour. Comme il arrive en pareil cas, cette action revêt deux formes : brutale et directe lorsque la possibilité en est donnée, idéologique et indirecte si les circonstances l’exigent”* (Moscovici, 1972b, p. 267).

The social representational perspective draws on social psychology as anthropology of contemporary societies (Moscovici, 1992) and Lévy-Bruhl’s conclusions that the explanations of a phenomenon by those who experience it are at least as important as that of those who scrutinize and observe it from a distance. It argues that knowledge stems from social position (Moscovici, 1961 ; Rouquette, 2009), challenges the objectivity of non-situated research, counters the narratives of unreflexive psychology (Herman, 1996) in which the “aseptic” narrative told by experimenters turns to their own epistemological advantage (Scheibe, 1988 ; Young & Hegarty, 2019) in social psychology’s masculinist scientific culture (Haraway, 1997, Young & Hegarty, 2019). This makes the social representational perspective congruent with the feminist standpoint theory, in which the standpoint refers to historically shared, group-based experience (Hartsock, 1983; Collins, 1997). In both of these approaches, *situated* knowledge is a leverage in power systems. Hartsock (1983) suggested that the visions of the oppressed do give a privileged perspective on social change (epistemic privilege), an idea inherent to Moscovici’s theory of social change as a result of active minorities’ influence.

Understanding social representations means understanding social change: not only how they transform, but also, perhaps especially, what makes some more powerful than others in the social arena (Joffe, 1995; Moloney & Walker, 2007). As La Fontaine said, *“La raison du plus fort est toujours la meilleure”* (1668), meaning that it is not the one who argues best who is right but the one who dominates the conflict. This brings power, control and domination in the equation. But also, and here is the hope: social change, resistance and innovation, come through a process that Moscovici called the “active minorities”’s social influence (1976).

## Trauma informed perspective

The trajectory of social psychology was bent in the most profound ways by World War II and the Holocaust. If indeed, as Billig wrote, history is for many psychologists an incomplete enquiry, because of the evasive ‘messiness’ of history and social life (2008, p.10), we do know that Moscovici drew groundbreaking work on social representations and the psychology of active minorities from his own experience of trauma and exile (Moscovici, 1997, 2019). Both theories were trauma informed in the strictest sense. Moscovici noted how in the history of societies, change generally comes from the outsiders, the disobedient, those who are external to dominant groups (1976). How could women’s liberation struggles, the civil rights movement, or ecology emerge

and transform society in depth, when they were a minority and had neither the authority nor the trust of majorities? Moscovici defined minorities in relation to majorities, not just as less numerous, but also as groups who have less access to resources, including less access to power. His studies with Lage and Naffréchoux (1969) showed that social change takes place because active minorities trigger a deep, long term conversion process. This conversion is capable of lastingly transforming the deep perceptions of society. The decisive moment in this process is when minorities, who have been treated as “deviant” and marginal in relation to the social code of a dominant group, *reclaim* their status as “active minority”. The moment when these minorities assert their own code and, in addition, they offer it to others as an alternative. From Objects of a dominant group they become Subjects of themselves.

Our research on the social psychology of political totalitarianism brought evidence on how difficult it is to take the identity<sup>72</sup> turn from being an Object of a dominant other to Subject of oneself, when one has lived colonized by a reducing vision of oneself: the survivors of totalitarianism keep the traces of their imposed identities in their social thinking even 25 years later (Ernst-Vintila, Pachtchenko-de Préville & Rouquette, 2011; Ernst-Vintila, Smbatyan, Havarneanu, & Romero, 2014; Blodgett, Yakushko, 2020). This is congruent with both Herman’s clinical research findings about trauma (1992) and findings on the transformation of social representations (for a synthetic review, cf. Abric, 1994, 2001; Flament & Rouquette, 2003; on the corresponding theory, Rouquette, 2000a, b; for a case study, Guimelli, 1998a, b). Whether it comes from other persons or a political regime, living under the controlling gaze of powerful Others can be a form of violence with a lasting impact on people’s brains, identities and behaviour.

If trauma is a *loss of meaning*, then possibly one of the most important functions of psychology is to *restore the meaning* (Johnstone, 2018). The development of a personal story or narrative has been described by clinical psychologists as “a way of summarising meanings, and of negotiating for shared ways of understanding and communicating about them” (Butler, 1998, p. 4). To resist being imposed an identity by a powerful Other one needs to anchor oneself in one’s own definition of oneself and in unquestionable solidarities. Recovering one’s own meaning of one’s identity from the impact of interpersonal or political violence takes years, anti-racist movements have advanced over decades, feminists have been moving the lines over decades. These are long time frames, but by means of visibility, autonomy, persistence, sense making, active minorities succeed in transforming societies (Moscovici, 1976).

However, political and interpersonal histories of violence leave *haunting legacies* on people and societies (Schwab, 2010). As we saw earlier, for victims of collective trauma (the Holocaust), the meaning of trauma relates to the construction of a transgenerational collective self (Hirschberger, 2018). Even when violence occurs in settings viewed as “private”, the World Health Organization has concluded from multi-country research that children who grow up in families where there is intimate partner violence suffer a range of behavioural and emotional disturbances that can be associated with the perpetration or experiencing of violence later in life (WHO, 2012, p. 17). Violence and adversity especially during childhood (ACE studies, Felitti *et al.*, 1998) have a long term impact on traumatic memory and people’s brains, identities and behaviour. Adverse childhood experiences put children, if they are not protected and not appropriately supported, at greater risk of becoming a future perpetrator or polyvictim, at higher health harming behaviour and long term risk (Fulu, Miedema, Roselli, & al., 2017). Some researchers raise the question of meaning and lack of meaning in deadly identities and affiliations and how they translate into extreme responses such as hatred and in terrorism (Kruglanski, Gelfand, Bélanger, Sheveland, Hetiarachchi, & Gunaratna, 2014; Mouchenik, Baubet & Moro, 2016).

*“From a formulation-based perspective, the work of every mental health professional, whatever their training, should be based on this principle: that however unusual, confusing, risky, destructive, overwhelming,*

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<sup>72</sup> The value of the social identity framework for understanding the experience and impact of psychological trauma has been highlighted (Muldoon, Haslam, Haslam, Cruwys, Kearns, & Jetten, 2019).

*or frightening someone's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours are, there is a way of making sense of them*" (Johnstone, 2018, p. 32). We argue that social change, social representations and social identity are necessary social psychological frameworks that contribute to understanding the experiences, sense making, and impact of trauma in social psychology, as well as post traumatic experiences and growth. In this *situated* quest, on the one hand, our social psychological methods matter, as I will explain later. Individual based methods limit theorisations of interactional phenomena. Yet, trauma informed research "*is not solely a methodological issue. Rather, it is an ethical undertaking, in which the research process involves the development and disclosure of clearly articulated frameworks of meaning that are capable of holding, and making sense out of, traumatic material and affect*" (Salter, 2017, p. 2).

On the other hand, social psychological research can focus on traumatic experiences, or on issues that, while they are not knowingly addressing trauma, may include research participants who may have experienced trauma. Through the research process, then, researchers are likely to have contact with trauma survivors<sup>73</sup>. Traumatized people have no visible feature that distinguishes them from non-traumatized people, but the mere fact of assuming that they are not leaves their *history* under-debated and implicit, leading to an un-reflexively reproduced social psychology of hegemonic positions and to the "naturalization" of dominant ideas (Rizzoli *et al.*, 2019). In fact, the rates of trauma histories (66%–85%), and posttraumatic stress disorder (9%–12%) among university students, possibly the most frequent "population" in experimental social psychology, should make us very careful of the extent to which our research methods may both trigger (Carello & Butler, 2014), and be unadapted to the participants' sensemaking (rather than the researchers' epistemologies). Yet, trauma informed research goes beyond *care* (Gilligan, 1987; Tronto, 1993; Gilligan, Laugier, & Paperman, 2009; Molinier, 2013; Brugère, 2017). Young and Hegarty recently pointed to cultures of control in experimental social psychology (2019) and to

*"narratives of unreflexive psychology (Herman, 1996), in which experimenters monopolize storytelling to their own epistemological advantage (Scheibe, 1988). As Keller (1985) pointed out, unreflexive subject-object relations in empiricism in early modern science were originally imagined through metaphors of coercive (hetero)sexual violence committed by active male minds against nature (gendered female). A lack of reflexivity has long been a mark of the dominant, extra-feminist cultures of psychological science (Morawski, 1994), even as more reflexive visions of science have been practiced by psychologists of all genders on-and-off since the discipline's founding (Morawski, 2005). Social psychologists have long been party to this masculinist fantasy of unreflexive science, whilst a minority have used historicist attempts to cast experimental ambitions to reach truth as tragically flawed (Cherry, 1995; Gergen, 1973)".*

Some social psychologists treat our discipline as a pure and disinterested science, although acknowledging that epistemological diversity is a starting point for its advancement (Prislin & Vignoles, 2015). However, a scientific field is a social field like any other, with its power relationships, monopolies, struggles, and strategies, stakes and profits (Bourdieu, 1976). Noting that while we are used to the idea that there are various forms of oppression, political, economic or sexual, in a world "structured" by the powerful to the detriment of the powerless (Hartsock, 1983), Fricker (1999) drew attention to another species of oppression at work, "*one that has not been registered in mainstream epistemology: epistemic oppression*". "*(T)he powerful have some sort of*

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<sup>73</sup> Researchers can prevent and manage vicarious trauma through self-care and self-protection by ensuring a balance between work, rest and socialising with family and friends, transforming negative aspects of work into connection by creating meaning in activities and challenging negative beliefs, participating in building communities with others (Van Der Werwe, 2019).

*unfair advantage in structuring our understandings of the social world*", she wrote (p. 191). She coined the term epistemic injustice, to name an injustice done against someone specifically in their capacity as a knower (2007). As a student, a practicing psychologist, a researcher, I had no training on trauma informed research. At the time of my research on the social representations of earthquakes and on totalitarianism in former Eastern Europe, both of which touched on the participants' traumatic experiences, social psychology had a hegemonic pattern of laboratory experiments and individualist approaches (Reicher, 2004; Ernst-Vintila *et al.*, 2016; Rizzoli, Castro, Tuzzi, & Contarello, 2019, Lantos *et al.*, 2017), which made qualitative, let alone trauma informed approaches, barely legitimate. Yet, trauma results from an actual or perceived threat to life or physical and/or psychological integrity that overwhelms a person's coping resources. It has lasting adverse effects on her functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional or spiritual well-being and neurobiologically imprints a person's brain, mind and body, negatively affecting how she views herself and the world around her (Van Der Kolk, 2015).

Herman (1992) has analysed thousands of trauma cases ranging from war, imprisonment, Nazi extermination camps, child abuse and violence within the couple. She found that in all of these captivity situations, by taking control over the victim, the abusive person or system becomes the most powerful reference in the victim's life, and the victim's psychology is shaped by its actions and beliefs. Understanding the victim's psychology and sense making is impossible if we "extract" her from this *relationship history* and ignore domination processes. Instead, an *interactional approach (regard psychosocial)* that considers the victim's psychology in relationship to domination and control is essential. In our view, the "social" in social psychology seeks to explain and examine precisely the *situated* processes of domination, resistance and change that are completed in culture and history (Reicher, 2004). In this endeavour, we need interactional methodologies.

In social psychology, trauma informed research adds perspective in power situations and a voice that stands with the oppressed. It recognises that people's responses are a way of adapting and coping with symptoms of trauma. It requires understanding the effects of trauma, recognising trauma triggers and trauma responses and integrating trauma-informed practice into professional conduct and research. Trauma-informed practice asks 'what has happened to you?', and 'what have they done to you', rather than 'what's wrong with you?', creating a safe space for the person's rationale (rather than the researchers'). It is based on the principles of safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration and empowerment alongside respect for diversity (Fallot & Harris, 2009). A trauma informed approach takes the participants' sense making and standpoints seriously, rather than consider them cognitive biases, troubles, individually motivated, etc. It recognizes the presence of trauma, hence power, and acknowledges their role in a people's life, including research participants and researchers. The data collection is clearly not just about quantity of data, hypothesis testing, fulfilling grant requirements. The quality of data collected directly affects people's lives and how the information is used.

A trauma informed approach is perhaps needed in a discipline whose very trajectory was bent by trauma. It is important to acknowledge that, as other trauma researchers mentioned (Salter, 2017), a drive for (unidealized) trauma informed research often comes from a desire to overcome experiences of voicelessness and powerlessness in the face of the unspeakable, as well as motivations to use research and practice to help others.

## Methodological implications for interactions in power contexts

The congruence between the research object, population and method was specifically addressed by Rouquette in the field of social representations (2005). In this vein we focus on the Power Threat Meaning framework (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018) and its methodological implications for an interactional approach in social psychology. Using such a clinical approach is yet an originality in social psychology studies and an adapted *interactional* method to understand participants' sense making and behaviour in contexts marked by asymmetric power



relations. The Power Threat Meaning Framework can be used to identify “*broad, provisional, evidence-based patterns of meaning-based threat responses to the negative operation of power*” (British Psychological Society, 2018, p. 10). It is “*sociopolitical in the sense that it situates people’s distress firmly in that context and links directly to ideas about social justice and community and social action*” (Johnstone et al., 2019, p. 48).

#### *The Power Threat Meaning framework is compatible with trauma informed research*

This framework draws on the idea that categorisation<sup>74</sup> is part of a continuum of oppression and marginalisation and that it is a tool for ensuring those who wield negative power are not challenged by those against whom that power is deployed. Such categorization appears as an epistemic violence. That is, a set of ideas imposed by a powerful group upon a subordinate group, reinforcing their oppression. For the authors, when groups within society are devalued, oppressed or marginalised, epistemic injustice denies them “*the opportunity to make sense of their own experiences due to unequal power relations and lack of shared social resources.*” This injustice “*may occur in a context of historical and inter-generational oppression of a whole social or cultural group by, for example, warfare, colonialism or in extreme cases, genocide*” (p. 48).

In the Power Threat Meaning framework, behaviours are understandable responses to adverse environments and the behavioural responses, both evolved and socially influenced, serve protective functions and demonstrate human capacity for meaning making and agency (Johnston & Boyle, 2018). This makes it adapted in asymmetric power relations and compatible with trauma-informed research. The authors describe “Power” as follows:

*“The person and their social group are likely to have past and ongoing experiences of multiple forms of subordination, exclusion and oppression related directly or indirectly to a devalued aspect of their identity, although this is not true for everyone. These may take the form of chronic background threats (such as living in deprived and unsafe environments or with frequent reminders of the potential for violence or aggression against your group), or of discrimination (in pay and employment, education, housing, transport, healthcare and so on). It may also take the form of numerous encounters with negative stereotypes of your group, of hostility and harassment and of ‘micro-aggressions’ or multiple, brief daily interactions which often subtly denigrate individuals in relation to their group membership. Harder to detect are potentially traumatic practices which are seen as socially acceptable or even desirable. Devaluing of a social or cultural group also extends to ‘hermeneutical’ or ‘epistemic injustice’, in which members are denied the opportunity to make sense of their own experiences due to unequal power relations and lack of shared social resources. All of this may occur in a context of historical and inter-generational oppression of a whole social or cultural group by, for example, warfare, colonialism or in extreme cases, genocide. The negative operation of ideological power may be especially salient given its role in the creation of meaning and identity, norms and standards against which group members’ behaviour, character, skills and value may be judged. Ideological power is also closely related to ‘hermeneutical injustice’ (see above)” (Johnston & Boyle, 2018, p. 48)*

We used the Power Threat Meaning framework as a trauma informed methodology to collect accurate data while maintaining trust and engagement with participants in a social psychological research about the French Muslim women’s who wear a headscarf experiences of misrecognition by other French. The following questions allowed us to collect the participants’ experiences, emotional impact, their social representations (sense making), and behavioural response to misrecognition :

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<sup>74</sup> In Johnston & Boyle, 2018, categorisation = mental health diagnosis.

1. “What has happened to you?” How is **power** operating in your life?
2. “How did it affect you?” What kind of **threats** does this pose?
3. “What sense did you make of it?” What is the **meaning** of these situations and experiences to you?
4. “What did you have to do to survive?” What kinds of **threat response** are you using?

## Research projects

### The MisMIE Project

Exploring *misrecognition* was a goal that gathered a small number of social psychologists in a project around *Misrecognising Minorities in Europe: Challenges to integration and Security* (“MisMiE”)<sup>75</sup>. MisMIE was born as an extension of XTREAMIS (Xenophobia, Radicalism in Europe, Anti-Semitism, Islamophobia – Deradicalisation and Prevention). It is concerned with the acceptance of minorities in European nations and the importance of national misrecognition in this process. In the MisMIE project, France coordinates a research strand about the experiences of misrecognition among French Muslim women who wear a headscarf with funding for research assistantship.

Around 9% of the French under 60 years of age have a Maghrebi background (INSEE, 2012; Tribalat, 2015) and 16% of children born in 2006-2008 have at least one Maghrebi grandparent (Breuil-Genier, Borrel, & Lhommeau, 2011). Half of those children are girls and women. As Gaymard (2003) showed, those girls and women live a life in which they navigate between norms that are both heteronomic (Ernst-Vintila *et al.*, 2014) and often conflicting, between norms that Gaymard termed as “traditional” (their parents’) and “modern” (Western). Education, higher education (Gaymard, 2003) and identity performance (Blackwood, Hopkins, & Reicher, 2013a) are some of the tools that they may use to try and navigate such double-bound social and mental seas (Bateson, *et al.*, 1956). In this context, some of those young women wear a headscarf.

In France, the headscarf and the visibility that it attracts on the women who wear it raises societal, recurrent, highly controversial social debates (“burkini case” 2015, Decathlon running hijab 2019, etc.). Such visibility contrasts with the apparent societal silence of those women’s voices. In the aftermath of the terror attacks perpetrated in France since 2012, Muslim women were the most likely targets of anti-Muslim acts in France, especially when they chose to wear a headscarf (Najib & Hopkins, 2019). Islamophobic discrimination often appeared to be shaped simultaneously by other types of exclusions associated with gender, race, class and age (*ibid.*). Considering the headscarf as one of the most visible and politicized identity markers (Hopkins & Greenwood, 2013), we studied the experiences of misrecognition by young French Muslim women who wear a headscarf.

