

SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF ETHNIC GROUPS IN CONTEMPORARY ROMANIA

Cătălin Turliuc, Nicoleta Turliuc

I consider that the theme of the present paper deals with a great problem in the world socio-political context starting from the following arguments:

1. Nowadays, there is a great emphasis upon the political and ideological discourses on the necessity of the opening the reciprocity and solidarity, of acknowledging the values and life-style specific to certain ethnic and national groups, but the individuals and groups keep on being ignored, marginalized, stigmatised.

2. The observance of the equality right of all people is being watched, which means the equality right of minority with majority, but there are still flagrant violations.

3. There are searched new strategies of inter-group and inter-ethnic relationship, aiming at their improvement, but there are conflicts that cannot be easily surpassed, as it has happened in the case of the former Yugoslavia.

4. Within the Romanian national context, since the conflicts between Hungarians and Romanians, from March 1990, Târgu Mureş, since the latest conflicts between the Romanians, Hungarians and the Gypsies from Constanţa or Mureş (1997), there have been registered real progresses in the relationship between the ethnic or national minorities and majorities, but the tensions keep on existing being sustained both by majorities and minorities.

These are a few of the problems, which have troubled the whole international community, at the end of this century. Simultaneously, there are some of the problems, which the Romanian society is confronted too. They prove the fact that between wish and reality, there is often a significant gap.

In certain inter-group situations, the politicians want – at least they assert so – to change the discriminatory manifested or latent behavior of majority, without considering a necessary problem namely to change the stereotypes, prejudices or social representations, which determine the attitude or the concrete manifestations of the individuals who are in a binary relation. Or, the social representations constitute important principles, which generate attitudes, which guide the majority behavior towards the minority, directly influencing the answers, offered by minorities and vice-versa. The knowledge of the ethnic

representations imposes itself aiming at the discovery of its real, deep signification of the mutual interactions, behavior and attitudes of the members belonging to certain different ethnic groups, having in view the conscious administration and the best management of the inter-group relations. In other words, behavior cannot be understood and does not allow the achievement of certain predictions without referring to the mental models of reality.

In this context, I tried to analyze the particularities of the Romanians' social representations regarding some of the ethnic minority groups in our country. My lecture is structured in three distinct parts, which follow the presentation: a) of certain theoretical aspects of the social representations, b) of the factors which should be taken into consideration in the theoretical and practical analysis of the ethnic representations and c) of the content and structure of the Romanians' social representations regarding the ethnic minorities.

The plurality of approaching a “crossroad concept”

In 1961, Serge Moscovici called the psychological researchers' attention on a “forgotten concept”: that of collective representation. This notion was introduced in the sociological vocabulary by E. Durkheim who, in his study *De la division du travail social* (1893), raised the problem of a collective conscience including the whole believes and common feelings belonging to the majority members of a certain collectivity. This reality exists through the individual conscience, which are reunited in a series of collective representations. In 1898, in the article *Representations individuelle et representation collectives*, E. Durkheim wrote that the collective representations are produced through the exchange activities and relations between the individual types of consciousness, the last ones being social on the condition they should be the products of certain common characteristics of a group of individuals belonging to a society, and psychological, as the perception of reality and the mind organization represent individual work. However, Durkheim perceived the collective representations in analogy to the pure logical categories and constants of the spirit where all the knowledge modalities are included.

S. Moscovici redefined and redimensioned the concept, outlining the fact that, if the social representations were further analyzed in such a general way, they would become obstacles for the significant knowledge of reality instead of becoming heuristic instruments. In his famous doctor's thesis, *La psychoanalyse, son image et son public* (1961), Moscovici analyses the social representations as a specific way of knowledge and communication, specifying that they occupy an intermediate position between a concept (aiming at the abstraction of a meaning from reality) and the image/percept (reproducing reality in a concrete way). Thus, the representation gives sense to any figure and

ascribes an image to any signification. *Where we refer to "reality", these representations are all we have got.* After their model there are adjusted both our cognitive and perceptive systems (S. Moscovici, 1995, p. 4).

The notion of "social representation" has become a "key concept" for the social psychology (W. Doise and A. Palmonari, 1996, p.23), but it can be found in the field of cognitive psychology, of social cognition (W. Doise, 1989, 1990) and psychoanalysis, too (R. Kaes, 1975; D. Anzieu, 1981). Within the psychoanalytical approach, it was made the distinction between the play of the individual visions and that one of the social imaginary, in producing the social representations.

Due to its extraordinary heuristic and epistemological valences, this notion opened the possibility of re-reading the myths, of a new understanding of the magic-religious thinking, of the utopia and ideologies, of different symbolic systems or social attitudes which are reflected by mentalities (D. Jodelet, 1989, pp.39-40). Thus, it gained a significant role in other social sciences, too, such as: history, anthropology, sociology etc. The social representations are considered by historian necessary elements of the conceptual network, permitting to take into consideration "the relations between material and mental in the societies evolution" (G. Duby, 1978, p.20). By an anthropologist, they are attributed the property to particularize, in any social form, the cultural order, to be constitutive to reality and social organization, to have, in their definition, their own efficiency. For a sociologist, the representations justify certain political and religious behavior and appear by means of the political discourse – as a factor of social transformation.

The role of articulating different domains, confer the social representations a transversal status, which claims not juxtaposition, but a real coordination of the points of view.