Drawing on the social representational and social identity conceptual frameworks, we explored the relationship between the meanings of the headscarf for those who wear it and how they experience the way it is represented in French mainstream society. In 2017, Caroline da Silva started her PhD research on the national identity misrecognition of Maghrebi French using social representational and social identity approaches with funding from the MisMIE project. In 2019 the Dutch team led by Bertjan Doosje and Allard Feddes, two junior researchers, anthropologist Judith de Jong and social psychologist Naomi van Bergen, joined France in this research strand about misrecognition and brought a comparative dimension to our studies, by asking how young

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<sup>75</sup> Coordinated by Steve Reicher from St Andrews University, and Andreas Zick from IKG-Bielefeld University.

Muslim women who chose to wear a headscarf experience misrecognition in The Netherlands, and if misrecognition played a role for those who decide to not wear one.

### *Misrecognition: social representations, social identity, social change*

As opposed to recognition (Moscovici, 1976; Honneth, 1992; Honneth, & Margalit, 2001), misrecognition (Blackwood, Hopkins, & Reicher, 2015) involves a mismatch between the way people see themselves and the way they are seen by powerful others. Misrecognition is an interactional, dialogical (Marková, 2003) experience. To what extent do members of minorities feel that they are viewed by others as not belonging to a nation? When does this lead to a sense of estrangement whereby minority members withdraw from participation in the national community, or even become actively anti-community? Our aim is to explore misrecognition using a social representational and social identity lens, in a gender perspective<sup>76</sup>.

Reicher suggested four dimensions of misrecognition: 1) membership misrecognition; 2) totalising misrecognition; 3) content misrecognition and 4) invisibility. *Membership misrecognition* occurs when people have one valued social identification denied because of another group affiliation or characteristic. For instance, Hopkins and Greenwood (2013) found that Muslim women who wear a headscarf felt mis-categorised as foreigners by other members of the British society, although they are British. In *totalising misrecognition*, people have an identity imposed upon them, with which they may identify or not, but with which they do not want to be identified in all the contexts. Blackwood, Hopkins & Reicher describe an example of totalising misrecognition as Scottish Muslims reported being regarded as Muslims rather than as Scots by the airport authorities (Blackwood, Hopkins, & Reicher, 2013a, b, 2015; Hopkins & Greenwood, 2013). *Content misrecognition* occurs when a powerful group recognizes one's social identity, but associates it with (frequently negative) characteristics, with which the person might not agree. For instance, Muslims can be associated with violent extremism (Blackwood *et al.*, 2015). Finally, *invisibility*: "cultural history offers numerous examples of situations in which the dominant express their social superiority by not perceiving those they dominate" (Honneth & Margalit, 2001, p. 112). People suffer from invisibility when they are not even considered by the powerful group. They then experience a sense of being invisible and unheard. For example, invisibility occurs when Muslim women's perspectives are not taken into account in discussions around the headscarf in France (Ghorashi, 2010). All of these aspects form what Pierce and colleagues called microaggressions: "subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are 'put downs'" (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Wills, 1978, p. 66). Additionally, Davis (1989) defined racial microaggressions as "stunning, automatic acts of disregard that stem from unconscious attitudes of white superiority" (p. 1576).

In France, the misrecognition of Muslim women occurs in an asymmetric, heteronomic power relation (Ernst-Vintila, Smbatyan, Havarneanu & Juarez Romero, 2014), between a dominant, secular European mainstream non-Muslim society, on the one hand, and women perceived as religious, ethnic, gendered minorities, mostly associated with former colonies or labour immigrants, on the other hand. The social representations framework, which includes a historical time dimension, seems relevant to explore the Muslim

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<sup>76</sup> Gender mainstreaming is an approach to policy-making that takes into account both women's and men's interests and concerns. The concept of gender mainstreaming was first introduced at the 1985 Nairobi World Conference on Women. It was established as a strategy in international gender equality policy through the Beijing Platform for Action, adopted at the 1995 Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing, and subsequently adopted as a tool to promote gender equality at all levels. In 1998, the Council of Europe defined gender mainstreaming as: "The (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making." Source: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/genderequality/what-is-gender-mainstreaming>, accessed 8 April 2020.

women's *national* and *intersectional* misrecognition, because their present interactions are rooted in a long term history marked by power relations. "Inevitably, feminist political psychology", Hopkins *et al.* noted, "will be particularly concerned with how women feature in, and experience, these practices and processes. Women are used to symbolize national identity in all manner of media" (Hopkins, Kahani-Hopkins & Reicher, 2006, p. 53). On the other hand, "women are not only used in the symbolic representation of collective identities. As so many cultural traditions are gendered, women are also typically expected to be key agents in cultural reproduction, and this role in the maintenance and transmission of tradition can itself all too easily entail the tight policing of women's behaviour (Yuval-Davis, 1997). Thus, even those women construed as symbolizing collective identity may experience their prototypicality as highly oppressive" (*ibid.*, p. 53).

How do the young French Muslim women experience national identity misrecognition? How do these experiences affect their sense of self and in turn, their understandings of their social identities? We are interested in the specific, intersectional misrecognition of young French Muslim women who chose to wear a headscarf. We want to understand how they feel excluded "from full participation in creating the forms of thought which constitute the social consciousness of a society" (Smith, 1975, p. 365), and how they respond to such an experience. "Without opposing them unduly, we can say that by an experiment we try to ascertain facts and by experience, meanings", Moscovici wrote (1991, p. 255). Obviously, between an experimental and a qualitative approach, we need the second. Under these research conditions, we tested a trauma informed approach to methodology drawing on the Power Threat Meaning Framework (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018). The following questions allowed us to analyse the participants' experiences of misrecognition, the emotional impact of those experiences, the social representations involved, and their behavioural response:

1. "What has happened to you?" How is **power** operating in your life? Experiences of misrecognition
2. "How did it affect you?" What kind of **threats** does this pose? Emotional impact
3. "What sense did you make of it?" What is the **meaning** of these situations and experiences to you?  
Social representations
4. "What did you have to do to survive?" What kinds of **threat response** are you using? Behavioural response

Challenging objectivity claims of non-situated research, our interest in understanding the young French Muslim women's experiences of and responses to national misrecognition draws on Levy-Bruhl's insights that the explanations of phenomena by those who experience it are at least as important, and valid, as that of those who scrutinize and observe it from a distance. This is even more important if we take seriously Millett's (1970) argument in favour of a paradigm shift in how we look at the power dynamics between States and non-State actors, for those who are without the power of dominance are not, as too often supposed, utterly impotent and helpless. On the contrary, they have extensive powers, which tend to be invisible in the short run, but which are fundamental to all major, long-term social change, as Moscovici found with active minorities. Hence, "it is not enough to explore the social construction of identities and the varied ways in which they exclude or oppress: we must also consider social change (...) Reconstructions of identity (...) arise in the context of practice and are produced to explain situations and organize action. Nor are they products of an isolated individual's imagination. Rather, they are produced through a social dynamic of argument in which particular identity constructions arise to counter alternative definitions and, in turn, prompt further contestation, and so on" (Hopkins *et al.*, 2006).

## Understanding national identity misrecognition from the experiences of young French Muslim women who wear a headscarf

*The following empirical study was developed within the MisMIE project with Caroline da Silva as part of her doctoral research.*

### *Method*

#### *Participants*

Forty-six young French Muslim women who wear a headscarf, aged 16 to 28 ( $M = 20.46$ ;  $SE = 2.29$ ), were recruited on the Paris-Nanterre University campus using a snowballing sampling technique. Most of them (42) had a North African background; 2 participants had another background (Comorian and Afghan), and 2 others were “native” French women converted to Islam.

#### *Assessments and measures*

We ran ten focus groups of two hours each with 3 to 6 participants (January to March 2019). The group discussions were initiated and moderated/observed by a PhD student (8 groups) or a Masters student (2 groups). Both moderators were women, non-Muslim and non-French. The interview schedule used cartoon images as stimuli to approach misrecognition indirectly. We used a thematic analysis structured by the four questions mentioned above in the Power Threat Meaning framework questions (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018).

### *Results<sup>77</sup>*

#### *Operations of power: experiences of misrecognition*

The participants reported that they felt that members of the mainstream society regarded them through a lens of religious markers and ethnic background (totalising misrecognition); they felt being regarded as foreigners (membership misrecognition); being attributed a halo of negative features (terrorism, oppression) attached to their religious identity (content misrecognition); finally, they reported a feeling of being invisible to society, unheard by mainstream media when controversies around the headscarf arise, for example. Under these circumstances, their choice to wear a headscarf was associated with anticipation that wearing it would increase their misrecognition by non-Muslim French, and at the same time, pressures to fulfill their own, and fellow Muslims', headscarf-related expectations. Their own voice and behaviour appeared as a subject to a confusing, insoluble double bind (Bateson *et al.*, 1956). Making sense together of shared narratives as Muslim women, then, appeared as a coping resource and exercise of agency (Haslam, Jetten, Cruwys, Dingle, & Haslam, 2018).

#### *Emotional impact*

Such experiences of misrecognition obviously take a heavy toll on the participants' emotional health and well-being. We noted 1000 occurrences of negative emotions across the 10 focus groups (exactly 953 occurrences), which means an average of almost 50 negative emotions per hour in each focus group: distress (151),

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<sup>77</sup> The data were collected by C. da Silva (also data analyst) and Ç. Babacan with A. Gruev-Vintila, with the approval of the Ethics Committee of the University of Amsterdam, as part of the MisMIE project. The study results are reported in a paper submitted by C. da Silva, J. de Jong, B. Doosje, A. Feddes, and A. Gruev-Vintila.

humiliation (109), sadness (105), dissatisfaction (81), discontent (73), pain (67) and irritation (61). This negative pattern of emotions underlines that the misrecognition is experienced by the participants as (symbolic) violence.

### *Meaning*

We used a social representational approach to understand how participants make sense collectively of their shared experiences of misrecognition. Social representations are naive theorisations about social objects (Moscovici, 1984, 2019). Such forms of social thinking are structured around a small number of “core elements” (Abric, 1987, 2001), which are consensual and drive collective understandings and behaviours related to a specific object - here, the experiences of misrecognition (Rouquette, 2009; Gruev-Vintila & Rouquette, 2007; Ernst-Vintila *et al.*, 2014). This means that they are decisive in how participants make sense of their experiences and what they recognize as experiences of misrecognition (Ernst-Vintila *et al.*, 2011). Such elements drive the meaning of the experience, how the interaction is understood, and they are capable of guiding behaviour in a *meaningful* way. That is, in a way that is consistent with the (collective) understanding of experience: they define what behaviour is suitable, unsuitable, or forbidden, *which is “properly vital for decision-making, relational regulation, as they command engagement or withdrawal, and define both identity and alterity”* (‘otherness’) (Rouquette, 1998b, p. 508).

Thus, we aimed to identify which social representational elements the group discussions brought forward as consensual. An essential finding concerned the participants’ consensus around their shared experiences of misrecognition. They theorised their experiences and consensually understood misrecognition based on the who they identified as misrecognizers, and where the incidents took place. For example, we found representational consensus about who the participants viewed as misrecognizing agents: the mainstream media and the “vieille France”, traditions, politicians, and elderly people.

There was also consensus around a spatial understanding of misrecognition. First, Paris was viewed as worse than the suburbs but still better than the countryside, which made participants *avoid* places where they were likely to experience misrecognition. As we shall see, avoidance was a strong component in the participants’ responses as a way of adapting and coping with the experiences of misrecognition, and serves protective functions. It should be understood as a meaning-based threat response to their misrecognition by people viewed as dominant. As we shall see further, this experience-based representation of misrecognition impacted their mobility, and in fact harmed their perceived right to freedom of movement within their own country.

Second, France was perceived in a more negative way than other countries (Canada, United Kingdom, etc.) in terms of experienced misrecognition. They made sense of those accentuated experiences in France by linking them to the French colonization of the Maghreb, France’s tradition of imposing its dominant traditions and norms over the colonized people, the contemporary French policies of assimilation and strict secularity, and their instrumentalisation by the government and the media in recurrent debates about the right to wear a headscarf in France in a way that makes sense with the “vieille France”, associated to the dominant colonizer. These findings point to what Geisser (2010) termed “hijabophobia”, a signature of misrecognition as an intersectional Islamophobia directed specifically against *women*. Clearly they made sense of their experiences of misrecognition as a negative operation of power, and such meaning defined what behaviour is suitable, unsuitable, or forbidden, on their behalf.

### *Behavioural responses to misrecognition*

#### *Avoidance and hypervigilance*

Participants mentioned a variety of avoidance responses: they avoid going to certain places, going out with friends in the evening, taking night buses, approaching the metro tracks when wearing a jilbab, talking about

religion. This highlights the daily avoidance and hypervigilance which they put in place, as well as restrictions in their behaviour and self-expression in response to experiences of misrecognition. Importantly, it shows that their experiences of misrecognition impact their mobility and freedom of movement within their own country.

### *Anticipation and ingratiation*

Participants anticipated bizarre looks and aggression with a smile when entering public transportation, to indicate that they are friendly and non-threatening. They also anticipate by paying attention to the type of clothing they wear, noting that cheerful and colorful clothes are more easily accepted than long dresses and black headscarves, and a turban is also more easily accepted than a hijab. Thus, they sometimes anticipate and attenuate aggressive reactions by using colored coatings, by wearing a turban instead of a hijab or, at least, loosening it around the neck. These behaviours may be understood as ingratiation. Ingratiation means to gain favor or favorable acceptance by deliberate effort (Jones, Gergen, Jones, 1963; Jones, 1964). In this understanding, smiling may appear as impression management, especially impression motivation (the degree to which people are motivated to control how others perceive them), known to be strongly affected by the (smiling) person's dependency on the target (the other (non-Muslim) passengers), thus, status or power differences (Leary & Kowalski, 1990).

It was found that "women smile more than men" (Hall, 1984; Hall *et al.*, 2000), but feminist scholars have argued that this is a reflection of women's subordinate status (Henley, 1977). There is some evidence to support this claim. For example, across a variety of cultures, when asked to choose the dominant face out of a pair of faces, people were found to pick the non-smiling face (Keating *et al.*, 1981). There is strong evidence that smiling is influenced by the power relations (Deutsch, 1990), that there is a cultural association between sex and status showing that "sex is a diffuse status cue" (Berger, Rosenholtz, & Zelditch, 1990). Hence, smiling here appears as a behavioural response to intersectional operations of power.

### *Withdrawal*

The participants indicated withdrawal as a result of misrecognition, painful statements such as "we get used to it", a decrease in national identification, and even self-restrictions in going to places in which wearing a headscarf leads to experiences of misrecognition, even in job applications. They said that they got used to not being recognized as French in their own right and that, sometimes by dint of being denied national belonging, they ended up no longer identifying themselves as French. Some of the participants even felt estranged and expressed a wish to leave the country in the future, so that their children do not suffer from such denial.

### *Negotiation*

Sometimes, participants contested their own misrecognition by facing their detractors, explaining their own point of view, refusing to cooperate, or qualifying comment or action as being discriminatory. They also use humor and jokes that aim to reveal hidden meanings and discriminatory connotations embedded in certain questions people ask them, such as "where do you come from?"

### *Identity transformation*

*"If people's action is contingent upon their identifications, it follows that a change in social practice is only possible if new definitions of identity and identity-appropriate action become available. (...) What is needed is some sense of agency and active self-definition"*, Hopkins *et al.* wrote (2006, p. 54). This is illustrated by some participants, who claim visibility and access to the national group by asserting their merit concomitant with their identity as Muslim women. They highlight their and other Muslim women's intellectual capacities. They aim for recognition achievable through such skills and merit. In other words, they view professional success, which they

describe as depending only on themselves (getting a diploma, having a good CV), as a means to access the national group. Thus, participants hope to escape misrecognition and obtain social identity recognition by achieving personal success and identity transformation. This change in women's understanding of themselves and their social relations brings empowerment and marks a transformation in relation to both national majority oppression and to male oppression.

### *Discussion*

Using a trauma informed methodology based on the Power Threat Meaning Framework restored the links between participants' meaning-based threats and meaning-based threat responses. It allowed the understanding of their behaviours as meaning-based threat responses to the negative operation of power, that serve protective functions and demonstrate their capacity for meaning making and agency (Johnston & Boyle, 2018).

While cumulative microaggressions may be invisible to non-Muslim French, they lead to a sense of misrecognition among young French Muslim women, with the impact of intersectional violence. For some participants (a minority), experiences of misrecognition triggered a change in their understanding of themselves and an individually meaningful identity shift from objects of Others to Subjects of themselves along with individual merit and upward "social mobility" individual responses. For others (the overwhelming majority), however, they triggered behavioural responses similar to those triggered by violence and trauma: anticipation, avoidance, hypervigilance, withdrawal, etc. We found that their humiliating and frightening experiences impacted their psychological health, hindered their fundamental rights (rights to equal job/school opportunities, freedom of movement), ironically contradicting France's claim of equality as a fundamental republican value. This change in women's understanding of themselves and their social relations brings empowerment and marks a transformation in relation to both national majority oppression and to male oppression.

At a practical level, understanding their misrecognition as intersectional violence draws attention to the need for sensitivity, and especially gender sensitivity, in the public policies that seek to counter the social alienation of young French Muslim women.

### Added value of trauma informed research for the theorisation of the identity *misrecognition*

#### Theoretical distinction between *misrecognition* and *discrimination*

Theoretical frameworks that consider power relations and use history as a resource (Rouquette, 2003; Pérez, 2015; Vala, 2013) may be interesting to blend with interactional, trauma informed methodologies. Here, using such an approach allowed us to advance an *interactional* theorisation of misrecognition, in which it makes sense as a shared, potentially traumatic social experience of young French Muslim women.

This aspect was not explicit in the initial conceptualisation of misrecognition and is important to consider for both theoretical and practical reasons, for its implications for inclusive policies.

The findings yielded using a trauma informed methodology allowed us to clarify an important epistemological distinction between misrecognition and discrimination, a notion that may seem confusingly close.

Discrimination (Allport, 1954) has been conceptualised using an analytic gaze that focussed on the perpetrators and their discriminating behaviour towards victims, with negligible consideration to the history and the social context of the relationship marked by power and dominance in which discrimination occurs; and only



secondly did questions raise about the impact of the perpetrators' behaviour on the victims' health and well-being, intergroup relations, etc. (*cf.* for example, Branscombe *et al.*, 1999; Da Silva *et al.*, *in press*).

By contrast, we conceptualise misrecognition using an interactional gaze, termed *regard psychosocial* (Moscovici, 1984, p. 11). This gaze is that of Proust's Narrator, who views each character (Swann, Odette, Charlus, Albertine, etc.) both through their own codes, but also as the others characters see them, as well as in relation to historical events (the Dreyfus Affair, World War I) (*ibid.*). We argue that using such a interactional gaze, clarifies a theoretical distinction between misrecognition and discrimination thanks to its focus on the *relation* between the two parties involved in misrecognition, rather than on only one party, as it is the case with discrimination. Using an analytic gaze with a focus on the victim's *interaction* with a *dominant* perpetrator, allows for a conceptualisation of misrecognition as an *interactional*, rather than an individual experience (Ego-Alter, rather than Ego *or* Alter, in Moscovici's terms from 1984).

Present day interactions draw on relational history and bear the marks of power relations and grievances (Ernst-Vintila & Klar, 2016). Moving from a personal to a shared collective experience of misrecognition is moving from an (inter-)individual to a positional level of analysis (Doise, 1982), which means moving from a psychologised to a politicised understanding of the phenomenon. The social representations theory is one that specifically focusses on a positional analysis of interactions (Ernst-Vintila *et al.*, 2011, Chapter 2). Its use combined with a trauma informed approach methodology (PTMF) uses a positional, rather than (inter-)individual level of analysis, which allow us to understand misrecognition as a dynamic, rather than static phenomenon, by considering from the offset the interactional "past", that is the relative positions of those who misrecognize and those who are misrecognized, in terms of domination. Such an approach allows us to understand how participants consensually interpret various individual experiences in the same ways, identifies "how" power and history drive a consensual interpretation of different individual experiences, in different contexts, at different ages, etc. It explains how, beyond the variety of individual experiences, participants share "one and only one" rationale in interpreting them, although they do not know each other, but share the same relative position and system of social representations.

## Place and markers of domestic violence in violent extremism

*'Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.'*

UNESCO Constitution & ancient Vedic wisdom

*The following reflection is engaged as part of Francisca Toledo's interdisciplinary PhD research in social psychology and sociology.*

The United Nations emphasized that “*violence against women was drawn out of the private domain into public attention and the arena of State accountability largely because of the grass-roots work of women's organizations and movements around the world. This work drew attention to the fact that violence against women is not the result of random, individual acts of misconduct, but rather is deeply rooted in structural relationships of inequality between women and men*” (UNO, 2006, p. 1). We wish to explore it as recurrent data in violent extremism (terrorism, etc.). We start this exploration from the following three psychosocial observations that draw on a reflection initiated in the ANR-15-MRSE-0008 XTREAMIS Xenophobia, Radicalization in Europe, Antisemitism, Islamophobia network, and on existing international research used by the United Nations and the World Health Organization.

Extreme violence has two red threads: its target and the perpetrators' male gender

Effective prevention starts with a deep understanding of the underlying processes at work in extreme violence. Scholars and practitioners have noticed the continuum and commonalities of violence, fear and control present in all forms of extreme violence, from domestic violence to international terrorism (McCulloch, Walklate, Maher, Fitz-Gibbon, & McGowan, 2019; Smith, 2019). Regardless of their ideological motivations and operation mode, all of those forms share two common traits. The first is that they target a hated "Other": "foreigners", Jews, Muslims, French, Belgians, Americans, immigrants, minorities, women, politically different people. The second common trait in violent extremism, whether it is right-wing, supremacist, masculinist ("Incel"), or perpetrated in the name of an ideology or religion, is the perpetrators' gender. Perpetrators are overwhelmingly men, although there is an epiphenomenon of women who may have a role in recruitment, logistics, funding, intelligence and sometimes attacks, etc.

The root of extremist and violent ideologies is misogyny and dehumanization

Second, the gender aspect in violent extremism is under-examined, and the data obtained from a gender perspective is insufficient. However, extremist and violent ideologies are only the late phases of a process that roots in dehumanization.

Dehumanization is the act of denying humanity to other human beings (Kelman, 1976; Haslam, 2006), transforming the victims into subhuman bodies with degrading qualities, or into objects (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997). It is a phase that is essential in perpetrating cruelty without remorse (Romito, 2006, p. 87) and a tactic used to conceal violence.

Dehumanization often starts as a discursive strategy. Its functions are to motivate and legitimize violence (Savage, 2013). It can be identified in language (Stollznow, 2008) and one of its key signals is misogyny (for a review, see Díaz & Valji, 2019).

Misogyny, far from being a “psychological disposition”, does not always involve hatred or hostility

towards women, and certainly not towards all women, but it is best understood as a political phenomenon—a system of control that operates in male-dominated societies to enforce female subordination, and especially “unruly” women’s subordination (Manne, 2018, p. 33). There is a growing list of documented findings on the personal history of domestic violence or misogyny of most perpetrators of violent extremism. Nazir Afzal, former chief Crown prosecutor for the North-west of England recalls that there was research in the 1980s *“the number one finding was that the first victim of an extremist or terrorist is the woman in his own home. We’ve forgotten that... We haven’t built on that. Had we recognized them earlier as wife beaters and misogynist, I’ve no doubt that violence against women would have been a big flag when we have to decide who to carry out surveillance on”* (Smith, 2019). Misogyny, resentment, and the history of domestic violence were already identified as recurrent risk or action factors in the trajectories of violent extremists. On December 6th, 1989, a terrorist entered the prestigious Ecole Polytechnique of Montréal, separated between men and women, and killed with premeditation the women, 14 of them, claiming to act for *“political reasons. I have decided to send the feminists, who have always ruined my life, ad patres”* (Blais, 2013). It took 30 years for the Montréal Massacre to finally be officially recognized by the City of Montréal as an anti-feminist attack (Blais & Dupuis-Déri, 2019). In her pioneering analysis of the battle of interpretations and the construction of the collective memory of the massacre, Blais (2009, 2013) showed how the perpetrator’s misogynistic motivations were concealed in the process of negotiating the representation of the attack by juxtaposing elements of both a feminist and anti-feminist discourse. She also demonstrates that the “December 6” attack *“has played a role in the emergence of a specific form of antifeminism known as masculinism, whose discourse, widely conveyed in mass-distribution newspapers, posits that men (including the killer himself) have suffered due to the presumed “triumph of feminism.”* The masculinist movement is a network including fathers' rights groups, organic intellectuals (journalists and psychologists) and websites, Blass clarified (2013).

Misogyny and domestic violence were documented in the trajectories of the terrorist attacks in Paris (2015), Nice (2016), Manchester (2017). The so-called incel (a men’s “involuntary celibate” group, Donnelly *et al.*, 2001) hailed a terrorist attack in Toronto (2018) as one of their own (Blais & Dupuis-Déri, 2019). The mass shooting in Nova Scotia (2020) was found to have begun as a domestic violence<sup>78</sup>, warning on how such brutality can quickly become a public threat. The annual European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report for 2020 finally pointed to the links of misogynist theories and anti-feminism but only with far-right ideologies based on cases showing that *“anti-feminism has been fitted into the ‘Great Replacement’ conspiracy theory: feminism is alleged to have been invented to distract women from their ‘natural’ role as mothers and, consequently, blamed for decreasing birth rates in Western countries, which in turn allows immigrants – whose women supposedly have not been influenced by feminist rhetoric – to become the majority more rapidly”* (Europol, TE-SAT 2020, p. 71).

The relationship between the male gender and war has become an element recognized by the United Nations for the analysis of armed conflicts and the construction of lasting peace strategies (Velasquez Toro, 2001). Research in the social science and humanities shows that in contexts of armed conflict and extreme violence, members of paramilitary groups *“develop an administration of otherness”* (Cortés Ibáñez, 2014, p. 59) in which the expected behaviour is based on hypermasculinity. Hypermasculinity is expressed and constructed by the contempt for the feminine (Theidon, 2004, p. 122), by eliminating any feminine trait, because the feminine is understood as a quality of the weak and subordinate subject (Cortés Ibáñez, 2014, p. 61). However, hypermasculinity is a widespread archetype for men, including in the West, even in countries like Israel (Yefet, 2015), reputedly based on the refutation of gender inequality (Buber Agassi, 1989).

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<sup>78</sup> <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-domestic-assault-may-have-preceded-nova-scotia-mass-shooting-rcmp-say/>

*Hostile sexism and support for violence against women are the factors most strongly associated with support for violent extremism*

Finally, research brought evidence that hostile sexist attitudes toward women (Glick & Fiske, 1997) and support for violence against women are the factors most strongly associated with support for violent extremism. Johnston and True's (2019) Policy brief, which was endorsed by the United Nations, based on two quali/quantitative research projects funded by the UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific and the UN Women Regional Office for the Middle East and Africa from the North, put forward the following three fundamental observations:

First, individuals who support violence against women are three times more likely to support violent extremism. Support for violence against women predicts support for violent extremism more than any other factor, among both men and women.

Second, support for violent extremism did not correlate with the degree of religiosity, age, gender, education level, employment and geographic area.

Third, misogyny, defined as both fear and hatred of women and/or the feminine, is an integral part of the ideology, political identity and political economy of violent extremist groups.

Johnston and True's findings (2019) are compatible with the definition of domestic violence as *domestic terrorism*. Both stem from the aggressors' supposed right to "administrate" and rule women. The difference between these two forms of violence simply lies in the difference in the nature of the place in which they are perpetrated, in private vs. in public. In domestic violence, such sense of entitlement and supposed right to "administrate" is exercised through controlling behaviours that range from everyday micro-management of the victim to coercion towards the victim. For example, Stark (2007) showed in terrifying detail how authors (most often men) can use coercive control to extend their dominance over time and through social space in ways that subvert the victim's (most often women) autonomy, isolate them, and infiltrate the most intimate corners of their lives, ultimately keeping them in *captivity* (Herman, 1992).

Control-based violence is continuous, cumulative and not episodic (Stark, 2009). It deprives the victim of her fundamental human rights (freedom, movement, security, dignity, physical and mental integrity, reduces the victims' space for action therefore), destroys her psychically and immerses her in lasting suffering from loss of agency, of identity, of self-confidence, psychotrauma, and physical health problems. In addition, control is also exercised over children, and through children. Domestic control is an insidious method, with lasting effects on the woman and child victims' agency, mental and physical health.

In France, authors who work with violent men decrypt the violent men's behaviour as steps in organizing violence, along with other preparatory acts meant to create or maintain a violent system (Vandevoorde & Estano, 2015). Such acts include maintaining their anger, violent thoughts, manufacturing weapons, bodybuilding to be strong, maintaining white weapons available, diluting their responsibility and distancing themselves from their own acts by blaming the victim, making her feel guilty for having "provoked" them, and ultimately, by denying their own violent behaviour, for example during investigations.

Analyzing violence in this way has the advantage of drawing attention to the factors that seem to be the basis of violent behaviour in general, in both "public matter violence" and "private matter violence", that is, in what is currently viewed as violent extremism in the context of extraordinary events such as terrorist attacks, and in violent behaviours that are less recognized and acknowledged as extreme violence because they occur in a domestic space. This perspective calls for the greatest attention to be paid to domestic violence, both as a phenomenon in its own right, and as a path in a process leading to violent extremism in the public space. Unfortunately France had to mourn at the end of 2020 three gendarmes killed by a violent man when trying to rescue his wife from the roof where she had tried to escape. Although the killer's ex-wife was said to have alerted

the police, the gendarmes, the child protection services, and even a minister, unfortunately all of these institutions downplayed the danger<sup>79</sup>.

### “Crime against women and children”: a public health, security and equality issue

Despite the mediatisation of the devastating reality of violence against women, and moreover against children, addressing, reducing and preventing this violence remains a major public health, security and equality issue.

An International Tribunal on Crimes against Women, a people's tribunal, was organised in Brussels in 1976, with the intention to "*make public the full range of crimes, both violently brutal and subtly discriminatory, committed against women of all cultures*" (Doughty, 1978, p. 148; Russell, & Van de Ven, 1976).

Article 1 of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women Proclaimed by General Assembly of the United Nations Organization states that violence against women "*means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life*". (1993/2006). It affects women of all ages, all social classes, all levels of education, on all continents, and with them their children. The 2019 homicide study published by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2019) highlights that girls and women continue to be the first victims of homicide by intimate partner and family. Out of the 87,000 women and girls intentionally killed in 2017, 58% were killed by intimate partners or family members (approximately 50,000 women and girls were victims of this type of murder). The home remains the most dangerous place for women, and what could be called a training ground for violent extremism in public spaces.

The World Health Organization (2012b, p. 1) acknowledged intimate partner violence as "*one of the most common forms of violence against women and includes physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and controlling behaviours by an intimate partner*". It stated that it covers any behaviour within the couple that causes partners physical, psychological or sexual harm or suffering, for example:

- *“Acts of physical violence, such as slapping, hitting, kicking and beating.*
- *Sexual violence, including forced sexual intercourse and other forms of sexual coercion.*
- *Emotional (psychological) abuse, such as insults, belittling, constant humiliation, intimidation (e.g. destroying things), threats of harm, threats to take away children.*
- *Controlling behaviours, including isolating a person from family and friends; monitoring their movements; and restricting access to financial resources, employment, education or medical care” (ibid.).*

Such violations of human rights led the World Health Organisation to acknowledge the key fact that, in addition to being a major issue of security and gender equality, "*violence against women – particularly intimate partner violence and sexual violence – is a major public health problem and a violation of women's human rights*" (WHO, 2017). Understanding violence against women as violation of human rights is still very new in both legal and public understanding of domestic violence. For example attacks on a person's individual freedom listed as coercive control are included in the domestic abuse legislation in the Scotland, Ireland, Wales, etc., but not in France<sup>80</sup>.

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<sup>79</sup>[https://www.francebleu.fr/amp/infos/faits-divers-justice/j-ai-alerte-qu-il-etait-dangereux-l-ex-epouse-du-tueur-des-trois-gendarmes-d-ambert-sort-du-silence-1608903050?\\_\\_twitter\\_impression=true](https://www.francebleu.fr/amp/infos/faits-divers-justice/j-ai-alerte-qu-il-etait-dangereux-l-ex-epouse-du-tueur-des-trois-gendarmes-d-ambert-sort-du-silence-1608903050?__twitter_impression=true)

<sup>80</sup> A recent French law about domestic abuse (2020) included the notion of *emprise* (“mental control”), though not other forms of control (micromanagement, financial abuse, counterparenting, isolation, harassment and stalking, etc., cf. theduluthmodel.org).

The American Psychological Association, arguably world's leading body of psychologists, defines intimate partner violence as “*physical, psychological, or sexual abuse of one person by another in a close relationship. The couple may be heterosexual or same-sex, and they may be (or have been) dating, married, or living together. Apart from violence and threats of abuse, control is a hallmark of the abusive intimate partner relationship, with the aggressor controlling the partner’s access to family and friends, taking control of shared finances, and constantly monitoring the partner’s activities. If rejected, the perpetrator may also stalk the partner*” (APA, 2020).

In France, domestic violence has passed from the private domain to public attention, involving the responsibility of the State and as such the whole of society. In 2019, the French government set up a national consultation called the “Grenelle Violences Conjugales” with working groups involving the Ministry of Justice, the State Secretariat for equality between women and men and the fight against discrimination, the State Secretariat for Child Protection, etc., with institutions and NGOs working with victims and also with perpetrators. One of the aims of this Grenelle was a change in mentality and in the law to protect the women victims and their children, and work with the perpetrators to decrease the number of domestic homicides. A new “domestic violence law” was adopted in 2020 that updated the existing law. It introduced a reference to mental control (“emprise”) and sanctions for harassment leading to suicide, and ways to suspend an abuser’s parental authority. However, the core element of control in those relationships is mildly defined, if at all, and post-separation abuse, which is known to continue, is still unmentioned in the new law.

According to the reference figures in France published by the State Secretariat in charge of Equality between women and men and the fight against discrimination, the number of women aged 18 to 75 who are/were victims of physical and/or sexual violence committed by their former or current intimate partner, is estimated at 219,000 women per year. These women are often mothers who have children with the abuser. The perpetrator of this violence is their current or ex-husband, partner, civil partner (PACS), or boyfriend, who lives with her or not. Three out of four female victims say they have suffered repeated incidents. Eight out of ten women victims state that they have also been subjected to psychological attacks or verbal assaults.

Each year in France men kill a number of women, sometimes with their children, which is higher than the number of dead caused by the Bataclan terrorist attack in 2015 (121 women were killed in domestic homicide cases in 2018, according to the Ministry of the Interior), to which should be added the number of children victims who are affected in the long term, if they survive.

Despite the number of victims higher than those lost to terrorism, domestic violence shocks less than terrorist attacks, arguably because its nature makes it so insidious and its target towards mostly women and children (Sloan-Lynch, 2012). While in France toll-free numbers were presented as a solution, the reality shows that they are rarely a relevant option for women and children victims crushed by years of shame, fear and guilt, confusion, isolation from their own entourage, controlled and stripped of their autonomy and resources by the abuser, who find themselves alone to manage abuse situations, retaliation risk, and their psychotraumatic impact on their own psychological and physical health (Salmona, 2013), victims who know that they will face, in court, a burden of proof and doubt that is favorable to the abuser, questions as to their own credibility, and may expose even more their children to the abusive parent.