Taking into consideration the special status of the representations, S. Moscovici (1995, pp. 64-68) noticed not only the fact that certain themes but also some methodological principles within the domain of the social representations, can be found in a series of social disciplines mentioned above. The author enumerated the existence of at least four common methodological principles:

a. To obtain a material of samples from a conversation in a society. Some of these retorts exchanges deal with important problems, while others deal with topics, which should be unknown to the group, but tending towards the mutual understanding. G. Tarde in 1910 was the first who asserted that the opinions and the representations are created during the conversations, as elementary ways of links and communication. He demonstrated how they appear in special reserved places (such as the saloons, the cafés), how they are determined by the physical and psychological dimensions of those meetings among the individuals (S. Moscovici, 1976). This kind of infra-communications and thoughts, based on

rumors, constitute a kind of intermediate stratum between the public and the private life, facilitating the passing from one to another. The conversation would be, thus, in the center of our consensual universe, as it forms and animates the social representations.

b. To consider the social representations as means of reality re-creation. By communication, the individuals and the groups give a physical reality to the ideas and images, to the classification and denomination. The most impressive result of this reconstruction of abstractions is the fact that they detach themselves from the individual's subjectivity, gaining in time permanence and stability. Thus, a saying, for example, becomes independent of the person who produced it, after it has been repeated and taken by others. The representations should be seen as art works and not as raw material. It refers to something permanent rather than something newly built, as: the only reality is that which was structured by the past generations or by other group, being the one we reproduce in the exterior world, without avoiding the images and our inside models distortion.

c. The social representations character is relevant, especially, during crises and social revolts, when a group and its images bear a change. During these periods, people are willing to talk, the images and the expressions are more intense, the collective memory is aroused, and the behavior becomes spontaneous. The individuals are motivated by the desire to understand the world, which appear unfamiliar and disturbed.

d. The persons, which elaborate such representations, are noticed and studied as amateur "scientists", and the groups they form are perceived as modern equivalents of those societies of amateur scholars, who lived a century ago. In many unofficial meetings, during the discussions from cafés or clubs, the way of thinking and expression reflects the expressed curiosities and the social links established at that time. Many of the social representations are put into circulation by a series of works, aiming at the popularization of different domains of science or by the opinions expressed by certain journalists of a certain structure. Such information, offered on people's taste, can create to many individuals the impression that they are sociologists, historians, psychologists, and physicians, even amateurs.

Anywhere and any time we come across people, events or things, the representations, functioning as a milieu of the individual or group.

The social representations circulate, cross and crystallize permanently in the social life, by means of words, gestures or attitudes. The information we receive – and to which we try to offer a meaning- is under their control and does not have any other significance to us, but that one which are offered by the representations. (S. Moscovici, 1995, p.13). They guide our way of defining the different aspects of reality, to interpret them, to decide on them, and it is necessary, to take position towards them and to protect them. Their intimate link with

the imaginary is transparent in S. Moscovici's remark (1994, p.46): the individual or social representations make world be what we think it is or should be.

The person who launched "the social representations era" considered that, these are modalities of practical thinking, oriented towards communication, understanding and governing the social, material and ideal environment (S. Moscovici, 1995, p.22). D. Jodelet (1989, p.36) appreciated that the social representations are a form of knowledge, socially elaborated and divided having a practical aim and competing to the building of a reality, which is common to the social group. From the analysis of the definitions given to the concept of "social representations" we memorized the different authors' agreement of considering the social representations as being: a) *the process and the product of a both psychological and social elaboration*, fact which imposes to take into consideration both the psychological and sociological perspectives; b) *a practical knowledge of reality*, an intermediate instance between information and attitude, assimilated by individual or group, rebuilt in its cognitive system and integrated in its system of values, believes and ideologies; c) the social representations participate to the formation and orientation of the acts and social relations, constituting an efficient and active guide for action and intercommunication.

If we accept the fact that it always exists a certain quantity both of autonomy and constraint in each environment- either natural or social and in this case we refer to both- then, we can assert that the representations certainly accomplish, *two general roles*: they conventionalize the objects and are prescriptive (S. Moscovici, 1995, pp.5-12).

a. The representations conventionalize the objects, the individuals and the events with which they are in contact. They confer them a precise form, they locate them into a category with which we are in contact and impose them gradually as a distinct model, which is divided into a group of persons. All the new elements adhere to the model and merge with it. Any person and object which do not correspond to a certain model, which do not correspond to a cliché of interpretation, must assume a given form, enter a certain category, because, otherwise there is the risk that they cannot be decoded. Therefore, any new experience articulates itself to the ancient conventions; connect to the pre-determined significance, to certain contexts or constructions gained within the intra-cultural process.

b. The representations are *prescriptive*, that is, they are imposed to us with an unpredictable force. The modality an object that is presented in an individual's mind depends on the socio-cultural experience, which imposes a certain "manner of thinking"; it depends on the social representations inculcated to each generation. The collective memory stocks, activates, classifies, images and stereotypes, trickling them to any newcomer (A. Neculau, 1996). This means that the experiences and the past ideas are not dead, but they keep on

being alive, present, implicated in the present thoughts and facts. The groups create representations in a way that they trickle the information derived from the surrounding environment, these ones controlling thus the individual's behavior. The change is perceived and accepted only if it permits the continuity of the discourse, of tradition.

D. Jodelet (1989) goes back to those two roles of the social representations, presented by Moscovici, in order to identify three of their specific functions: the function of maintaining the identity and socio-cognitive equilibrium; the function of protection and legitimacy; the function for conduct orientation and communication, of anticipatory or retrospective justification of the social interactions or the group relations. At his turn, J. -C Abric (1994) appreciated that we can talk about four essential functions of the representations: the function of knowledge, the identity function, the orientation one and the justifying function. The difference between these points of view comes from the effort to obtain more and more clearly the specification and the differentiation of these functions.

The theory of the central knot (J. -C Abric, C. Flament).

All the authors, after Moscovici, agreed on the fact that the representation is an ensemble, which is organized and structured on elements. J. -C. Abric (1976, 1987, 1994) and subsequently C. Flament (1987, 1994) developed a new theoretical model, which delimitates the elementary structures around which the representations system is crystallized. The model distinguishes two essential components: the central elements or the central knot and the peripheral elements. These components permitted the formulation of certain important conclusions from the point of view of stability and representations change, as well as their relation with practice.

The central knot. Within the theoretical system elaborated by J. -C Abric, the central knot becomes the organizational internal principle of the social representations (1994, p.21). It becomes simple, concrete, under an image form and coherent, corresponding to the values system to which the individuals refer, bearing the seal of culture and the societies norms. From his point of view (1994, p.28), the central knot presents the following characteristics:

- It has a *clear social determination*, being linked to the historical, sociological and ideological conditions, to the norms and social values.
- It is the common, social basis – in a proper sense – which defines the homogeneity of a group and *permits the consensus realization*, beyond the contradictory individual behaviors.

- It has an essential role in *establishing the coherence of the social representation*, to which it ensures the perennially and the slow evolution in time.

Therefore, the central knot is constituted of one or more elements which give the distinct significance to the representation and which opposes the greatest resistance to change. The central knot is for the subject the reality itself and, because it defines best the represented object. When the representation is well constituted, *the object is wholly defined by the representation knot* (C. Flament, 1994, p.46).

The central knot organizes the peripheral elements – even the most marginal ones – of representations, any nucleus change stimulating radical changes at the level of the entire structure of representation. The simple way of making evident the content of certain representations is not sufficient for the understanding of their specificity, imposing the necessity to specify the central knot, and in the absence of certain essential elements of the knot, representation catches a completely different significance (A. Neculau, 1996, p.39). Thus, there appears the possibility of comparing the representations which, in order to be different, should be organized around certain nucleus, around certain different elements (J. -C. Abric, 1994, pp.22-23). The central nucleus is considered the unifying and stabilizing component for the social representations.

The central knot has two different dimensions (J. -C. Abric, 1994, p.23):

1. *The functional dimension* appears obvious in the situation with operational finality. In this case, in representation there will be given a privileged place the most important elements for the task accomplishment. The representations define the practices, which will be activated when the individuals or the groups are confronted with their object.

2. *The normative dimension* has the precedence in the situations where the socio-affective, social or ideological components interfere directly. In this case, a norm, a stereotype, an attitude, which is strongly marked, will be in the center of representation. This dimension is better outlined in the case of the ethnic or national minorities representations, too. The normative dimension determines the judgments and the attitudes regarding the representation object.

The peripheral elements. The peripheral components are schemes, which are determined and structured by the central knot (C. Flament, 1989), because their weight, value and functions depend on the last ones. They constitute the essential content of representation, in the case they are more numerous than the central elements, which it protects and anchors in reality. They are the most living, the most concrete, the most accessible, but also the thinnest and the most flexible part. The peripheral elements organize and form themselves into a hierarchical system on a less or greater distance from the central knot, as follows: the nearest ones play an important role in the

materialization of the significance representation, while the further elements explain, illustrate or justify its significance.

Being the interface between the central knot and the concrete situation where a representation is elaborated or function, the peripheral system is more individualized or more contextualized. It ensures new information and different practices integration in the representation systems and favour the appearance of certain heterogeneous behaviour.

While the central knot ensures the link with the collective memory and with the group history, the peripheral elements permit the integration of the experiences and the individual histories. If the central knot is consensual, defining the group homogeneity, the peripheral system eases the acceptance in the representation system of certain group heterogeneousness. If the central system is coherent, stable, rigid, resistant to change and a little sensible to the immediate context, the peripheral system is supple, dynamic and bears the contradictions, it is evolutionary and sensible to the immediate context, asserts J.-C. Abric (1994).

The theory of the principles organising (Willem Doise).

As any other knowledge, the incorporated one in the notion of social representation is relational, sending to the understanding act, which means to organize and to form the information on the hierarchical system. Or, this organization articulates itself within the specific dynamics of the psychic processes, of the relations and the social communications. The joining of these dynamics with that of the representational process constitutes the key of the proposed definition by W. Doise (1995, p.88): "the social representations are generative principles of attitudes linked to specific insertions in an ensemble of social relations and organizing the symbolic processes which interfere in these relations". The expressed positions regarding a given problem depend on everybody's social affiliation, but also on the situations, which were produced. This double source of variation can generate an apparent multiplicity of attitudes, which are produced starting from common organising principles (W. Doise, 1990, p.127). Not accidentally, the theory of the organising principles attributes the representations two distinct functions: they are *generative principles of attitudes and organising principles of the individual differences*. The social representations offer the individuals' common reference points, in relation to which there are connected the individual divergences. It is not necessary the consensual to the level of the opinions expressed by individuals: not the points of view should be divided but the questions around which they confront each other (W. Doise, 1990, p.127). Therefore, what can be consensual,

in a certain measure, are the stakes, the reference points in relation to which the attitudes appear (W. Doise, A. Clemence, F. Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1992, p.245).

Which are the organising principles, which Doise speaks about? It refers to the opposition and hierarchy principles presented by P. Bourdieu about the dichotomy principles, adaptation and assimilation ones, which interfere in the propaganda dynamics, of propagation and spreading, described by S. Moscovici (1976); about the organising principle represented by the category difference, which are extremely important in the analysis of the social representations built in the inter-group relation context.

The bi-dimensional model of the social representations (P. Moliner)

The consensus – after the knot theory – and the divergences of attitudes – after the theory of the organising theory – are phenomena, which are situated in different cognitive places.

The consensus on which the central knot theory is built is grounded on significance. Any representation is organized around the central knot, and this constitutes its fundamental element, as it determines concomitantly the representation significance and organization.

The divergence, about which the theory of the organizing principles speaks, is grounded on evaluation, on judgement. In other words, the subjects' attitudes are grounded on the social values of the area they belong to.

Reflecting on those two approaches, P. Moliner (1994) concludes that we may speak about the existence of the consensus regarding the definition of an object on grounds of certain characteristics and divergent consensus regarding the judgements emitted on those characteristics. The theory of the central knot permits us to realize the consensus at the significance level, while the theory of the organizing principles explains the evolving divergences determined by the social values. Moliner suggests that those two explanatory modalities, apparently contradictory, are in fact complementary.

The bi-dimensional model of the social representations tries and succeeds in establishing the best compromise between the two previous theories, mentioned above. In this new perspective, the representations can be analysed counting on two distinct dimensions: the centrality and the evolving character (P. Moliner, 1994, pp.44-45).

Centrality is the dimension, which, within a representation, permits us to distinguish two groups of elements, depending on their central or peripheral status. The central peripheral distinction is grounded on the consensus noticed in a given population, considering as central, the items appreciated by the majority individuals as being necessary for defining the representation object. It means, a consensus on the significance level.