In France, the types of domestic violence sanctioned by law are psychological violence (Law of 2010), physical and sexual violence (rape is a crime and domestic rape an aggravating circumstance) and domestic homicide - increasingly called *femicide*<sup>81</sup>.

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<sup>81</sup> In different countries the murder of a woman is referred to as femicide, homicide, or aggravated homicide. These terms are sometimes used in the law “legal”. Feminist movements in many countries in Latin America have adopted the use of Russell's politicized ‘femicide’ and have successfully used it socially, politically and legally to address lethal violence against women in their respective countries. Today, 16 of them acknowledge “femicide” in their laws. Their definitions differ, but all of them consider the intentional death of a woman to be femicide and punish it with a custodial sentence. Under Chilean law, for example, a femicide [*femicidio*] is the

Femicide names "*the killing of females by males because they are female*" (Russell, 1976). Russell redefined the term with the intention to politicize and bring attention to the misogyny driving lethal crimes against women, which she said gender-neutral terms like murder failed to do. In order to deal with these extreme crimes against women, Russell insisted, it was necessary to recognize that, like race-based hate crimes, "*Femicides are [also] lethal hate crimes*".

The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence is based on the understanding that violence against women is a form of gender-based violence that is committed against women because they are women. The [Istanbul Convention](#), adopted in 2011, ratified by France in 2014, understands violence against women as "*a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women and shall mean all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life*", and domestic violence as "*all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occur within the family or domestic unit or between former or current spouses or partners, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim*". French sociologists who work on post-separation abuse (Prigent, 2019; Sueur & Prigent, 2020) mention that this type of abuse is still under acknowledged in society, yet an integral part of the continuum of violence (Kelly, 1987, 1988) and a control strategy (Stark, 2009) used by abusers against their victims (Herman, 1992; Hart & Hart, 2016) as acknowledged by the World Health Organisation (*cf. supra*).

As we see, the existing legal framework aims to enable an early identification and action to prevent, stop and sanction violence. However, both the public and sometimes professionals' understanding of violence is fragmented and governed by distorted representations (Auslander 2019 ; Rose, 2018). Research has shown that the representations of collective threat focus on its consequences (Gruev-Vintila & Rouquette, 2007) and seem governed by a hierarchy of victimhood (Ernst-Vintila, Klar & Blajwajs, 2015). They distinguish between two types of violence roughly speaking. On the one hand, violence perceived as a "*fait divers*", an issue of individual "psychology", and "private" life, etc. This is typically the case of most domestic violence against women and children. On the other hand, violence that mobilizes everyone, by its occurrence in the "public space" and its interpretation as "societal phenomenon". This is typically the case of terrorism. Such a separation made it possible for decades to conceal the common grounds and processes at work in domestic and terrorist violence (misogyny, dehumanisation), and their links with one another.

Far from being a matter of psychology and individual behaviour, violence against women is a social phenomenon that harms more victims than terrorism (Auslander, 2019). Although it is still legitimised and psychologised in contemporary thinking societies (Auslander, 2019; Lelaurain *et al.*, 2018), the deformation of its social representations and its conditional logic are neither random, nor neutral: contemporary societies do not understand violence against women on a case-by-case basis, either as "serious" or as "banal". On the contrary, relative to other forms of violence socially recognized as extreme (terrorism), the social thinking about violence against women is asymmetric, as if it were under the effect of a gendered magnetic field. It is subject to trivialization, rather than social amplification. It prompts victim blaming or mutual blaming (Meier, 2002), rather than the moral (and judicial) condemnation of perpetrators - see the low and decreasing conviction rates for rape: 1% in France, and still decreasing; 40% decrease in the last 10 years<sup>82,83</sup>. It elicits empathy towards the perpetrator rather than the victim (Auslander, 2019). In contrast to terrorism, which triggers massive moral

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murder of a woman by a person who is or has been her husband or partner (Law No. 20.480). In France, several institutions and associations fighting against violence against women are asking to use the "femicide" as a legal term. For example, the Île-de-France region voted on September 19, 2019, a resolution asking the government to officially acknowledge femicide in the Penal Code.

<sup>82</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/940739/convictions-for-rape-in-france/>

<sup>83</sup> <https://www.capital.fr/economie-politique/en-dix-ans-chute-spectaculaire-de-40-du-nombre-de-condamnations-pour-viol-1307057>

condemnation in societies (Ernst-Vintila & Macovei, 2016), the social thinking about violence against women is still subject to moral indifference (Auslander, 2019). Research on social thinking showed that, if social representations are distorted (unacceptability of terrorist violence, acceptability of violence against women), this is because they are *determined* by deeper forms of social thought which drive them, typically ideologies, which have historical roots and an exceptional stability over time (Rouquette, 1998; Rateau, Ernst-Vintila & Delouvé, 2012; see also Chapter 2, here). Such findings explain the asymmetry in the social thinking about violence specifically when it is done to women (and moreover to children), but not about terrorism. The legitimizing ideologies of violence against women are often termed “collective myths”. They orient the interpretation of violence against women along specific sociocognitive paths (trivialization, psychologization), distinct from those used in other forms of violence such as terrorism (amplification, politicization).

Third parties’ “neutrality”, then, both for practitioners (judges, evaluators, social workers, etc.) and society (from the “entourage” to society at large), is in fact subject to those myths as well as personal life experience (which is also gendered, with a likelihood for women to be former victims of violence and banalisation; and a likelihood for men to be unconvicted perpetrators). They impact, consciously or not, their presumptions about who is telling the truth, between the victim and the denounced perpetrator, and the interpretation of the evidence. As Meier explained about judges and evaluators (2002, p. 682):

*“For instance, those who are predisposed to believe that women often fabricate or exaggerate domestic violence allegations are likely to be harder to persuade of the truth of such allegations, than those who are predisposed to believe that men frequently beat women. Despite the tendency of psychological evaluators to invoke a purely “scientific” basis for their opinions (often by relying on psychological tests), the reality is that it is not possible for human beings to eradicate their life experience or perspective from their interpretations of facts. Second, instead of genuine neutrality, which is receptive to information, many judges and evaluators actually exhibit skepticism or disbelief toward abuse allegations, which is somewhat resistant to contrary input”.*

From a structural approach to social representations, Meier’s analysis stands: evidence interpretation is driven by stable central elements congruent with prior “knowledge” (beliefs). Practically speaking, “neutrality”, then, is already *positioned*. It is from such a position that sociocognitive processes (evidence selection, interpretation, etc.) are oriented, motivated and regulated (Rouquette, 2009), sometimes with devastating consequences for the victims, women, and especially children.

### Wounded children: the lasting impact of domestic violence on children and the perpetuation of violence in societies

Violence against women is “a global health problem of epidemic proportions” (WHO, 2013, p.1) with a lasting impact on victims’ physical and mental health and an intergenerational impact on children (Ehrensaft *et al.*, 2003; Lev – Wiesel, 2007). While domestic violence has long been viewed as an adult matter, research pointed out that it has serious consequences for children. Studies on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE, Felitti, 1998) have shown that the impact of violence and exposure to violence on children’s mental and physical health lasts for decades, and especially that such impact is gendered. Among the children exposed to domestic violence, more boys would become perpetrators and more girls would be re-victimized as adults, compared to an unexposed population. Among the most important moderators of the long-term effects of exposure to violence



are the “*identification with the perpetrator, as well as the extent to which the violence (1) seems true to life, (2) is portrayed as justified, and (3) is perceived as rewarded*” (Huesmann & Kirwil, 2007, p. 555). It should be noted that while one is not responsible for one's trauma, one is nevertheless responsible for one's behavioural choice as an adult.

The deleterious effects of exposure to family violence are of such magnitude for children that even in long standing war-torn societies (Sri Lanka, Afghanistan) researchers found that in addition to multiple exposure to war and disaster-related traumatic events, children also indicated high level of exposure to family violence (Catani *et al.*, 2008). Exposure to domestic violence is an even stronger predictor of adolescents' psychological distress than exposure to political violence (Al-Krenawi *et al.*, 2007). Even in the Israeli-Palestinian context, domestic violence was found to contribute the most to post-traumatic stress (PTS) symptomatology. The more contexts in which youth were exposed to violence, the higher their levels of *subsequent* post-traumatic stress symptoms, regardless of initial level of post-traumatic stress symptoms (Al-Krenawi *et al.*, 2007). By its repetitive nature and its impact, exposure to domestic violence (most often against the mother) is a chronic developmental traumatization for children. French Judge Durand argues for an understanding of children's exposure to domestic violence as a form of child maltreatment (2018).

Children's exposure to domestic violence causes extreme stress and chronic developmental trauma

Children living with domestic violence sometimes resist regimes of coercive control (Katz, 2016), but they are most often harmed in multiple ways that go far beyond the post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD). A complex trauma is a traumatic situation that lasts or is repeated, which is the case of enduring exposure to domestic violence. Complex post-traumatic stress disorder (C-PTSD) results from a sustained period of traumatic incidents (which, taken individually, may not be significant enough to produce symptoms of trauma), often in childhood, which happen at the hands of someone with whom the victim has a personal relationship, often a primary caregiver such as a parent. Such chronic trauma impacts developmental capacities and conditions of early childhood may increase both risk of trauma exposure and the risk that individuals will respond adversely to traumatic exposures (Koenen *et al.*, 2007, Sar, 2011).

Childhood trauma causes enduring neurobiological effects of stress on young brain development. It is not a passing psychological put-down that one can “ignore” once she becomes an adult. Physical, sexual, and psychological trauma in childhood may lead to difficulties that show up in childhood, adolescence, or adulthood. The victim's fear, anger, shame, and despair can be directed inward to spawn symptoms such as depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and post-traumatic stress, or directed outward as aggression, impulsiveness, delinquency, hyperactivity, and substance abuse. “*Though extremely costly socially and psychologically, and potentially leading to maladaptive strategies in a benign social world, the altering functioning of brain and body (...) is potentially valuable in fostering survival in a hostile and abusive world*” (Teicher *et al.*, 2003, p. 211).

Research indicates that when trauma occurs before puberty, it may involve fundamental alterations of the stress management systems of the brain and body that reach as far as changes in their molecular organization and sensitivity (Teicher *et al.*, 2003). It results in a cascade of negative effects of stress, which include changes in the brain's anatomy, wiring and functions, as well as in the hormones and neurotransmitters that mediate development of vulnerable brain regions. Neurobiological brain studies with adults victims of childhood trauma showed that it is linked with EEG abnormalities (Ito *et al.*, 1998), excess neuronal irritability, especially limbic irritability, which tends to produce dysphoria (chronic unhappiness), aggression, and violence toward oneself or others. It is also associated with diminished development of the left cortex and left

hippocampus, reduced size of the corpus callosum, attenuated activity in the cerebellar vermis, and diminished right-left hemisphere integration (Teicher *et al.*, 2016). Alterations in the neurochemistry of the brain also heighten the hormonal response to stress, producing a state of hyper vigilance and right-hemisphere activation that colors views with negativity and suspicion. Alterations in the size of the hippocampus, along with amygdala and limbic abnormalities, further enhance the risk for developing dissociative symptoms and memory impairments (for a detailed review, see Teicher, 2002).

Because violent parents' behaviour is sometimes non-violent and even "loving" towards the child, a parent's inconsistent behaviour (sometimes loving, sometimes abusing) might generate an irreconcilable mental image in a young child. Instead of reaching an integrated view, the child would form two diametrically opposite views (perhaps storing the positive view in the left hemisphere, the negative view in the right). These mental images, and their associated positive and negative world views, may remain unintegrated, and the right-left hemisphere integration is reduced and the hemispheres remain rather autonomous, as the child grows (Teicher, 2002).

Exposure to domestic violence causes extreme stress in children. The stress response to violence programs their developing brain to a state of defensive adaptation, enhancing survival in a world of constant danger. It interferes with the child's cognitive and emotional processing of those experiences and may result in post-traumatic stress disorder: re-experiencing the event through intrusive memories, dreams, etc.; emotional numbing; avoiding stimuli associated with the events (children exposed to domestic violence actively avoid situations that might bring back memories of the trauma); symptoms of increased arousal (e.g., hypervigilance, sleep problems), irritability or outbursts of anger, difficulty concentrating, hypervigilance, dissociation. They may show diminished interest in significant activities, restrict the range of their emotions, or have feelings of detachment or estrangement from others (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). *"...repeated trauma in childhood forms and deforms the personality. The child trapped in an abusive environment is faced with formidable tasks of adaptation. She must find a way to preserve a sense of trust in people who are untrustworthy, safety in a situation that is unsafe, control in a situation that is terrifyingly unpredictable, power in a situation of helplessness. Unable to care for or protect herself, she must compensate for the failures of adult care and protection with the only means at her disposal, an immature system of psychological defenses"* (Herman, 1992, p. 96).

A child, then, comes to build her personality with her traumatic memory and survival dissociative disorders, which prevents her from knowing who she truly is, and from viewing herself as a normal, worthy person (Salmona, 2013, Van der Hart *et al.*, 2017). *"By developing a contaminated, stigmatized identity, the child victim takes the evil of the abuser into herself and thereby preserves her primary attachments to her parents. Because the inner sense of badness preserves a relationship, it is not readily given up even after the abuse has stopped; rather, it becomes a stable part of the child's personality structure"* (Herman, 1992, p. 105).

For victims, and especially for children, domestic violence is something unrepresentable, perhaps because it is exercised under the disguise of love and education, or because it is exercised by one parent against the other, but also because it is insidious, stunning, and escalates progressively, as we saw - it is, in fact, a downward spiral to terror and hell. French psychiatrist and victimologist Muriel Salmona (2013) explained that experiencing or being exposed to such violence, which for a young brain in development means quite the same extreme stress, has a paralyzing effect ("freezing"), which prevents "fight or flight" response, inhibits the prefrontal cortical adjustment of the stress response, as well as the adjustment of stress hormones, adrenaline and cortisol. When extreme stress takes the organism by storm, the excess of adrenaline and cortisol puts the organism at vital risk through damage to the heart and brain (Rauch *et al.*, 2007). The brain, then, triggers a neurobiological survival mechanism (Yehuda & LeDoux, 2007; Nemeroff *et al.*, 2009) that disrupts the emotional brain circuit, causing an emotional and physical anesthesia by producing endogenous dissociating drugs, morphine-like and ketamine-like neurotransmitters. Physical freezing prevents action and emotional anesthesia

results in dissociation.

Dissociation occurs as a result of ongoing trauma associated with chronic stress. It provides a kind of mental escape when physical escape is not possible. During dissociation, the normally integrated functions of perception, experience, identity, and consciousness are disrupted (they do not thread together to form a cohesive sense of self (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Both retrospective and prospective studies showed that dissociation is one of the consequences of developmental trauma (Lewis *et al.*, 1997; Ogawa *et al.*, 1997). People with dissociation often experience a sense that things are not real, as if they were spectators of their life; they can feel disconnected from themselves and the world around them. Their sense of identity can shift, their memory can turn off, and the connection between past and present events can be disrupted.

The survival disruption in the emotional brain circuit disconnects the amygdala, the limbic structure in charge of sensory and emotional responses, from the hippocampus, which plays a critical role in the formation, organization, and storage of new memories as well as connecting certain sensations and emotions to these memories. Because the hippocampus cannot process the sensory and emotional memory of unrepresentable violence, such memory remains trapped in the amygdala as “sensations”, unprocessed and unintegrated in the autobiographical memory, timeless, and non-conscious. It “lights up” and invades the victim’s mental space whenever it is triggered by the slightest trauma-related stimulus (smell, sound, sensation, etc.) resulting in the hallmark symptoms of (C-)PTSD: flashbacks, re-experiencing trauma, nightmares, avoidance, dissociation, etc.

Such memory trapped in the amygdala that has not become autobiographical is sometimes called *traumatic memory* (LeDoux & Muller, 1997; Salmona, 2013). Traumatic memory is at the heart of psychotraumatic disorders, and probably of personality disorders.

In studies that analysed the neurological and psychiatric history of violent adolescents and adults, objective evidence was found for childhood abuse or family violence in most cases (Lewis, *et al.*, 1979; Lewis, *et al.*, 1986; Lewis, *et al.*, 1997). Those studies also found that that these persons had not been clinic outpatients, but, rather, have been examined in prisons, where they were incarcerated for violent crimes, meaning that the impact of their own childhood trauma had been unrecognized and they were unaware of its psychiatric impact. Even more, many of them had partial or total amnesia, or minimized the trauma that they had experienced as children, which the researchers retrieved with unusual efforts from outside sources, interviews with family and friends, and objective records, Lewis, *et al.*, 1997. Such studies brought objective evidence for the morally difficult hypothesis that the roots of violence towards others and towards oneself are fertilized by childhood trauma.

Some children may compensate for these neurobiological effects of stress on their young brain development and succeed in spite of them, especially when they are cared for, comforted and unconditionally supported by a protective parent, but it is difficult that such abnormalities can actually be reversed in adulthood.

The costs to children and to society are immense. Psychiatric patients who have suffered from childhood abuse and neglect are far more difficult and costly to treat than patients with a healthy childhood (Teicher, 2002). Protecting the child from an abusive parent and supporting the protective parent are decisive first steps in prevention.

### *Children’s exposure to domestic violence impacts their learning processes*

Besides hypervigilance and the other negative neurobiological effects of stress mentioned above on a number of processes involved in formal learning in schools (attentional focus, memorization, etc.), with or without the children’s awareness, repeated exposure to domestic violence results in informal learnings that make coercive

control and violence, as well as survival strategies, more likely, acceptable, and even desirable (for a review of the empirical evidence, see Huesmann & Kirwil, 2007).