The evolving character of certain elements of representation indicates the fact that certain items can be evaluated positively or negatively. The positive or negative connotation is socially determined, being originated in the values belonging to a social group. The representation elements, which are endowed with a value, play the role of evolving criteria.

Starting from these two dimensions, P. Moliner has the merit of proposing the elements classification on four different fields, regulated on different logical elements, as follows:

The field of definitions group the *central elements a little evolving* which permit the individuals to define the representation field. This field is grounded on the significance logic.

The norms field group the central evolving elements. It refers to the elements which – speaking about terms – are necessary for defining the representation object and which express a value judgement upon this object. This field is governed by the evolving logic established on social values.

• The descriptive field established on social values.

The descriptive field group the *peripheral elements, which are a little evolving*. It is about the characteristics frequently attributed to representations, but which are not necessary for its definition. These elements are not invested with any particular value for the individuals. The elements that belong to the descriptive field correspond to the operational part of the peripheral system. They permit the action and the understanding in the numberless situations with which the individuals are confronted. The descriptive field is regulated by logic of action.

The prospects field group the *peripheral evolving elements*. These elements ensure the great inter-individual variability in the evolving activities. They permit the expressing of the individual attitudes, of desires and the grounds for the representation object. This field sends to the individual judgement.

The social representations of the ethnic reality

The theoretical and practical analysis of the social representations of a national majority regarding the co-inhabiting ethnic minorities must take into account several aspects, first, the relation between majority and minority (E. Allardt, C. Starck, 1981). This relation is ambivalent: positive and negative, at the same time (M. Doms, 1983, p.23). Its positive aspect is that the individual or the minority group constitutes one of the majority group pole and of the social change, while its negative aspect consists in that, the minorities are often kept at a distance, being the target of numerous negative stereo-types.

1. The development of the relations among the great social groups (peoples and nations) after the Second World War was characterized by two continuous

processes that seem to go to different directions but in the same time, to be complementary. This is to say that independence growth simultaneously with the differentiation among the social groups (H. Tajfel, 1978). The multiplication of the economic, cultural, political relations and, especially, the communicational ones, brought together the states and nations, previously separated or distant. If the integration tendency is more obvious in the developed states, the differentiation process has its origin in the minority groups, found at a certain cultural and/or historical distance from the other groups. This phenomenon, called "the new ethnicity", appears paradoxically, in the conditions in which the contestant group share many norms and common values with the groups around him, beyond the frustrations that animate both (E. Allardt, C. Starck, 1981). Many of the actions done for the differentiation direction had common claims, based on the minorities' rights to decide to be different and to preserve the specificity defined in their own terms, dictated implicitly or explicitly by majority. Thus, self-categorization and self-identification grew their importance, and the external definitions were often appreciated as an insult to the fundamental human rights (E. Allardt, C. Starck, 1981; H. Tajfel, 1978).

2. Passing from the analysis of the relations among states to that of the relations among the great social groups within the same society, the same state. J.A. Perez and F. Dasi (1996, pp.72-73) mentioned that, there are two explicative processes of majority and minority co-inhabiting: social uniformity and social diversity. Both orient the social representations of the minority and deviation groups. Having in view the norms uniformity, they are attributed an absolute character, conformism towards norms being the essential principle of society working. In this case, the deviation appearance is considered a negation of the norm, which should be removed, aiming at "society good working". Having in view the social diversity, the norms have a relative character, being the result of negotiation and compromise among the individuals or the groups situated on different positions. It is important in this case the way the norm is maintained, and not the way it is modified in order to facilitate the development of the social and inter-group relations. The deviation is considered a possible positive alternative of the norm, and the normative conflict a source of innovation and progress for the society. To the innovating minority does not correspond a powerful negative representation, as in the previous situation, but one, which can be entirely positive.

The normative conflict can have multiple causes. Very often, the explanatory socio-economic level is attributed a determined causal role in the inter-group relations, without taking into consideration the processes which mediate this cause at the individual and group level (A. Lange, C. Westin 1981). This means, for example that, upon the nature of representation and inter-group stereo-types or of the inter-group behaviour there cannot be made predictions directly from the inter-group economic situations, as it is often outlined in many

psychological studies. It is true that the social and economic situations, which lead to the rivalry among the groups, which aim at the same advantages, are associated with the unpropitious appreciation of the out-group. But, for these consequences there also exist the psychological explanations. Theoretically, a rival can be regarded as "good", even when its aim is incompatible with the own ones. Therefore, the "objective" conflict of interests, the most important determined term of the social conflicts; it is not the only cause. The origin of the conflict between majority and minority can also be placed in their disadvantage, regarding what is good and what is bad. The *value conflict* can be attached to the need of knowledge that pushes minority to act in the differentiation direction.

3. The social representation of an ethnic identity different of the own one, "built very carefully" can include the characteristics of the self-stereotypes and be used as an instrument in the social adaptation. The cognitive adjustments of the minority representation and identity, which constitutes its object, rather tend to maintain "inadequate", than to lose them. That is why; it is not impossible that such an identity should be used as an instrument of negotiation, intending to transform this identity and its representation in adequate psychological constructions in the future, as they are desirable. Therefore, its representation and identity do not depend only on the passed events, and on the present historical conditions or on the way of relating to future, which is specific to the different interactive groups. Minority may not accept the definitions offered by the dominant group, generating a negotiation process of their own identity.

4. Lange and Westin (1981, pp.74-75) present a number of theories, which support the existence of a low level of inter-group aggressions when the ethnic and social categorization coincides. This fact is explained by the *status equilibrium*, which means that all the members of a certain category have the same status, high and also low. If certain members of a certain ethnic or national minority have a high status while the others have a low status, the same thing being true for the national majority, the inequality of the positions may cause easily inter-group aggression.

The same perspective is also present in the theory of the inter-group relations elaborated by H. Tajfel (1978). When between two groups there are feeble similarities comparatively with the powerful differences of status, power etc. there appears the possibility that the last ones determine the tensioned inter-group relations. Similarly, E. Allardt and C. Starck (1981, p.53) assert that the crossed pressures performed by the members of certain minority groups tend to diminish the aggressions performed by majority, while a feeble coincidence in the stratification plan increases the risk of the powerful aggressions.