On the one hand, researchers linked post-traumatic stress, survival strategies, and learning: “*in C-PTSD, dissociation may play an even more crucial role than it does in PTSD. Children are particularly likely to engage in dissociation because of their lower emotional maturity and limited experience. Children have little or no ability to control their situation. They are reliant on caregivers for the primary needs of food, shelter, nurturing, and safety. In response to abusive or disturbing behaviours at home, where active resistance is difficult, the child would find that the most natural and safe response to cope with the abuse is to detach, to go through these traumatic experiences without really experiencing them. However, when the trauma is drawn out over a number of years, dissociation becomes a way of life. Once learned, it may become a fixed part of the personality, that asserts itself long beyond the original dangers that prompted it. This is an illustration of the principle that C-PTSD is essentially a learning process gone awry as a consequence of the child developing in a dangerous environment*” (Franco 217, para 9).

On the other hand, exposure to violence results in specific observational learning and desensitisation to violence. The Social-Cognitive Information-Processing Model, which is based on Bandura’s social learning theory (1977), found that “*the abnormal violent behaviour is not a consequence of “deficient” processing, but rather a consequence of “different” processing*” (Huesmann & Kirwil, 2007, p. 565). While violent behaviour is the product of predisposing individual differences and precipitating situational factors (Staub, 1989; Huesmann, 1998), exposure to violence is one important environmental experience that contributes to predisposing a person to behave more violently in both the short- and the long-term. The long-term effects involve processes of observational learning of cognitions and of emotional desensitization.

Children learn specific behaviours from models and also more generalized, complex social scripts. Once learned, such scripts serve as cognitive guides for future behaviour. From observing violent and controlling people, children may learn that aggression can be used to solve interpersonal conflicts. A first kind of learned cognitions assumed to influence behaviour are those scripts, which are stored in a person’s memory. Scripts “*persist in a child’s repertoire, as they are rehearsed, enacted, and generate consequences, becoming increasingly more resistant to modification and change. A more violent person is generally a person whose repertoire of social scripts emphasizes violence*” (*ibid.*, p. 547). A second kind of cognition assumed to influence behaviour are world schemas. Such schemas are the database that children exposed to violence, and later the adults they would become, use to evaluate environmental cues and make attributions about other people’s intentions. A person who believes the world is a vile and unfair place is more likely to make hostile attributions about others’ intent and consequently more likely to retrieve a more aggressive script. A third kind of learned cognitions that influence behaviour are normative beliefs. Normative beliefs are cognitions about the appropriateness of aggressive behaviour. They are used to interpret others’ behaviours, to guide the search for social scripts, and to filter out inappropriate scripts and behaviours. A person who believes it is wrong for them to use physical and psychological violence or coercive control against a woman is likely to reject retrieved scripts that involve such behaviour (Huesmann & Kirwil, 2007).

#### *Children’s exposure to violence results in cognitive and emotional desensitisation to violence*

Repeated exposure to violence also leads to *desensitization*. When repeated exposures to violence are followed by changes in beliefs about violence – from the belief that coercive control and violence are rare and unlikely to the belief that they are “*common, mundane, and inevitable*” (*ibid.*), the process is called cognitive desensitization. Cognitive desensitization results in more approving coercive control and violence beliefs, in more positive moral evaluations of coercive control of others and of physical as well as psychological violence, and in more

justification for such inappropriate behaviour inconsistent with social norms and a person's moral norms. As a result, the person may develop stronger pro-control and pro-violence attitudes (i.e. attitudes approving control and violence as a means of regulating interpersonal contacts; Huesmann, 1998). Emotional desensitization is a habituation process through which repeated exposures to violence cause a reduction in the observer's emotional reactions to violence, i. e., a reduction in distress-related physiological reactivity to observations or thoughts of violence (Mrug, Madan, & Windle, 2016). Desensitization to violence has a neurophysiological basis and is seen as a "*natural, very subtle, and unconscious process, which occurs as an effect of repeated exposure to violence*" (Huesmann & Kirwil, 2007, p. 555).

### *Children exposed to domestic violence are victims*

International scientific research as well as the Istanbul Convention unanimously recognize the major traumatic impact of domestic violence on children and its massive impact on parental capacities, recalling that children are consequently also victims and that a non-violent parent will continue to experience post-separation counterparental control.

The World Health Organization has concluded from multi-country research that children who have grown up in families marked by interparental violence, which occurs most often against the mother, have a range of behavioural and emotional disorders and a likelihood of committing or suffering from violence later in life (WHO, 2012b, p. 8, WHO, 2012c, p. 18, Fulu *et al.*, 2017). Domestic violence impacts the victims' and their children's physical and mental health: victims are more likely to report poor or very poor health, emotional impact and suicide attempts; their children are often less healthy and have poorer academic performance (*ibid.*).

Women with abusive fathers figures were found to have significantly higher mean scores on the Beck Anxiety Inventory, Beck Depression Inventory, and Trauma Symptom Checklist-40 (TSC-40) than women with absent fathers. There were no significant differences between women with absent father figures and women with nonabusive father figures on the Beck Anxiety Inventory, Beck Depression Inventory, and TSC-40 (Downs & Rindels, 2004).

Exposed children may be more or less severely traumatized, and in any case impacted on the long run on their physical and mental health, their emotional, cognitive, and behavioural development, school and informal learning, etc. (Romano, 2017), at risk to become victims or perpetrators, unless they are protected from the abusive caregiver (or parent), comforted and appropriately cared for. On the one hand, children, when they are directly threatened, are a trigger for women victims to denounce violence and leave abusive relationships in order to protect the children. On the other hand, children may be a major reason for the women victims to *not* denounce violence, when mothers fear losing custody in the event of separation and because of the risks run by children when they are alone with a violent father, if the court maintains the abusive parent's custody rights, which is unfortunately still too frequent (Salmona, 2016).

The European Council's Istanbul Convention (2011) is the first legal instrument that sets supranational norms to prevent violence against women. It acknowledges children exposed to domestic violence as victims. It sets the norms for children to be adequately protected, comforted and cared for, considering the above mentioned impact of domestic violence on their physical and psychological health. In order to protect the children who face such situations, a law adopted in France as of August 3, 2018 to strengthen the fight against gender-based violence introduced the presence of minors as an aggravating circumstance of domestic violence. However, the law application and enforcement still too often allows that even after domestic violence has been reported, children continue to be exposed to the violent parent, in the name of a biological component of parenthood and in the absence of what is perhaps its most important aspect: protecting the child, not being

controlling and violent, respecting the other parent. The children's fundamental need for safety and comfort, which should be the legal professionals' and social workers' absolute priority in the children's best interests, still too often comes after the violent parents' visitation rights and the questionable idea that children should maintain a link with the father at all costs (Salmona, 2016).

Such re-exposure perpetuates the psychotraumatic impact (McKinsey Crittenden & Brownescombe Heller, 2017) and increases the risk for the child to become a victim again, or to reproduce the violent behaviour later in life, against others or against themselves, leading to an intergenerational perpetuation of violence.

Moreover, after the separation when victims and children should be safe and comforted, violent spouses often use children to continue to abuse them through the exercise of joint parental authority, custody and access rights.

While society has become somewhat aware today of the devastating effects of domestic violence on children, some practitioners (legal professionals, social workers, etc.) often still resist accepting its seismic impact on the exercise of parenthood, and how such impact fuels further the children's psychotrauma, social learning, physical and mental health, and their emotional, cognitive, and behavioural development, on the long term (Katz, 2016; Romano & Izard, 2016; Prigent, 2019; Sadlier, Durand, & Ronai, 2020; Stark, 2007; Sueur & Prigent, 2020). The resistance of such key actors still too often results in maintaining parental contact at all costs between the child and a violent perpetrator, which in fact sustains the ravaging impact of domestic violence on the child. Indeed, while the laws in many countries allow a child to have limited or discontinued contact with a parent who has been violent towards the child or her mother, studies show that such measures still need to be argued in courts and before social workers, and oftentimes ruled out, rather than being the rule in the child's interest in many countries, including in France (Meier, 2002, 2020; Katz, 2016; Prigent, 2020; Sadlier, Durand, & Ronai, 2020; Sueur & Prigent, 2020).

## The continuum of violence

The continuum of violence spans over collective and individual processes, over time and over space. In social psychology, its theory was developed by Staub (1989), to explain the roots and incremental movement along a *continuum of destruction* (Hilberg, 1992) that may lead to extreme violence, in a process often motivated by maintaining order - maintaining privilege and power at the hands of those who have it. Staub highlighted a *recognizable* and *predictable* pattern that has led to atrocious acts. His analysis focussed primarily on group dynamics, but applies to individuals as well. Staub identified a factor that had a precipitating effect. When experiencing what he called "prolonged difficulty" (political upheaval; economic distress; varying degrees of social anarchy; or ongoing perceived threats to a group's identity, sense of autonomy, rights, sense of entitlement), those conditions intensified towards a tipping point that set in motion a downward spiral. Significant early warnings in this process should be raised when the group members devalue, marginalize, and oppress certain people ("Others"), put premiums on obedience, take radical measures to uproot the problem attributed to Others. While the perpetrators' thinking process was marked by scapegoating those Others, their action process was marked by their choices in an escalation of engagement in a spiral of violence. At each stage, they made choices by giving themselves permission to take *actions* that corresponded to their *thinking*, and especially did so when they saw "similar others" engaging in such actions. Engaging in even one slightly harmful act diluted their own moral reservation and led them to see themselves as someone capable of perpetrating similar, more harmful acts. In analyzing these processes Staub highlighted that: 1) *all* instances that ended with extreme violence began with *devaluation* and *marginalization of Others*, and progressed downward; 2) the perpetrators' trajectories are almost completely predictable; 3) trajectories escalate with *less harmful* attitudes and actions giving way to *more harmful* ones; 4) perpetrators *learn* by *seeing* and *doing*; and 5) seeing and doing changes

how they view themselves, and that of which they are capable. This “changing self-concept”, as Staub called it, made violent actions feel “natural”.

Genocide philosophers and historians such as Arendt (1962) and Hilberg (1992) have taught us how *fragmentation* serves the banalisation of evil and dehumanisation, while at the same time it obscures the continuous dynamics of violence. At the individual level, research has shown that violent behaviour in previous relationships is one of the best predictors of violent behaviour in the current relationship (Deal & Wampler, 1986; Leidig, 1992).

In both war- and peacetime, societal and individual violence are linked (Krause, 2015). The role of *third parties*, be it the entourage, practitioners, or the society at large, is decisive in facilitating or curbing violence. Social psychology has highlighted such a decisive role in classic research about by-standership (Latané & Darley, 1970). More recently, it has shown that opposition from third parties can reactivate the moral values of perpetrators and cause them to worry about sanctions (*ibid.*; Staub, 1989).

As far as domestic violence is concerned, the reference to private space in its very name (Moscovici, 1999) contributes to such fragmentation by separating between violence in private and in public spaces. For a long time, it has obscured the continuum of violence and helped banalizing the gravity of societal consequences including in both the public and the private space, encouraging false beliefs that such violence would be a private matter, unlike terrorism, for example, and it would be limited to some family members, but not others.

On the one hand, we saw how misogyny feeds extreme violence in the public space. On the other hand, domestic violence should generate the same feeling of deep moral indignation (public shaming, loss of reputation) about the perpetrators, an essential ingredient to dissuade them from taking control over the victims as well as to increase the sense of responsibility of the entourage and of practitioners.

However, despite a solid literature on the continuum of violence, *fragmentation* still feeds distorted, widespread (mis)representations that blur the understanding of the continuum between violence in private and public space, obscuring the mechanisms at work in domestic violence appear to be those in other violent extremisms, as we saw above. If domestic terrorists do not all become terrorists in public space, many of the terrorists export in the public space a behaviour already practiced in private space, as we have seen, perpetuating terror from private to public space.

## Using a feminist lens to understand violence

In matters of violence, just as elsewhere, our social (mis)representations guide action that conforms with them, while only the action that disconfirms them may eventually trigger their transformation (Rouquette, 2000; Gruev-Vintila & Rouquette, 2007). As we saw, the social thinking about violence is gender biased: unlike terrorism, violence against women is subject to a logic of minimisation. Contemporary social representations about violence against women and children are part of a history of societies whose institutions and *jurisprudence* have been organized by those in power, mostly men, to use women and children as resources (Moscovici, 1972) and to obscure their suffering for millenia, by muting their voices and discrediting their truth, oftentimes by turning the political nature of violence against them into a psychological or pathological issue (Lelaurain, 2018 ; Auslander, 2019). The fragmented understandings of violence fuel further such social representations as tools of oppression for the next generations.

Research and policywise, then, the misrepresentations that guide a *fragmented* understanding of violence should be rectified to understand it as a continuum. This requires us to initiate a theorisation and understanding of violence, including in research (Auslander, 2019) and practice, in which acknowledging the

massive gender component in violence is central. Such new practices are needed to reveal the continuum in the processes and the dynamics of violence in time and space. Rather than analysing a “photography” of violence at a given moment (often in the present or in the short term), practitioners should be trained to recognize the “movie” and to capture more or less visible clues that appear here and there (control behaviours, misogyny, etc.). In this sense, researchers, caregivers, legal and law enforcement professionals, social workers, journalists, and other practitioners, etc. have a decisive role as opinion leaders, and should not minimize their responsibility. For example, in France, such a wake-up call led the Ecole Nationale de la Magistrature, France’s leading body for the professional education of judges, to set up (2019) a novel, interdisciplinary training about intimate partner violence aimed at judges, the police, social workers, lawyers, victimologists, etc., based on the most recent scientific knowledge about neuroscience, the developmental needs of children exposed to domestic violence, psychotrauma, the continuum, cycle, and impact of violence, and even some notions of coercive control.

Working in line with the active minority of those who uncover the continuum of violence (Kelly, 1987, 2013) is decisive. The fragmentation of violence served to obscure the responsibility of the perpetrators, as Arendt revealed in the analysis of the defense of the Nazi officer Eichmann in Jerusalem (1963). Conversely, research on genocides has shown that dehumanization is central in the escalation to extreme violence and appears as the red thread between actions that, taken together, form a continuum that made genocides possible. Understanding the role of dehumanization allowed us to reveal the mechanisms of violence from the victims’ narratives and voices.

However, even genocide research has overlooked for a long time the role of misogyny in the perpetration of violence, as well as the use of rape as a weapon. “*Rape and combat might (...) be considered complementary social rites of initiation into the coercive violence at the foundation of adult society. They are the paradigmatic forms of trauma for women and men*”, Herman wrote (1992, p. 61). Dr. Denis Mukwege, Nobel Peace Prize 2018, reminded that the rape of women and girls by soldiers during wartime has occurred throughout human history. Its use as a weapon of war was abominably demonstrated during World War II, when both Allied and Axis armies committed rape as a means of terrorizing enemy civilian populations and demoralizing enemy troops.

The *fragmentation* of violence between the public and the private spaces in both women’s personal lives and societies, and its *non-gendered* study succeeded in letting decisive elements such as misogyny, sense of entitlement to control others and coercive control go “under the radar” for many practitioners and researchers. Conversely, understanding violence as a continuum and using a gender-sensitive lens form a structural change in practice. The continuum of violence, as conceptualised by Liz Kelly in 1987, is a term designed to highlight that all forms of male violence against women are linked and form a continuum from subtle to obvious violations of women’s rights and forms of control over women’s lives, bodies, and sexuality. Understanding violence as a continuum and using gender-sensitivity are a matter of mainstreaming gender in research (EIGE, 2012), which bring into focus the mechanisms, factors and indicators that characterise both domestic violence and violence perpetrated in the public space, perhaps a chance to reveal the sensitive points at which domestic terrorists may export into the public space a sense of entitlement and behaviour already practiced in private space, as well as the transition points that can be used as leverages to prevent escalation in the spiral of violence. Using a gender-based lens in the social psychology of violence is not merely to suggest it is male violence against women, although it often is. It is violence that is driven in a central way by the social and structural dimensions of gender. This means gender plays an important role in who perpetrates the violence, who is targeted, how and why. Arguably, all forms of violence against women aim to silence women and maintain them in a subordinate place, which maintains the power and privilege status quo and prevents resistance.

Far from being limited to physical violence, which is only the tip of the iceberg, domestic violence must be thought of as a warning sign in a continuum of control. This phenomenon in itself can be recognized by the perpetrator’s strategies to take control over the victim, as well as a warning sign in a process that may be



exported to the public space. *“Any analysis of violence based only on violent and criminal incidents is problematic and limited in scope. The control dynamics imposed by the abuser is not limited to violent actions or criminal acts; there is a range of violent and non-violent strategies that are carried out and that must be considered to understand its dynamics, dangerousness and consequences”* (Ouellet, Blondin, Leclerc, & Boivin, 2017, p. 332).

## A continuum of violence in societies: across space and time

*“It is very tempting to take the side of the perpetrator. All the perpetrator asks is that the bystander do nothing. He appeals to the universal desire to see, hear, and speak no evil. The victim, on the contrary, asks the bystander to share the burden of the pain. The victim demands action, engagement, and remembering... In order to escape accountability for his crimes, the perpetrator does everything in his power to promote forgetting. Secrecy and silence are the perpetrator’s first line of defense. If secrecy fails, the perpetrator attacks the credibility of his victim. If he cannot silence her absolutely, he tries to make sure that no one listens. To this end, he marshals an impressive array of arguments, from the most blatant denial to the most sophisticated and elegant rationalization. After every atrocity one can expect to hear the same predictable apologies: it never happened; the victim lies; the victim exaggerates; the victim brought it upon herself; and in any case it is time to forget the past and move on. The more powerful the perpetrator, the greater is his prerogative to name and define reality, and the more completely his arguments prevail.”* (Herman, 1992, pp. 7-8).

In future research, I aim to better understand the social psychological processes and impact of violence using the continuum of violence paradigm by focussing on the place and markers of domestic violence in violent extremism. My understanding of the continuum of violence (Kelly, 1987) links the private and the social domains. Violence in the private and public space should be thought about as a continuum and a systemic phenomenon, with ramified, intergenerational, gendered implications, and misogyny as a root. This is a matter of social representation of violence for contemporary and future societies (Auslander, 2019; Auslander & Toledo, 2021), as well as a matter for our research paradigms.

This approach includes a continuity of time. On the one hand, such studies would consider children who are exposed to domestic violence as directly impacted, just like those exposed to other extreme violence. As we saw, growing up in a violent environment has a sustainable and fundamental impact on both their physical and mental health and results in increased likelihood to perpetrate violence against others or against oneself, or to become a victim again (polyvictimization). Identitywise, subscribing to such a paradigm means that researchers stand with the victims, in resonance with their oppressed voices. Actionwise, it means resisting a dominant consensus around the fragmented understanding of violence, adopting a “survivor-centered”, trauma-informed approach.

On the other hand, when studying the place of domestic violence in the trajectories of violent extremists, considering that coercive control is a predictor of intimate femicides (Johnson *et al.*, 2019), we suggest that it is decisive to pay attention to misogyny and coercive control as key warning signals.

The possible histories of domestic violence of violent extremists need to be analysed using a gender-based analysis and considering the multiplicity of dynamics of control and violence within families, modulated by the different relational, social and cultural factors of those involved.

The fragmentation of violence, whether such fragmentation concerns the *place* where violence is perpetrated, private vs. public, the *time when* it occurs, present vs. past (for example, limiting the focus on recent “ideological” motivations, “radicalization”, without considering past sexist and misogynistic behaviours, of terrorists; etc.), or the *target* against which it is exercised (“national citizens” in the case of terrorism, vs. family,

women and children, in the case of domestic violence; the latter being based on the false belief that a perpetrator who controlled or abused his partner could be a good father to a child), is a misrepresentation that inspires a research paradigm about violence which obscures the understanding of its processes and its underlying factors, which in turn leads to response strategies that are at best partial, and at worst backfires against the women and children victims.

While the separation between domestic violence from what qualifies as “terrorist” violence is institutionally needed and backed-up, for example in Law, it is widespread in today’s thinking societies, however scientifically unfounded. Just as the anatomy of the Holocaust revealed the continuum of destruction, this division must be intellectually lifted in research practice if we want to understand the continuum of violence, how domestic violence transforms certain perpetrators into terrorists, and how we can prevent and reverse these processes by taking seriously past behaviour (coercive control, misogyny) as a warning signal status in the escalation of violence. In such new practices, researchers along with professionals in the legal, health, care, child protection, and law enforcement systems have an essential role as opinion leaders in a battle of interpretations of violence.

In this vein, our (trauma informed) research in Francisca Toledo's doctoral thesis aims to understand the place of domestic violence in the trajectories of violent extremists and to suggest evidence based operational tools to reduce violence, using a mixed qualitative and quantitative methodology. It has the following operational goals:

- Collect French empirical data on the prevalence of domestic violence among those detained for terrorist acts or violent extremism, regardless of the claimed "ideology"
- Highlight the behavioural markers of the continuum of violence, the points and the circumstances of bifurcations from which people escalate this continuum, or not
- Give professionals and staff the tools to decrypt the strategies of coercive control and the strategies used by perpetrators to conceal domestic violence
- To improve prevention, protection, care and support for child victims.

## Advancing the theorisation of social modulation and polarisation

As we saw throughout this document, social representations guide not only the action (by selecting and ordering “relevant” action criteria, for example), but also the choice of events to which people respond, which engages them because they are understood as meaningful in relation to represented objects (cf. section dedicated to *personal involvement*).

My findings on the social thinking about terrorism among US passengers interviewed after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in Manhattan (Ernst-Vintila *et al.* 2011) support Gaymard’s point about the importance of the peripheral cognitions for the modulation (conditionality, negotiation) of social thinking and, conversely, the polarisation, nexus-like social thinking, in the absence of peripheral cognitions. This raises a theoretical hypothesis about a possibly major role of the peripheral cognitions in the modulation and radicalisation of stances. This point should be addressed in future studies. Here I would like to open a theoretical discussion.

What happens with social thinking when the representational structure shows an absence or dearth of the peripheral system? Collective mobilisation is being galvanised but deriving coordinated, flexible, articulated, individual *behavioural prescriptions* is blocked, the theorisation of mobilisation nexuses suggests.

For a long time, the representations’ peripheral system was considered to be “secondary” compared to their central core. However, within the central core theory and the question of norms, the heart of the problem, Gaymard noted, is that “*it is impossible to consider the idea of change working from the absolute (non-*

*negotiable) characteristics of the central core*" (2011, p. 232). Her work has shown the importance of the peripheral zone in affording individual latitude, modulation and deliberation as a basis for social change (Moscovici, 1976). Latitude, individual faculties of thought, judgment, discernment, and ultimately "negotiation", she suggests, hence resistance and challenging a dominant consensus, rely on the representations' capacity of adaptation through their periphery. Gaymard's research into the periphery of representations allowed a theorisation of *conditionality* (Flament, 1994b) and of *legitimate transgressions*, showing how *conditionality* links *behavioural prescription* and *condition* ("in such or such a condition one must do this or that...") and allowed the integration of the deviations from norms in the social representational theorisation (Gaymard, 1999, 2003, 2014). In fact Gaymard's work challenged the "classical" discontinuity assumed between peripheral and central cognitions in the structural approach to social representations (Abric 1987), or, rather, suggested a complementary understanding of the social representational structure, just like the notions of continuity and discontinuity as used in physics and other sciences are complementary and not just contradictory. Gaymard's points, while almost ignored in the contemporary (male dominated) research on social representations, open avenues for future research.

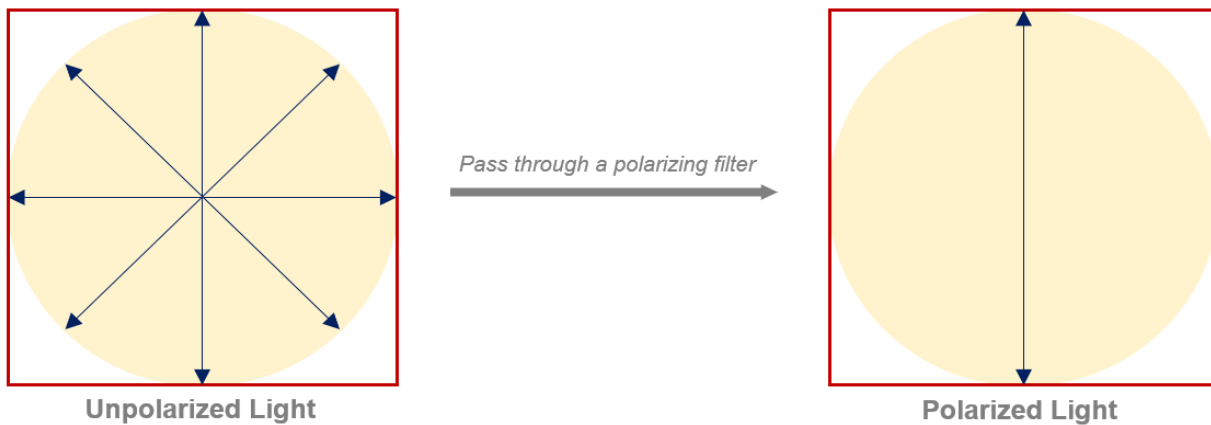
As we saw (Chapter 3), the US passengers' representation of terrorism post-9/11 had a particular structure: an affective element (fear) that was definitional for the represented object (terrorism) co-existed with a poor peripheral system - which stripped the representation down to its core, reduced its modulation potential: interindividual and situational adaptation, range of possibilities to adapt the central core elements, which are "abstract", to the "concrete" everyday circumstances, etc. Such reduced range of possibilities restricts the representational meaning and expression. In fact, as the findings showed, such a configuration brings a shift from the expression from what is individual to what is collective (e.g., action criteria), and that collective, because it is of an affective type, has only two modalities: liking, or disliking; adhering, or leaving: with us, or against us.

## About the importance of peripheral cognitions

This theorisation argues for the importance of the peripheral cognitions in social thinking as an independent line of future research.

Just like small talk is a bonding ritual that serves a social function rather than seeking to offer any information of value, we saw that the peripheral cognitions serve a social function. Their absence appears as an indicator of polarisation. Their presence, instead, increases the range of adaptation possibilities of central elements.

The range of possibilities addresses an issue about the *variation within extremes*: under certain circumstances, the range becomes limited to its two opposing poles. A social representation with a rich peripheral system allows situational adaptations and individual expressions of its central elements in a large number of concrete situations (say, an array of spectrum colours), as opposed to a representation with a poor peripheral system, whose structure restricts the range of its meanings to "black or white" options, that is, stances that are at the extreme poles of the spectrum ("full light"/"no light"). In physics an illustration is the full spectrum of unpolarised light (light emitted by the sun, by a lamp, or by a candle flame) going through a polarising filter and becoming polarised (Figure 4.1). Unpolarised light waves oscillate or vibrate in various planes (left). Polarised light is a light wave in which all photons have the same polarisation, i.e, the waves oscillate in only one direction. Passing unpolarised light through a polarising filter allows the vibration specific to only a single plane to pass through, thereby achieving what is called polarised light (right). When the electric field vectors are **restricted** to a single plane by filtration, then the **light** is said to be **polarised** with respect to the direction of propagation and all waves vibrate *in the same plane*. The polarising filter "reorganizes" light, by thus increasing visual clarity, contrast, and acuity. In physics, this process is called polarisation.



**Figure 4.1.**

*Light polarisation: Passing unpolarised light (left) through a polarising filter allows the vibration specific to only a single plane to pass through, thereby achieving what is called a plane polarised light (right). The polarising filter “reorganizes” light, by thus increasing visual clarity, contrast, and acuity<sup>84</sup>.*

In psychology, group polarisation (Zajonc, Wolosin, Wolosin & Sherman, 1969; Moscovici & Lécuyer, 1972) referred to the tendency for a group to make decisions that are more extreme than its members’ initial inclination, by reducing the behavioural variation interval to its extreme poles rather than a spectrum of moderated options.

As we saw, a rich peripheral system adds to a representational system’s complexity and robustness, which enriches meaning and interpretations with new facets because it enables situational and individual flexibility by its ability to recognize and use more diverse information in various circumstances (Guimelli, 1995; for example, Er-Rafiy & Brauer, 2010, showed a beneficial effect of increasing perceived variability on nuancing behaviour: reducing stigma and discrimination). By contrast, the absence of a peripheral system (or its dearth) strips social thinking to its core, consensual, essential elements. It constrains the range of meanings and interpretations. In other words, the absence of a buffering peripheral system leads the representation to rely exclusively on the central cognitions to define (i.e., interpret) situations and interactions, claim legitimacy and drive behaviour “in the name” of those key cognitions, which are admittedly “indisputable”.

Research showed that (1) central elements are key to defining the social identity of a group (Zouhri & Rateau, 2015), (2) conflict exacerbates group polarization by enhancing identification with the ingroup and hostility towards the outgroup (Reicher, 1984; Reicher *et al.*, 1995), maximizing the prevalence and salience of consensual (structurally central) over diverse (structurally peripheral) cognitions, thus collective over individual criteria. The central cognitions, then, may act on the diversity of interpretations and meanings like a polarising filter on unpolarised light, allowing only cognitions “aligned” with the central elements, and rejecting the others (*cf. supra, denial scheme*: Rouquette & Guimelli, 1995; Guimelli, 2002; Wolter, 2008; Wolter & Rouquette, 2010).

As we saw earlier (Chapter 3) the conditional nature of peripheral elements allows them to act as “bumpers” (Flament, 1994) by integrating challenging elements that jeopardize the central core as acceptable “exceptions” (an integration that uses “*strange schemes*”, Rouquette, & Guimelli, 1995; Wolter & Rouquette 2010). Hence, a representational structure characterised by the presence of only central (consensual, undisputable) cognitions and the absence of a peripheral system (or its dearth) would, especially in crisis/conflict

<sup>84</sup> Figure courtesy of <https://www.chemistryscore.com/glossary/plane-polarized-light/>.

circumstances, play a role in stance radicalisation and group polarisation. This is arguably why Rouquette wrote that "*conflict, which always involves an identity claim*", makes social representations explicit and "*radicalizes their expression*": it does not bend or distort them, but strips their meaning to its *essence* (Rouquette & Rateau, 1998, p. 18). This is perhaps also, from a social thinking perspective, how deindividuation operates in the social identity model (Reicher *et al.*, 1995), another study to be run.

Finally, in a divided representation of society (Moscovici, 1987), crisis/conflict circumstances, characterised by increased personal involvement, have chances to activate mobilisation nexuses.

Obviously, the totalitarian obsession with propaganda, consensus and reducing interindividual variability proceeds from the same rationale.

These theoretical considerations should be empirically and rigorously tested in the next steps, and so should the "restoration" of the representational flexibility by understanding and enhancing the role of peripheral cognitions which enrich meaning and interpretations<sup>85</sup>. Such empirical findings are not an end in themselves, but they are valuable insofar as they can test and develop the theory and contribute to understanding how thinking societies respond to extreme circumstances.

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<sup>85</sup> For example, via a change in social practice, one could assume in the light of Guimelli, 1998; Rouquette & Rateau, 1998; Abric, 2011.

## Chapter 4 - Synthesis

Chapter 4 presents a vision of future research that aims to add a voice towards the integration of the social representations, social change, and social identity conceptual frameworks. I would like to explore the social psychology of power, violence, and resistance drawing using some theoretical anchors and implications of trauma informed research. I would like to focus more deeply on the social psychological processes and impacts of violence and coercive control: state violence (totalitarianism), terrorism, violence against women and children, the continuum of violence between the public and private social spaces, sense making under these extreme conditions, using trauma informed research. This chapter put some benchmarks on this road. I present some theoretical anchors and methodological implications of trauma informed research in social psychology. First, I present a political perspective on social vs. psychologized social identity and a social psychological theory of the citizen that brings power in the equation. Second, I recall a feminist perspective on social identity and oppression. Drawing on both, I discuss what makes trauma informed research relevant in the battle of visions in contexts marked by negative operations of power. In trauma informed research, behaviours are understandable responses to adverse environments and the behavioural responses serve protective functions that draw from the human capacity for meaning making and agency. A trauma informed approach is one that takes the participants' sense making and standpoints seriously, rather than consider them in terms of cognitive biases, troubles, individual motivation, etc. Finally, I describe the research projects with my doctoral students and illustrate how the use of a trauma informed methodology may inform the social psychological theorisation of misrecognition, based on an empirical research about the asymmetry of power and the identity misrecognition of young French Muslim women who wear a headscarf. To conclude, I address violence against women and children as a negative operations of power and a major public health, security and equality issue. I propose an exploration of the place and markers of domestic violence in violent extremism drawing on social psychological processes and the notion of *continuum of violence* (Kelly, 1987). Finally, I suggest a gender-sensitive contribution to a trauma informed psychology of power, resistance, and violence.

## Résumé du Chapitre 4

Le chapitre 4 argumente en faveur de futures recherches qui ajoutent une voix à l'intégration des cadres conceptuels des représentations sociales, du changement social et de l'identité sociale. Je présente quelques ancrages théoriques et implications méthodologiques d'une approche de la recherche en psychologie sociale informée par le trauma.

Premièrement, je présente une perspective politique sur l'identité sociale vs. psychologisée, et une théorie psychosociale du citoyen qui introduit le pouvoir dans l'équation. Deuxièmement, je rappelle une perspective féministe sur l'identité sociale et l'oppression. En m'appuyant sur les deux, je discute de ce qui rend l'approche de recherche informée par le trauma pertinente dans la bataille des visions qui s'affrontent dans des contextes marqués par les opérations négatives du pouvoir. Dans l'approche de la recherche informée par le trauma, les comportements sont compris comme des réponses à des environnements défavorables. Les réponses comportementales remplissent des fonctions de protection qui tirent parti de la capacité humaine à donner un sens et à agir. Une approche informée par le trauma est une approche qui prend au sérieux la perspective et le sens construit par les personnes, plutôt que de les considérer en termes de biais cognitifs, de troubles, motivations individuelles, etc. Enfin, je présente les projets de recherche menés avec mes doctorantes. J'illustre comment l'utilisation d'une approche méthodologique informée par le trauma peut éclairer la théorisation psychosociale du déni de reconnaissance, à partir d'une recherche empirique sur l'asymétrie du pouvoir et la méconnaissance identitaire des jeunes femmes musulmanes françaises qui portent un foulard. Pour conclure, j'aborde la violence contre les femmes et les enfants comme une opération négative de pouvoir et un problème majeur de santé publique, de sécurité et d'égalité. Je propose une exploration de la place et des marqueurs des violences intrafamiliales dans l'extrémisme violent qui s'appuie sur des processus psychosociaux et la notion de *continuum de la violence* (Kelly, 1987). Enfin, je plaide pour une approche genrée et informée par le trauma en faveur d'une psychologie du pouvoir, de la résistance et de la violence.

# Conclusion

This note is a picture of my contributions to understanding how contemporary societies make sense in extreme circumstances, often informed by the social representations theory, which considers common knowledge as the raw material of collective action, allowing us to understand social phenomena in their collective and subjective dynamics.

This document focussed on two red threads. The first one gathered my work about *how contemporary societies think* in extreme circumstances. I analysed social thinking in circumstances that polarised thinking, behaviour, and affect, when people face collective risks related to environment, health, and violence. The second red thread focussed on how people feel *involved* by group memberships, and how their involvement plays a role in the polarisation of social thinking and behaviour.