These points of view include a series of presuppositions about the system of proper beliefs belonging to different groups, which are not explicitly presented. In the conditions of status equalities, it is supposed the fact that the implied groups do not conceive a cognitive alternative, regarding the present

situation. If, for example, the minority group perceives its situation as being stable and legitimate, there are reasons that lead to the attempt to change it (H. Tajfel, 1978).

In reality, it is hard to conceive any inter-group situation, which is static. A social identity, which should ensure a perfect security, is an empirical impossibility. This fact is true for all the social groups, including the majority one, which cannot stop acting for maintaining its position. As not all the groups have equal possibilities to affirm their identity or to contribute to the definition of the situation where they are implied, new minority claims may appear.

The problem raised by the majority/minority notions is that they seem inseparably interpenetrated by the differential values: minority is more often the deprived part. The categories of majority/minority seem to reflect, in an inherent manner, a normative hierarchy that combines the idea of status and legitimacy with that of number and deviation from norm. To be a member of majority means to be placed automatically, individually inside the group. To be a member of minority means to be placed outside it, either towards the top of the social pyramid, when it refers to the elite, or at its bottom, in the case of a disfavoured group (S. Moscovici, G. Paicheler, 1978, p.256). In the social and psychological structure of reality, majority is the referent, the measure of all things.

Therefore, from the majority point of view, the guilt or the "natural" mistake of a minority is that, it is not the same with majority. Minorities are defined as being the particular faced with the general: They are defined by the particularity mark, no matter the concrete domain they manifest in. The difference is the mark of the relations between majority and minority. The members of majority are not different, as they create the reference frame (they do not fit any particularity to be fixed). In a contrasting way, particularities structure the definition of a member of a minority and, at the same time, they differentiate it of everything, which belongs to majority.

5. The representations and the treatment received by minorities depend both on the normative conflict and the inter-group contexts. They have been simplified for a long time by taking into consideration only the relations between a minority and a majority. But the inter-group context as J.A. Perez and F. Dasi asserted (1996, p.74), can be different: from the societies which have an absolute majority and a total homogeneity, to the societies constituted only from minorities, up to the societies with a majority and one or more minorities. The last situation is true for Romania, too.

The very existence of several minority groups obliges majority to pay a different attention to each ethnic or national minority, in order to develop adequate relations with each of them. Given this context, the social presentation of a minority group will be built both in comparison with majority and with the other minority groups. This double comparison creates the possibility to define two types of out-groups: the close ones, which are compared only to majority,

and the closer minorities (J.A. Perez and F. Dasi, 196, p.74). The representations of the minority groups will be more and more defavourable if they are noticed closer to majority.

Each class of the inter-group situation must be described and analysed in the terms of its specific characteristics – political, social, historical, cultural or economic (H. Tajfel, 1978), taking also into account the processes and the psychological mechanisms which influence them. In any stage of the relation majority-minority there can be found and used adaptable mechanisms and change strategies.

6. The theoretical and practical analysis of the social representations of a national majority regarding the co-inhabiting minorities should take into account:

The tendencies towards integration/differentiation among the great national groups:

The tendency towards uniformity or social diversity specific to the society:

The characteristics of the collective mentality specific to the majority, the particularities of the national, cultural identity;

Status relation between majority and minority;

The inter-group contexts and the nature of the majority-minority relation;

The features of the minority group as well as the visibility, the differential power, the differential treatment and the self-consciousness of the group or the behaviour style, the variables of the ethnic groups vitality;

The weight of the intellectual and evolving significance, which confer the ethnic representations more or less rational character;

The existence of the stereotypes and prejudices which are often prevalent in the structure of the social representations of the ethnic/national minority groups;

The appearance of certain more subtle discrimination forms, which do not appear blameable and easily transparent;

The fact the ensemble of the psychological processes (the cognitive automatism towards the minorities, which intervene in the ethnic reality building, lead to the *criptoamnezy* towards the minorities, to a weaker valorisation of the group members different from the affiliation one.

The ethnic representations of Romanians regarding certain ethnic/national minorities

The Minorities' problem is not a new in Romania. The statistics show that at the end of the past century, Romania was on the second place in Europe (after Switzerland), regarding the great number of the foreigners related to the native Romanians (79,0%), the most important minority being the Jewish one (around 5%). In 1930, in the conditions of an absolute or relative majority (in Dobrogea

and Bucovina) of the Romanians in all the Romanian provinces, the more numerous minorities become Hungarians, with 7,9% followed by Germans (4,1%) and Jews (4,0%). At the latest census, the one from January 1992, the more numerous minorities are the Hungarian one, representing 7,1% from the total population of the country, followed by that of the Roma (1,8%) and the German one (0,5%). The other ethnic minority or national groups, detain each a percentage situated under 0,4%. Although the Jewish minority represents only 0,03% from the total population of the country, having in view the weight and the important positions occupied by it, in time, in the Romanian society, the social representations of the Jews will be our study object, together with the more numerous minorities: Hungarian, Roma, and German.

The long co-inhabitation with the others, which are different, obliged the Romanian majority to make the constant effort to know and act, to recognize the right to difference. In contemporary Romania, the politics towards minorities accomplishes the European standards, the ethnic or national groups being all recognized, invested with equal rights to those of the majority or even submitted to a discriminatory positive treatment. In the present governing coalition there is nowadays a party organized on ethnic basis of the Hungarian minority, all the other ethnic or national minorities being represented in the Parliament.

The performances registered in the direction of a "communicational society" specific to the European cultural context, do not exclude the appearance or the persistence of a series of practical problems, of questions of the following type: What type of "sociability" should be promoted in a situation or another, in the case of a minority or another? Majority must find the answer, the best solution. Or, its movement reserve, in such cases, is very reduced. On the one hand, "the taboos of distortion" persist although they diminished in time, and on the other hand, there should be avoided the "perverse effects" which appear when a community – perceived as a problem – is indicated in order to be integrated. The attention focus of the other members of society on this aim lead both to the alimentation of the xenophobic prejudices, of the negative stereotypes, and the reinforcement of the group identity, which we want to integrate.