In the first chapter, I explained my interest in the social representations about seismic risk in a post-totalitarian society (Bucharest, Romania). On the one hand, the authorities expected the citizens to understand the seismic risk through a scientific, "objective" lens, as an imminent natural hazard that requires "rational" preparation and adequate preparedness- for example, the paraseismic retrofitting of buildings using a partially State granted funding, etc. On the other hand, the citizens themselves were far from such understanding. Their seemingly paradoxical thinking only "made sense" if it was understood in the long term and in the larger context of their *double bind* relationship with the authorities after half a century of totalitarianism, in relation to their own social identity, *positionally* different, and in fact antagonistic, to that of the authorities. In such a context, the peoples' behaviour in the face of risk made sense. It also had a *social validity*, signifying that it preserved their own norms. This perspective changed the question from simply analysing a sum of purely cognitive elements of "risk perception", to focussing on the *social representation* of seismic risk, as a social phenomenon in a *thinking society*. My findings suggested that the social thinking about collective risk, far from resulting from "cognitive biases", emerges from an active process of *sense making*, which creates *meaning* in a context marked by relations of power, loss, and search for the restoration of a capacity to act, to resist oppression, in a society where State authorities were a source of mistrust and fear for its citizens. In view of the above, I stressed the relevance of the social representations theory to understand social thinking about collective risks. Applying this conceptual framework to empirical and experimental studies about the dynamics of the social representation of a collective risk and the engagement in risk reduction behaviour yielded practical implications for risk management and communication, suggesting how to involve people, based on their previous risk experience and sociability.

Chapter 2 described the social representational framework often used in my research, as well as a perspective on collective risks as "extreme" circumstances, which disturb and polarize social routines. Collective risks may trigger an exceptional *mass emergent sociality*, with circumstantial relations marked by trust, respect, cooperation, solidarity, warmth, even among apparent strangers who share a sense of common fate and a sense of group identity. First, I noted that the conceptual framework of social representations includes the social response to such circumstances in a continuum of a more general social thinking landscape. Second, I presented social thinking as a *research object* for social psychology. I highlighted its theoretical foundations and main concepts, including the interpretative notion of *mobilisation nexus*. Third, I introduced a three dimensional model of personal involvement, an explanatory variable of social thinking, which theorises a person's position *vis-à-vis*



a social object, and, conversely, the objects' position in her cognitive space (*Mindscales*).

Chapter 3 described my contribution to research on social thinking and personal involvement under extreme circumstances. The first studies addressed the social representations of seismic risk. The data collected before and after an earthquake in a region with moderate seismicity in a post-totalitarian society (Bucharest, Romania) showed that the citizens' social representations of risk were normative in all cases, even though they became more practically oriented among people who had experienced the earthquake. The physical and social environment that irrigated the elaboration of those representations seemed to be sufficient to saturate the social representational evaluative component even in the absence of practice, however insufficient to saturate the functional component. The second important result showed that experiencing a potentially destructive earthquake significantly structured the functional component of social representation, had no significant effect on its evaluative component, and a nuanced effect on the emotional aspects.

Following those findings, I wanted to empirically test whether social representations that had a more functional orientation were really more effective to guide risk related behaviour, as the theory suggested. I focussed on the social thinking about the global financial crisis marked by the collapse of the Lehman Brothers bank in September 2008. I interviewed senior finance executives and non-professionals. My findings confirmed the normative nature of social representations in both groups, and showed that a more functional representation was indeed more effective in guiding risk related behaviour.

Second, after the 9/11 terrorist attacks I wanted to understand the social thinking about terrorism as collective risk based on empirical data. I collected data from French and American passengers, as well as airport safety officers. The findings confirmed that practice leads to a structurally more complex representation among safety officers. In contrast, in the absence of practice, the passengers' social representations showed a weak peripheral system, hence reduced modulation capacities, pointing to a more consensual, more "radical" (polarised) form of social thinking, possibly closer to a *mobilisation nexus*. After the terrorist attacks in Paris in January 2015, real-time online data allowed me to better explore this notion. The findings showed a stark contrast between the unanimous response to the attack on Charlie Hebdo journal, a symbol of "Liberty", which temporarily mobilised the French society beyond intergroup differences, and the very limited popular response to the anti-Semitic attack in Vincennes. The notion of mobilisation nexus helped to better understand how polarized identities had become prominent in (digital) crowds, drawing attention to the need to know more and prepare social resilience based on inclusive rather than exclusive identities.

Third, I explored the social representations of justice and injustice in a post-totalitarian society. From a structural point of view, long after the fall of totalitarianism, my findings showed that the Authority itself remained a defining element of those representations, imparting its hegemonic meaning to the representation itself, which indicated that it captured more than individual minds, ensuring the control over a thinking society (captivity). I see these results as a contribution to a social psychology of totalitarianism, a step forward in understanding the lasting effects of coercive control in contexts marked by power, as well as empirical evidence of Moscovici's idea that in a totalitarian system, the external submission converts into internal submission (1981).

In the second part of Chapter 3, I explored the link between personal involvement and various normative and practical aspects of social thinking, drawing on research about earthquakes, the financial crisis, terrorism, totalitarianism, epidemics. For example, one finding was that in a threat situation (terrorism), in the absence of practice, personal involvement is linked to a more radical form of social thought, where action and identity criteria shift from individual to collective, preparing collective mobilization. I see these findings as contributions to the theorisation of the interpretative notion of *mobilisation nexus*, that form new bridges between the social representations and social identity theories. A second important finding concerned the long term numbing effect produced by totalitarian socialization on the citizens' perceived capacity to act, which last for at least one generation.

Chapter 4 argued for the future. I would like to explore the social psychology of power, violence, and resistance drawing using some theoretical anchors and implications of trauma informed research. I would like to use trauma informed research to understand better the social psychological processes and impacts of violence and coercive control: state violence (totalitarianism), terrorism, violence against women and children, the continuum of violence between the public and private social spaces, sense making under such extreme conditions. This chapter puts some benchmarks on this road.

First, my reflection started from a political perspective on social vs. psychologized social identity and a social psychological theory of the citizen that brings power in the equation.

Second, I retained gender as an organizing *thema* of social phenomena. I recalled a feminist perspective on social identity and oppression.

Drawing on both, I discussed what makes trauma informed research relevant in the battle of visions in contexts marked by power and oppression.

Just like the social representations theory identifies a rationale that stands as valid for people in apparently paradoxical processes of social thinking, trauma informed research moves away from viewing people's response in terms of cognitive biases, troubles, individual motivations, etc., and cares for how they make sense, act, and self-define, as normal responses to negative, sometimes extreme, operations of power. It understands behaviour as a response to adverse environments, that serves protective functions drawing on the human capacity for meaning making and agency (Johnston & Boyle, 2018). Trauma informed research views the study participants' voices as central not only to resist retraumatization, but also to build platforms for disempowered groups to speak their truth (Voith, *et al.*, 2020). It moves from an individual to a social and political perspective of power dynamics. It assesses the structural inequalities that perpetuate trauma throughout all of the involved systems (Bloom, 2018; Bowen & Murshid, 2016). Trauma exposure and related effects are knowingly unequally distributed throughout society, with marginalized groups bearing the greatest burden, especially women and children (Bowen & Murshid, 2016). Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) explains how multiple identity dimensions (ethnicity and gender identity, religion, etc.) shape one's social "position" in society as well as her specific experience of trauma and oppression relative to power dynamics.

I would like to explore this road in two research projects conducted with my doctoral students. The first focussed on the experiences of misrecognition of young French Muslim women who wear a hijab. It illustrated how using a trauma informed methodology may inform the theorisation of social processes such as those involved in national identity misrecognition. The second doctoral project addresses violence against women and children as a negative operation of power and a major public health, security and equality issue in contemporary societies. It focusses on the place and markers of domestic violence in extremism. I am interested in highlighting the social psychological processes that irrigate a *continuum of violence* that is far from occurring at the individual or interindividual level, but rather at a positional level in which gender organizes domination and control in both public and private social space. This project addresses the processes and impacts of violence in contemporary societies. Both projects belong in a vision of future research that aims to add a voice towards the integration of the social representations, social change, and social identity conceptual frameworks. They attempt to use a trauma informed, feminist approach to a psychology of power, violence and resistance.

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The fundamental question is simple. Be extreme circumstances real or imagined, does it matter how people, especially those whose voices are often unheard, make sense of them?

The research answer is a solid "yes", for three reasons. First, because representations fuel, shape and

limit human behaviour and societies, as research has consistently documented for decades. Second, because the "objective" characteristics of those circumstances are only *one* dimension of their *social reality*, probably not the most relevant one from a social psychological perspective, because their experience and impact are deeply unequal. Finally, because the opposition between the technocratic and democratic response to those circumstances is a structuring axis in contemporary societies.

Responding to extreme circumstances needs far more than expertise, unless such expertise includes that of the "experts of non-experts": the social psychologists interested in how citizens, especially women and children, make sense of such circumstances in societies irrigated by history, haunted by compulsory loyalties, driven by power and resistance.

Drawing a full panorama of the theoretical work, empirical studies and experimental research conducted in this domain that challenges the boundaries between history, political science, and psychology was beyond the scope of this document. I only wished to present here several contributions to the analysis of some social thinking phenomena that have become salient in our societies. I aimed to argue for future research directions based on the research that I have conducted in a discipline fundamentally bent by history and trauma. I suggested a trauma informed, feminist approach to a social psychology of power and resistance that stands on the shoulder of giants, draws on new links with feminist and trauma research, and on empirical evidence from thinking societies confronted with extreme circumstances and violence. This approach imagines new research methods adapted to interactions in power contexts, allows theorising meaning making in more complex ways, opens transdisciplinary possibilities to form hopefully more inclusive and more just societies.

Writing this document from an experience of voicelessness and isolation made me think about our missing sister researchers who were "*pushed out or who never gained admission due to gendered, racialized, classed, heteronormative, and ableist structures and daily practices in the academy*" (Wu, 2015; Mountz *et al.*, 2015, p. 1240). It made me reflect about neoliberalism, power, and of course about resistance, which, in academia too, needs to be collective. It brought me closer to a view of slow science as a feminist politics of resistance through collective action in the neoliberal university (Mountz *et al.*, 2015), a politics that "*foregrounds collective action and the contention that good scholarship requires time to think, write, read, research, analyze, edit, organize, and resist the growing administrative and professional demands that disrupt these crucial processes of intellectual growth and personal freedom*" (*ibid.*, p. 1236). Slow science as a feminist politics of resistance through collective action positions self-care and the creation of caring communities as a means of "*finding ways to exist in a world that is diminishing*" (Ahmed, 2014). It brings a healing-centered engagement in research (Voith, *et al.*, 2020). It supports Mountz *et al.*'s (2015) idea that such slowing down is both a commitment to good scholarship, teaching, and service and a collective feminist *ethics of care* that challenges the accelerated time, patriarchal elitism of the neoliberal university, and quantitative logic, which fuels conformism. I support such a feminist *ethics of care* that challenges neoliberal working conditions, favours cooperation over competition, empowerment over power, content over counting, that offers a path for transforming the power relations of knowledge production. As Martell (2014) observed, such an understanding of 'slow' science is not just about time, but about structures of power and inequality, resistance and social change.

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# Tables and figures

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# Annexes



# Annex 1 - Papers

## A. Papers in international peer-reviewed journals

Scimago (Q)

1. **Auslander**, L. & Toledo, F. (2021, *in press*). La place et les marqueurs des violences intrafamiliales dans les extrémismes violents. *Soins Pédiatrie/Puériculture*, 318, numéro spécial Enfance et radicalisation, 10-17 **(Q4)** (signed with a pseudonym).
2. **Da Silva**, C., Badea, C., Bender, M., **Ernst-Vintila**, A., Reicher, S. (2021, *accepted*). National Identity Misrecognition, Psychological Well-being, and Attitudes Held by Maghrebi French toward the French Mainstream Society. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* **Scimago Q1**
3. Ghilani, D., Luminet, O., **Ernst-Vintila**, A., Van der Linden, N., Klein, P., & Klein, O. (2020). Long live the past: A multiple correspondence analysis of people's justifications for comparing the Paris attacks of 2015 to past events. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 8(2), 721-747, **(Q2)**
4. Van Assche, J., Noor, M., Dierckx, K., Saleem, M., Bouchat, P., De Guissmé, L., Bostyn, D., Carew, M., **Ernst-Vintila**, A., & Chao, M. (2020). Can Psychological Interventions Improve Intergroup Attitudes Post Terror Attacks? *Social Psychological and Personality Science* <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550619896139> **(Q1)**
5. Nariman, H., S., Hadarics, M. Kende A., Láštíková B., Poslon X., D., Popper M., Boza M., **Ernst-Vintila** A., Badea C., Mahfud Y., O'Connor A., Minescu A. (2020). Anti-Roma Bias (Stereotypes, Prejudice, Behavioral Tendencies): A Network Approach Toward Attitude Strength. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 2071, <https://www.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.02071> **(Q1)**
6. Hasbún López, P., Martinović, B., Bobowik, M., Chrysochoou, X., Cichocka, A., **Ernst-Vintila**, A., Franc, R., Fulop, E., Peter, P., Ghilani, D., Kochar, A., Lamberty, P., Leone, G., Licata, L., Žeželj, I. (2019). Support for collective action against refugees: The role of national, European, and global identifications, and autochthony beliefs. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2608> **(Q1)**
7. Bouchat, P., Licata, L., Rosoux, V., Allesch, C., Ammerer, H., Babinska, M., Bilewicz, M., Bobowik, M., Bovina, I., Bruckmüller, S., Cabecinhas, R., Chrysochoou, X., Csertő, I., Delouée, S., Durante, F., **Ernst-Vintila**, A., Flassbeck, C., Franc, R., Hilton, D., Keles, S., Kesteloot, C., Kışloğlu, R., Krenn, A., Macovei, I., Mari, S., Medugorac, V., Petrović, N., Pólya, T., Raudsepp, M., Sà, A., Sakki, I., Turjancin, V., Türken, S., van Ypersele, L., Vojak, D., Volpato, C., Warland, G., Klein, O. (2019). Greedy elites and poor lambs: How young Europeans remember the great war. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 7(1), 52-75. **(Q2)**
8. Bouchat, P., Licata, L., Rosoux, V., Allesch, C., Ammerer, H., Bovina, B., Bruckmüller, S., Cohrs, C., Csertő, I., Delouée, S., Durante, F., **Ernst-Vintila**, A., Flassbeck, C., Hilton, D., Kesteloot, C., Kislioglu, R., Krenn, A., Macovei, I., Mari, S., Petrović, N., Polya, T., Tavani J.-L., van Ypersele, L., Volpato, C., Warland, G., & Klein, O. (2018). 100 Years After: What is the Relation Between Pacifist Attitudes and Social Representations of the Great War? *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 25(2), 129-139. **(Q2)**
9. Bouchat, P., Licata, L., Rosoux, V., Allesch, C., Ammerer, H., Bilewicz, M., Bovina, B., Bruckmüller, S., Cabecinhas, R., Chrysochoou, X., Cohrs, C., Csertő, I., Delouée, S., Durante, F., **Ernst-Vintila**, A., Flassbeck, C., Hilton, D., Kesteloot, C., Kislioglu, R., Krenn, A., Macovei, I., Mari, S., Petrović, N., Polya, T., Sà, A., Sakki, I., Turjancin, V., van Ypersele, L., Volpato, C., & Klein, O. (2017). A century of victimhood: Antecedents and current impacts of victimization associated to World War I across Europe. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 47(2), 195-208. **(Q1)**
10. Mahfud, Y., Badea, C., Guimond, S., Anier, N., & **Ernst-Vintila**, A. (2016). Distance culturelle, perception du multiculturalisme et préjugés envers les immigrés en France. *Année psychologique*, 116(02), 203-225. **(Q3)**
11. **Ernst-Vintila**, A. Smbatyan, M., Havarneanu, G., Juarez-Romero, J. (2014). « Le fil de soie de la légalité » : une illustration du lien entre l'organisation normative du pouvoir et une catégorie

- fondamentale de la sociabilité. Représentations sociales de l'injustice en système totalitaire et post-totalitaire. *Cahiers Internationaux de Psychologie Sociale* 103, 517 – 547.
12. Juarez Romero, J. et **Ernst-Vintila, A. (2014)**. Apports de la théorie des représentations sociales à l'étude des questions liées à la justice et l'injustice dans différents contextes sociopolitiques : présentation du numéro thématique. *Cahiers Internationaux de Psychologie Sociale*, 103, 415 – 420.
  13. Camus, G. Berjot, S. & **Ernst-Vintila, A. (2014)**. Validation française de l'échelle de prise en considération des conséquences futures de nos actes (CFC-14). *Revue Internationale de Psychologie Sociale* 27, 1/2014, 35-63. **(Q3)**
  14. Py, J., Bouffard, T., Desmette, D., Fontayne, P., Geldart, S., Gosselin, P., Lories, G., Becker, M., Brunel, Dumas, R., **Ernst-Vintila, A., & O'Keefe, C. (2012)**. A summary of the publications appearing in ERAP from 2009 to 2011, including some notable developments that have emerged during this period. *European Review of Applied Psychology* 62, 1-2/2012, 1-2 **(Q3)**
  15. **Ernst-Vintila, A., Delouvé, S., & Roland-Levy, C. (2011)**. Under threat. Lay thinking about terrorism and the three-dimensional model of personal involvement. A social psychological analysis. *Journal of Risk Research* 14, 1-2/2011, 297-324. **(Q1)**
  16. Lo Monaco, G., Piermattéo, A., Guimelli, C., & **Ernst-Vintila, A. (2011)**. Using the Black Sheep Effect to reveal normative stakes: The example of alcohol drinking contexts. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 41, 1-5. Published online 29 July 2010 : Wiley (wileyonlinelibrary.com), DOI: 10.1002/ejsp.764. **(Q1)**
  17. **Ernst-Vintila, A., Delouvé, S., & Rouquette, M.-L. (2010)**. La crise financière de 2008 : menace collective ou défi individuel ? Une analyse de la pensée sociale mobilisée en situation de crise. *Cahiers Internationaux de Psychologie Sociale*, 87, 515-542.
  18. **Ernst-Vintila, A., & Wolter, R. P. (2010)**. La crise, les crises : présentation du numéro thématique. *Cahiers Internationaux de Psychologie Sociale* 3/2010 (87), 389-392.
  19. Bley, D., **Ernst-Vintila, A., Gaimard, M., Soulance, D. & Vernazza-Licht, N. (2009)**. Le chikungunya à la Ravine des Cabris (commune de Saint-Pierre, île de la Réunion) : premiers résultats d'une enquête pluridisciplinaire sur les comportements et perceptions. *Bulletin de la Société de Pathologie Exotique*, 102, 2, 130-136. **(Q3)**
  20. **Gruev-Vintila, A. & Rouquette, M-L. (2007)**. Social Thinking about Collective Risk: How Do Risk-related practice and Personal Involvement Impact Its Social Representations? *Journal of Risk Research* 10, 3-4/2007, 555-581. **(Q1)**