I assert that despite the adopted solutions (association contract, communitarian isles, the codes alternation or intercultural) it is obvious the fact that the precious formula will not appear from the simple exhumation of the reference points of the former collectivities; they speak too often in recovering terms about the necessity of an invention. But, the present cannot be understood in terms of ignoring the past.

The social representations of the Romanian majority regarding the ethnic groups were the topic of a research completed in 1998. The investigation followed the social representations content and structure outlining what the Romanian majority population spreads regarding the Hungarian, German,

Jewish and Roma groups. The social representations of the mentioned groups were studied also from the point of view of their evolving, attitudinal character, insisting upon the relative, stable and consensual aspects of these images. I started from the general hypostasis according to which, *the four social representations will be different, organizing themselves around a certain central different knot*, due to the different nature and evolution of the majority relations with each of this ethnic minority group. The research sample, aleatory formed, was representative on a national level.

The content, structure, the polarity and neutrality signs of representations were obtained by means of *the association network method*, elaborated by A. S. de Rosa (1993, 1995), and the check of the central knot was done by means of *the method regarding the successive selections formed in a hierarchy*, elaborated by J. C. Abric (1989, 1994).

The social representation of the Hungarians

The question: "What unites and separates the Romanians and Hungarians?" gave birth to a scientific activity reunited under the auspices of the Research Centre of the Interethnic Relations from Transylvania (CCRIT), within the University from Cluj. The CCRIT poles outlined the fact that: both Romanians and Hungarians agree that there are Romanian and Hungarian politicians which want to improve the interethnic relations, but the politicians and different institutions also contribute to the amplification of the majority and minority conflict relations; for 80% of Hungarians the most important holiday is 15th March, while for 75% of Romanians the most important holiday is 1st December, 45% of Hungarians would accept the Romanians as members of their families and 42% as friends; 52% of Romanians would accept the Hungarians as members of their families and 28% as friends and the examples could go on. But, let's see which are the social representations of the Romanians' inquired subjects regarding the Hungarian national minority.

The central elements are: *evil, chauvinistic, nationalist, civilized, hardworking, united, individualist and violent*. Other 14 items constitute the peripheral system of representation. Under this second limit there are more or less accidental elements, which correspond to individual representations.

The elements structure of the Hungarians' social representations can be followed in figure number 1.

The medium index of neutrality (-0,72) indicated the fact that less words have a neutral connotation, and the medium index of polarity (-0,21) suggested the fact that the positive and the negative items have the tendency to be equal, with a slow predomination of the negative ones. Calculating the algebraic sum of the items valences, comprised in the representation, in the sample, we may point

that, at the level of the central knot, the nationalist and individualist items were given a neutral valence, while the evaluated negative items (evil, chauvinistic, violent) are equal in number with the positive ones (civilized, hardworking, united). In the central knot the neutral words have a weight of only 25%, the rest of 75% being positive or negative. The tendency to maintain equality of the positive and negative words is maintained at the level of the peripheral system.

The weak associated neutrality of a polarity between $-0,49$ and $0,49$ indicates the fact that *the representation object is attributed a great importance, caused both by the negative feelings due to the possible danger which it represents for the perceiving group interests and the positive feelings appeared during the inter-group good relations, due to the values, norms and common interests, eventually convergent or super-ordinate.*

The Roma' social representation

The central elements of the Roma' social representations are: *dirty, thief, uneducated, lazy, rowdy and rude*. Other 14 elements from the peripheral system of their social representation are: *violent, musician, beggar, nomad, sly, liar, many children, immoral, vulgar, impertinent, businessman, united and black moor*. It is significant the fact that in a previous research, where A. Neculau (1996, pp.102-112) pursued the outlining of the modal personality characteristics and the Roma' community, the same items obtained a high proportion with the greatest frequency.

The elements structure around the central knot results from figure 2.

The medium index of neutrality ($0,72$) indicates the fact that few words have a neutral connotation; the medium of polarity ($-0,48$) indicates the fact that there is a tendency of the positive and negative words to be equal, although the negative ones are more numerous. This is reflected in a certain measure, in organizing the central and peripheral elements of the Roma' representation. In the central nucleus, the weight of the negatively evaluated elements is 100% and only at the peripheral system level there is a number of 5 elements with negative connotation, 4 elements with positive connotation and 4 with neutral connotation.

As in the Hungarians' case, the weak neutrality associated to a polarity index between $-0,49$ and $0,49$ indicates the fact that the representation object is attributed a great importance. This is caused both by the negative feelings due to the possible danger and the fact that the Roma constitute a social problem, which affect the perceptive group's interests, and the positive feelings appeared in the inter-group relations, due to the values, norms and common interests. convergent or super-ordinate.

The Germans' social representations

The Germans represent a national group, with which the Romanian autochthonous population co-inhabited from the middle of the 12th century, as a consequence of the Hungarian kings' decision to bring certain Saxon and Flemish colonists from the Rhine's borders to Transylvania.

There are three elements of the central knot representing the national German minority: *hardworking, civilized and cool nature*. The peripheral elements are: *tidy, intelligent, blonde, correct, honest, meticulous, clean, serious, educated, discipline, perseverance*. The elements organization of the Germans' social representation around the central nucleus appears in figure 3.

The index of the medium neutrality (-0,72) indicates the fact that fewer words have a neutral connotation. The medium index of polarity has the value 0,55, indicating the fact that most of the words have a positive connotation. Thus, at the level of the central knot, two items (*hardworking and civilized*) have a positive valence, and one (*cool nature*) has a neutral valence. Most of the items, which are included in the peripheral system, were given a positive valence (except for the *blond* item, which has a neutral valence).

The weak neutrality associated to a polarity between 0,50 and 1 indicates the fact that the representation object is attributed an increased importance, due to the very good inter-group relations, due to the values similarities and norms, the existence of common interests, eventually convergent or super-ordinate. The German minorities' qualities are recognized and appreciated.

The Jews' social representations

If at the end of the past century the image of the Jews, taken from several representative papers of the written culture, contained a great number of stereotypes resulted from a context to be negative, after a century of important historical transformations there have been produced many changes. These affected the variables of the Jewish group's vitality, the relations between the Romanian majority and the Jewish minority, as well as the majority image regarding the Jews.

The central elements of the Jews' social representation are: *businessman, religious, intelligent, stingy*. There are 15 peripheral elements: *united, sly, cultivated, holocaust, tradition, hardworking, chosen people, rich, egoist, versatile, civilized, practical sense, camp, sociable, profiteer*. The elements structuring around the central knot are presented in figure 4.

In the case of the Jews, the medium index of neutrality (-0,60) indicates weak neutrality, which means that few words have a neutral connotation. Nevertheless, the value of this index suggests that in the case of the Jews there are more items that have a neutral connotation, in comparison with the other

three groups. The medium index of polarity has the value of 0,26, indicating the fact that the positive and negative items have the tendency to be equal, but with an easy predomination of the positive ones. This fact is reflected by the elements organization around the central nucleus. At the level of the central knot, three items (businessman, religious and intelligent) have a prevalent positive valence, and one (stingy) has a prevalent neutral valence. In the peripheral system the negative and positive words have the tendency to be equal, with an easy predomination of the positive ones. There appear more neutral elements; it is about the descriptive items such as: holocaust, camp, chosen people.

The weak neutrality associated to an index of polarity between -0,49 and 0,49 indicates the fact that the representation object is attributed a great importance, caused by the negative feelings due to the "danger" – imprinted upon the social memory- which the Jews represented for the Romanian majority, as well as the positive feelings appeared in the inter-group relations, due to the values, norms and common interests, convergent or subordinated.

Conclusions

From the advanced hypothesis of S. Moscovici (1961, 1976, 1981, 1988), and those of the researches which developed the social representations theory up to its present status, I can assert that confronted with everything which is foreign, unknown and different in the ethnic, cultural identity of the ethnic and national groups, the mind processes and the collective construction have elaborated theories on the psychological identity of the minority group members, combining beliefs, values, information, attitudes. These theories are used as a practical knowledge (D. Jodelet, 1989), stimulating in different social situations where a minority group is evoked, aiming at intervening in the relation with it. Characterized by the disparity towards the scientific knowledge of the ethnic or national groups' characteristics, their social representations should not be evaluated as errors reducible to the ignorance effects and false knowledge, which can be rationally modified. On the contrary, it is necessary to try to understand the apparent formation or stability, taking into account their significant role in elaborating the practices of inter-group relation.

In this lecture I insisted upon the stable, consensual character of the social representations of the minority groups, in order to outline their profound anchoring in the values system shared by the members of the Romanian majority group.

The social representations of the Hungarians, Romas, Germans and Jews are different due to the fact that they are organized around certain different nucleus, which constitutes the checking of the second hypothesis. The highest homogeneity of the answers, depending on the limits of the centrality index

(calculated depending on the standard deviation) was obtained by Germans ($p_1=360$, $p_2=150$). They are followed by Jews ($p_1=311$, $p_2=144$) and Romas ($p_1=300$, $p_2=102$). The most differentiated answers were obtained by Hungarians ($p_1=240$, $p_2=102$).

The fact that the nucleus is not identical does not exclude the existence of certain resemblance from the point of view of their content. The most important is that between the *Hungarian representation nucleus and that of the German representation, both including the items "civilized" and "hardworking" (Hungarians) / "hardworking" (Germans)*. Also in the social representation of Romas we find the item "rowdy", with a significance close but not identical with the item "violent", from the central nucleus of the Hungarians' representation. In the central knot of the Jews' representation there appears the item "stingy" with significance relatively close to the item "individualist" from the central knot of the Hungarians' representation. The differences, from the perspective of the same criterion are numerous. We will take only one example, more significant. Although the illusion of the out-group homogeneity, creates the impression that the members of the different group think similarly, that there is no divergence as in the case of the in-group and therefore they would be more united – more when it is about the minority groups – the item "united" appeared only in the central nucleus of the Hungarians' representation, at the level of the peripheral system in the case of Romas and Jews, but lacks from the social representation of the Germans.

Interesting comparative observations permit the analysis of the medium indexes regarding the attitude valences of the social representations: neutrality and polarity indexes. Thus, in all the cases of the four social representations the first indexes reveal a weak neutrality (N being comprised in the interval -1 and $0,50$), equivalent to a great importance paid to the representation object. In the case of the Hungarians, Romas and Germans the neutrality index is identical ($N=-0,72$). In the case of the Jews, the index (in the same interval) is $-0,60$, indicating the presence of more neuter words, but also significance sensibly much low allowed to the Jews. Taking into account their numeric weight regarding the country population, this appears as natural. The highest polarity index is that of the words which are associated to the Germans' social representation ($P=0,55$). In this case the majority of the words have a positive connotation, suggesting the constant positive relations of most of the Romanians with the ethnic Germans, the existence of certain intense positive attitudes. This fact can be explained taking into account the fact that the Germans haven't ever constituted a social problem, as the Romas tended to be considered and they haven't been as rigid as the Hungarian minority in their negotiator way with the majority. In the case of the three ethnic groups P is between $-0,49$ and $0,49$ (Jews $P=0,26$, Hungarians $P=-0,21$; Romas: $P=-0,48$), indicating the positive words tendency to be equal with the negative ones. In comparison with these

three groups the positive attitudes of the majority are not so intense as in the case of the Germans, the importance paid to each group being caused simultaneously by positive attitudes of appreciation, knowledge, even admiration as well as by fear or reserved attitudes.

It is remarkable the fact that in the conditions of paying an increased importance to the four minority groups, which are equivalent from the beginning, to their acceptance by majority, neither of these groups is evaluated exclusively in negative terms. This means that, the social representations although they present a high stereotypical consensuality, the stereotypes, which they do not include, are not exclusively negative, being associated to the xenophobic prejudicial attitudes. The result is practically a reconfirmation of the tolerance spirit that is proverbial to the Romanian majority.