## B. Book chapters

1. Gruev-Vintila, A. & Toledo, F. (2021, *in press*). Le contrôle coercitif. Repérer les violences au sein du couple dans les interactions et le rapport de pouvoir entre l'auteur et la victime. In I. Rome & E. Martinent (Eds.). *L'emprise au sein du couple*. Paris, Dalloz.
2. Ernst-Vintila, A. (2016). Représentations sociales et implication personnelle. Questions théoriques et résultats récents. In G. Lo Monaco, S. Delouvé, P. Rateau (Eds.) *Les représentations sociales. Théories, méthodes et applications*. De Boeck, 557-576
3. Ernst-Vintila, A., Wolter, R. P., & Tavani, J.-L. (2013). Environnement, peurs collectives et représentations sociales. Illustration empirique de la taxinomie des peurs collectives proposée par Rouquette. In S. Delouvé, P. Rateau, M.-L. Rouquette. *Les peurs collectives*. Toulouse : Erès, 33-48
4. Ernst-Vintila, A. (2013). L'implication personnelle. Modèle théorique et résultats récents. In P. Rateau, J. Sagnes. *Mémoire, rumeurs, propagande. Approche psycho-sociologique. Hommage à M.-L. Rouquette*. Perpignan : Presses Universitaires de Perpignan, 87-101
5. Neculau, A. & Ernst-Vintila, A. (2011). Préface. In S. Moscovici, *Social Influence and Social Change/Psychologie des minorités actives*. Trad. Roumaine : Influenta sociala si schimbare sociala. Iasi : Ed. Polirom, p. 9-16
6. Ernst-Vintila, A. et Richardot, S. (2011). Do medo da sanção à transformação das "mentalidades". A contribuição da teoria das representações sociais aos estudos sobre a eficácia das leis (De la peur de la sanction à la transformation des « mentalités ». L'apport de la théorie des représentations sociales à l'étude de l'efficacité des lois). Dans L. Spadoni (Ed.), *Contribuição da Psicologia Social ao Direito*, São Paulo, pp. 11-26.
7. Ernst-Vintila, A. (2011). Représentations sociales du risque sismique et phénomènes d'implication personnelle. In B. Cousin (Ed.) *Les sociétés méditerranéennes face au risque. Représentations*. Le Caire : Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale
8. Ernst-Vintila, A. (2009). Le rôle de l'implication personnelle dans l'expression de la pensée sociale sur les risques collectifs. In M.-L. Rouquette (Ed). *La pensée sociale. Questions théoriques et recherches appliquées*. Ramonville-Saint-Agne : Erès, 161-190
9. Gruev-Vintila, A. (2007). Teaching social psychology as a discipline anchored in History. In: *Contemporary Issues of Teaching Psychology*. Yerevan: Yerevan State University Publishing House, pp. 190-194.
10. Gruev-Vintila, A. (2006). Historicité des représentations sociales du risque sismique. Une inscription culturelle et psychosociale dans le contexte roumain in V. Socorovschi (Ed.) *Riscuri și catastrofe (Risks and catastrophes)*, Vol. V, Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cartii de Stiinta, pp. 241-259.



## C. List of other relevant papers in scientific journals

1. **Auslander, L. (2018)**. Violences faites aux femmes, violences faites aux enfants. Intérêt des commissions pluridisciplinaires chargées de revoir les affaires classées sans suite et d'émettre des recommandations pour corriger les failles et dysfonctionnements du système judiciaire. Quelques éléments issus des recherches en psychologie sociale. *Psycho-Droit*, 3, 79-84 (signé avec pseudonyme).
2. Tikhonova, A. D., Dvoryanchikov, N. V., **Ernst-Vintila, A.**, & Bovina, I. B. (2017). Radicalisation of Adolescents and Youth: In Search of Explanations. *Cultural-Historical Psychology*, 13(3), 32-40.
3. **Ernst-Vintila, A.**, & Macovei, I. (2016). «Je suis Charlie», la liberté au-delà de l'égalité et la fraternité? Interprétation collective des attaques terroristes de janvier 2015 en France et expression online d'un nexus 3. *Psihologia Socială*, (38), 111.
4. **Ernst-Vintila, A.**, Ben Alaya, D., de Rosa, A. & Neculau, A. (2016). Do the Shoemaker's Children go barefoot? Diversity in Social Psychology and the Two Worldmaps of its diachronic evolution. *Diachronic Evolution. Psihologia Socială*, nr. 38 (II)/2016, pp. 125-132
5. **Ernst-Vintila, A. (2015)**. Mentalité conspirationniste, emprise totalitaire, radicalisation du sens commun. Réflexion théorique et illustration empirique. *Psihologia socială*, 36 (III), 89-104
6. **Ernst-Vintila, A. (2014)**. Editorial. Serge Moscovici (1925-2014). *Psihologia socială*, (34), 5-10.
7. **Ernst-Vintila, A. (2013)**. Adrian Neculau et Michel-Louis Rouquette. *Psihologia socială*, (32), 63-65.
8. Ben Alaya, D., Chrysochoou, X., Clémence, A., De Rosa, A., Drozda-Senkowska, E., Elcheroth, G., **Ernst-Vintila, A.**, Goncalves, I., Green, E., Hansen, K., Howarth, C., Kalampalikis, N., Reicher, S., Schrujjer, S., Simon, B., Staerklé, C., Uskul, A., Vala, G., Verkuyten, M., Volpato, C., Wagner. (2013). Developing diversity in EASP as a means to achieve a vibrant and relevant social psychology. *European Bulletin of Social Psychology* 25-2
9. **Ernst-Vintila, A.**, Cohen, P. (2013). Entre psychologie et économie : le citoyen. Un point de vue psychosocial. *Psihologia Sociala* 31, p. 105-110.
10. Rateau, P., **Ernst-Vintila, A.**, & Delouvé, S. (2012). Michel-Louis Rouquette et l'architecture de la pensée sociale. *Psicologia e saber social (Psychology and Social Knowledge)*, 1(1), p. 53-65
11. **Ernst-Vintila, A. (2012)**. L'implication personnelle, variable explicative de la pensée sociale. Quelques rappels du modèle tridimensionnel proposé par M.-L. Rouquette. *Psihologia socială*, 30, p. 121-126
12. **Ernst-Vintila, A. (2010)**. Contrainte, éducation et transformation des mentalités. Quelques apports de la théorie des représentations sociales à l'étude de l'efficacité des lois. *Revista de Psihologie a Academiei Române*, 56, 3-4, p. 185-196 (*Revue de Psychologie de l'Académie Roumaine*)
13. **Ernst-Vintila, A.** & Cheval S. (2006). Le changement climatique : quel défi pour la psychologie sociale ? *Analele de Psihologie ale Universitatii Al. I. Cuza*, 101-109
14. **Ernst-Vintila, A.**, Pachtchenko-de Préville, E., Rouquette, M.-L. (2011). Représentations sociales, conformité et processus minoritaire. Une étude de cas à propos de la responsabilité civique en système démocratique vs. totalitaire. *Psihologia Socială*, 27(2), n° spécial Théorie des Représentations Sociales – 50 ans, p. 7-22

15. **Gruev-Vintila, A. (2004a)**. Effets de l'implication sur les représentations sociales d'un risque collectif : le cas du risque sismique. Une comparaison entre la France et la Roumanie (Efectele implicarii asupra reprezentarilor sociale ale unui risc colectiv : cazul riscului seismic. O comparatie între Franta si România). *Psihologia Socială*, 14, 103-124
16. **Gruev-Vintila, A. (2004b)**. De l'analyse structurale des représentations sociales : le modèle des Schèmes Cognitifs de Base (SCB) (Despre analiza structurala a reprezentarilor sociale. Modelul Schemelor Cognitive de Baza (SCB)). *Psihologia Socială*, 14, 185-196
17. **Vintila, A. (2001)**. Représentations sociales des risques collectifs. Effets du statut minoritaire et de la normativité d'un message sur la représentation sociale émergente de la pollution de l'air (Reprezentarile sociale ale riscurilor colective. Efectele statutului minoritar si al normativitatii unui mesaj asupra reprezentarii sociale emergente a poluarii atmosferice). *Psihologia Socială*, 8, 3, 38-55



## Annex 2 - Research grants

N°	Grant name	Funding
1	Coordinator (15 countries)  <a href="#">ANR-15-MRSE-0008</a> XTREAMIS 2015-2017 Xenophobia, Radicalism in Europe, Anti-Semitism, Islamophobia – Deradicalisation and Prevention	30 k€
2	National coordinator for France  <a href="#">H-2020 REC-RDIS-DISC-AG-2017/808062 - PolRom</a> 2018-2021 Identifying evidence-based methods to effectively combat discrimination of the Roma in the changing political climate of Europe Coord.: A. Kende, ELTE	430 k€  France 89 k€
3	National coordinator for France  <a href="#">VW 94766 MisMIE</a> 2019-2020 Misrecognising Minorities in Europe. Challenges to Integration and Security Coord.: A. Zick, Bielefeld University - IKG S. Reicher, University of St Andrews	999 k€  France 139 k€
4	Participant  <a href="#">ANR-06-SEST-0004</a> ANTHROPOCHIK-MVT 2006-2008 Milieu de vie et santé : la gestion des maladies transmissibles vectorielles à l'île de la Réunion à partir de l'exemple du Chikungunya Coord.: D. Bley, CNRS	250 k€
5	Subcontractor  <a href="#">ANR-05-PDIT-002</a>  VIVRE 2 2005-2008 Programme de Recherche et d'Innovation dans les Transports terrestres (PREDIT) 2005 Coord.: Renault Trucks	673 k€
6	Coordinator (11 countries)  H2020-REV-INEQUAL-02-2016 XTREAMIS Xenophobia, Radicalism in Europe, Anti-Semitism, Islamophobia – Deradicalisation and Prevention	candidate for 5 M€
7	Coordinator SCI-JUST (French Ministry of Justice) Effets sociocognitifs d'une formation innovante relative aux violences au sein du couple sur le traitement en justice des affaires familiales	candidate for 67 k€



## Annex 3 - Research supervision

### Doctoral students

**Caroline DA SILVA, PhD in Psychology** at the Doctoral School ED 139 Connaissance, langage, modélisation - Université Paris-Nanterre - Laboratoire Parisien de Psychologie Sociale, EA 4386. Starting date : October 2017, viva expected in 2021 (COVID19 extension).

**Title:** National identity misrecognition of Maghrebi French and repercussions on intra- and intergroup relations. Social representational and social identity approach (*Déni de reconnaissance (misrecognition) de l'identité nationale des Français d'origine maghrébine et répercussions sur les rapports intra- et intergroupes. Approche socioreprésentationnelle et socioidentitaire*)

**Co-supervision:** C. BADEA, Professor of psychology, A. GRUEV-VINTILA, Assoc. Prof.

**Funding:** MisMIE project *Misrecognising Minorities in Europe: Challenges to Integration and Security*. Scientific coordination: Steve REICHER, PR psychology, University of St Andrews, and Andreas ZICK, PR Educational science, IKG - Bielefeld Universität, 2019-2021.

**Francisca TOLEDO, interdisciplinary PhD in Sociology and Psychology** at the Doctoral School ED 396 Economie, Organisations, Société - Université Paris-Nanterre & Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Mines de Paris - Institut des sciences sociales du politique. CNRS UMR 7220. Starting date : Decembre 2019

**Title:** *Continuum of violence: place and markers of domestic violence in the trajectories of violent extremists (Continuum des violences : place et marqueurs des violences intrafamiliales dans les parcours des extrémistes violents)*

**Co-supervision:** P. LABORIER, Professor of political science and scientific coordinator of the COSPRAD (Conseil scientifique sur les processus de radicalisation), A. GRUEV-VINTILA, Assoc. Prof.

**Funding:** winner of a doctoral contract funded by the French National Emergency Program for Scientists in Exile (Programme national d'Accueil en Urgence des Scientifiques en Exil "PAUSE"), 2020-2023.

### Masters Students

**Master Psychologie sociale appliquée Recherches, études et interventions**, Université de Paris-Nanterre, Laboratoire Parisien de Psychologie Sociale LAPPS EA 4386

1. Babacan, Çağla : *Le déni de reconnaissance de l'identité nationale : Etude de cas chez les Françaises musulmanes qui portent un voile* (2019). **Mention Bien.**
2. Albuquerque, Laetitia : *Terrorisme et violence de genre. Une approche socio-représentationnelle de l'interprétation et l'acceptation de la violence par de futurs acteurs de la justice* (2018) Co-supervised with A. Lantian
3. Sophie, Laurine : *Représentation historique du groupe national, marqueurs de nationalisme et comportements dans les relations intergroupes* (2018, M2R) Co-supervised with A. Lantian **Mention Bien.**
4. Charvin, Laurent : *Politisisation, radicalisation, implication personnelle et acceptation de la violence. Etude au sein du mouvement végane* (2017). **Mention Très Bien.**
5. Bouhout, Badredine : *Propagande djihadiste. Analyse des effets du type de musique sur une population Maghrébine* (2017)
6. Tellili, Lilia : *Impact de la propagande de DAECH sur les représentations sociales et l'identification au groupe chez la population maghrébine en France* (2017)
7. Liberge, Doriane : *Théories du complot et remise en cause du consensus* (2017). Co-supervised with A. Lantian

8. Bourdon Muñoz, Barthélémy : *Représentations sociales et attitudes envers les migrants et les réfugiés en France* (2016).  
Co-supervised with C. Badea, MCF HDR

**Master Psychologie Insertion et Risques Psychosociaux : Approche psycho-sociale et contexte économique,**  
Université de Reims Champagne-Ardenne, Laboratoire de psychologie C2S Cognition, Santé, Socialisation, EA 6291

9. Dauzet, Anna : *Représentation sociale de la relation demandeur d'emploi-conseiller d'insertion chez les demandeurs d'emploi. Impact du sentiment d'objectivation sur l'alliance au travail* (2015)
10. Orcha, Guévin : *La représentation du métier de vigneron champenois : une comparaison intergénérationnelle* (2014)
11. Herbay, Amandine : *Représentations sociales élaborées par les vignerons champenois de leur métier et de la santé au travail* (2013). **Recherche financée** par une **Allocation de recherche SHS obtenue par concours** de l'Institut International des Vins de Champagne – Villa Bissinger, Centre d'Etude de la Vigne et du Vin de Champagne. **Mention Bien**
12. Gérard, Guillaume : *Représentations sociales de la réussite. Étude de trois types de réussite : sportive, scolaire et familiale* (2013)
13. Koukourec Renata : *Représentations sociales du culte de la jeunesse dans une dimension interculturelle*(2013)
14. Bouinot, Benjamin (M2) : *Etude structurale des représentations sociales du « bien-être au travail » et du « mal-être au travail »* (2012)

**Master MASS Mathématiques appliquées aux sciences sociales,** Aix-Marseille Université, Laboratoire espace CNRS  
UMR 6091, co-encadrement interdisciplinaire Psychologie-Mathématiques

15. Alexis, Claire & Méresse, Mégane : *L'acculturation des étrangers à Marseille. Etude des pratiques et ressentis* (2010)
16. Mieulet, Elise & Perroni, Marine : *Le rôle des enfants dans l'acculturation des parents migrants* (2009)
17. Bérenger Cyril & Parianos, Michel : *Représentations sociales de la qualité de l'eau* (2008)
18. Demontis, Claire & Hellmuth, Audrey : *Représentations sociales du terrorisme. Etude sur l'aéroport Marseille-Provence* (2007)









The purpose of this document is to offer a picture of my fundamental and applied contributions to understand how contemporary societies make sense from extreme circumstances. I focus on two red threads, both of which are often informed by the social representations theory, sometimes the social identity theory.

The first red thread gathers my work on *how societies think* in extreme circumstances. It concerns social thinking in contemporary societies who face circumstances that appear as extreme and may polarise thinking, behaviour, and affect: collective risks (environment or health-related risks, natural hazards, vector-borne diseases, etc.), violence (terrorism, anti-Semitism, totalitarianism, violence against women and children).

The second red thread focusses on how we feel *involved* by group memberships, and how our involvement plays a role under such circumstances, especially in the polarization of social thinking and behaviour.

Drawing on both, I argue for future research that aims to add a voice towards the integration of the social representations, and social identity conceptual frameworks with a trauma informed, feminist approach to a social psychology of power and resistance.

\*

*L'objectif de ce document est de résumer mes contributions fondamentales et appliquées visant à comprendre la pensée sociale dans les sociétés contemporaines confrontées aux circonstances extrêmes. Je me concentre sur deux fils rouges, qui sont souvent informés par la théorie des représentations sociales, parfois la théorie de l'identité sociale.*

*Le premier fil rouge rassemble mon travail sur la façon dont les sociétés pensent dans des circonstances extrêmes. Il concerne la pensée sociale dans les sociétés contemporaines confrontées à des circonstances qui apparaissent comme extrêmes et peuvent polariser la pensée, les comportements et les affects : risques collectifs (risques environnementaux ou sanitaires, aléas naturels, maladies à transmission vectorielle, etc.), violence (violences d'Etat (totalitarisme), terrorisme, antisémitisme, violences contre les femmes et les enfants).*

*Le deuxième fil rouge focalise sur la façon dont nous nous sentons impliqués par l'appartenance à un groupe, et le rôle de l'implication personnelle dans de telles circonstances, en particulier dans la polarisation de la pensée et des comportements sociaux.*

*En m'appuyant sur ces travaux, je plaide pour des recherches futures qui visent à ajouter une voix vers l'intégration des cadres conceptuels des représentations sociales et de l'identité sociale avec une approche féministe, informée par le trauma, d'une psychologie sociale du pouvoir et de la résistance.*