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Figure 1. Social representations of the Hungarians

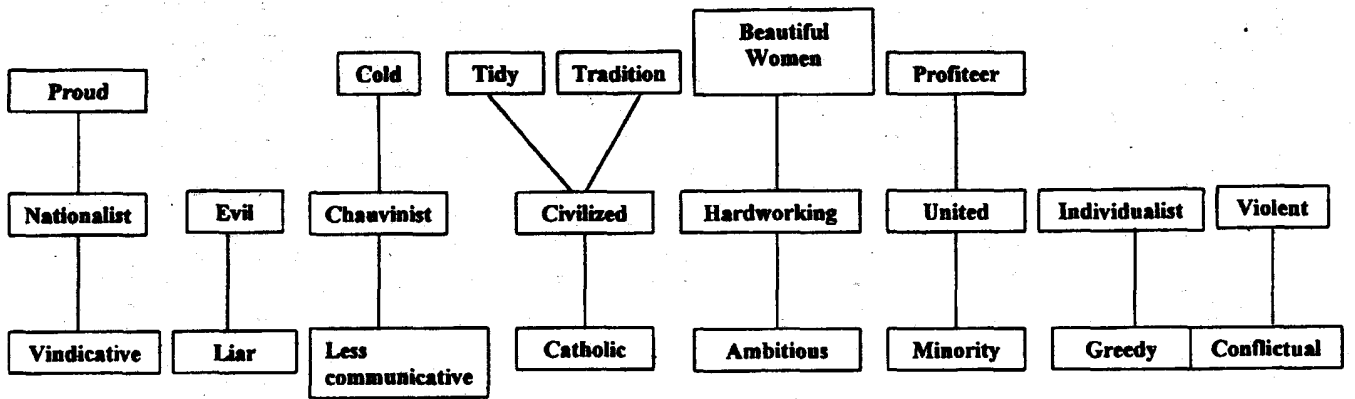


Figure 2. Social representation of the Roma

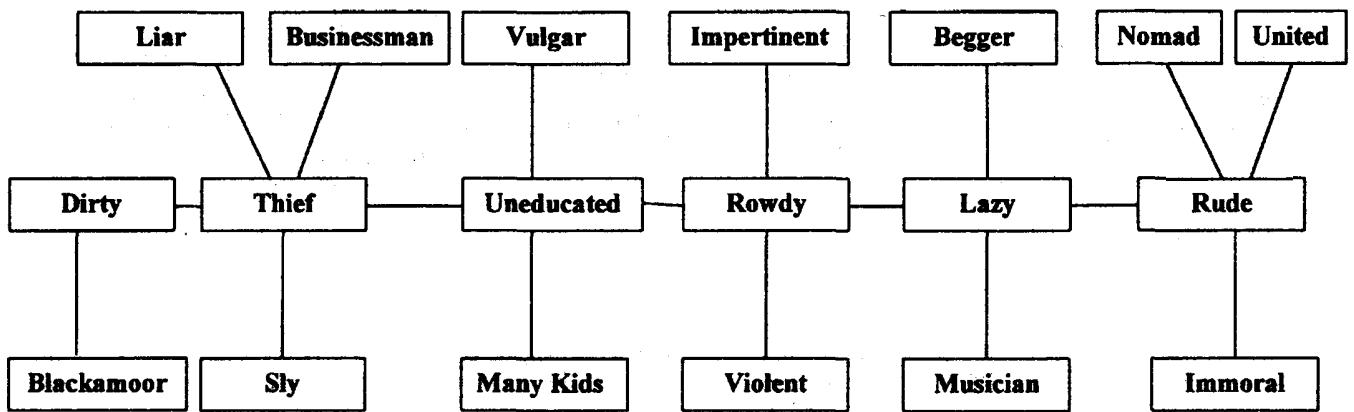


Figure 3. Social representation of the Germans

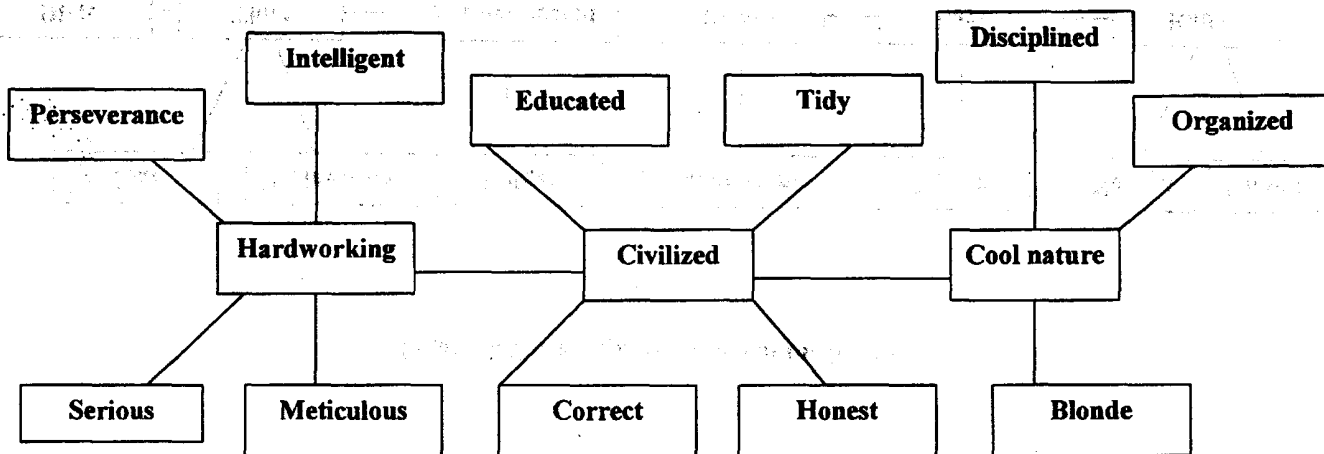


Figure 4. Social representations of the Jews

